

destroy all villages in the region. However, most of the villages are small and remote in the forested hills and troops can never catch villagers there, so Army columns have never even given them relocation orders; the columns simply approach each village, shell it with mortars, then enter and burn down every house. As stated in a typed and signed SLORC order issued to 64 villages in 1997, *"The above mentioned villages must move and consolidate...Small villages, even those not included in the above list, must move and consolidate to nearby consolidation villages before May 6th. Villages which fail to move will be destroyed."*

Food supplies are systematically hunted out and burned and villagers are shot on sight. Most villagers have fled into the forest where they hide in groups of 2 or 3 families, trying to stay near their ancestral fields so they can grow some food. However, SPDC patrols the area at least once a month to hunt out and destroy their shelters, destroy any crops or food supplies, and shoot villagers and livestock on sight. An estimated 30,000 villagers are still living in hiding in the forest, and the area of village destruction continues to expand. About 2,000 people have escaped to refugee camps in Thailand, but this is difficult and dangerous because of landmines and SPDC patrols. In March, Thai authorities moved these refugee camps further south and barred non-governmental organizations from this part of the border, so it is likely that any new arrivals will be forced back across the border at gunpoint by Thai troops.

Similar forced relocations and village destruction campaigns have been occurring in other parts of the country as well, such as southern Tenasserim Division, where at least 100 villages have been relocated and destroyed and are now being used as forced labour building a road network and Army camps throughout their home area, and Chin State,

where some strategic forced relocations are now occurring. In Pa'an and Dooplaya districts of central Karen State, the SPDC is in the next stage of consolidating its control and is currently using villagers as forced labour building road networks and new Army camps, while continuing to conduct localised forced relocation and destruction of villages wherever villagers are to be more tightly controlled or punished for opposition activity in their area.

Another tool now being used by the SPDC to consolidate its control over ethnic rural populations is the creation and support of "proxy armies" in order to divide the ethnic-based resistance. In Karenni State, the Karenni National Democratic Army was created in 1996 at the instigation of SLORC and used to attack Karenni refugee camps in Thailand. In 1994 the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) formed of its own in Karen State but was promptly made dependent on SLORC for material support, and since that time it has primarily been used as a form of SLORC/ SPDC militia and to attack Karen refugee camps in Thailand. The most recent such attacks occurred in March 1998, when Huay Kaloke (Wan Kha) refugee camp was

burned, leaving four refugees

dead and 9,000 homeless, and Maw Ker and Beh Klaw (Mae La) camps were also attacked. In late 1997 in central Karen State, the SLORC helped to form the Karen Peace Army (KPA) under the command of a Karen Army officer who was known for corruption.

The SPDC has now given this new proxy army control over a large territory in central Karen State, ejecting the DKBA from the area in the process. The KPA still has only 200 or 300 soldiers, but they are actively recruiting by promising that the families of all recruits will be exempt from forced labour for the SPDC. It appears likely that the SPDC



Faces of the internally displaced