

tematic forced labour and economic exploitation of the local population

Many villages now being burned by SPDC troops were first burned in 1975 when the Four Cuts were first implemented, and some villagers speak of having been on the run from Burmese troops since 1975; but even these villagers say that in the last 2 to 3 years things have grown much worse. The direct attacks on the civilian population, characterized by mass forced relocations, destruction of villages and the village economy, and completely unsustainable levels of forced labour, have now become the central pillar of SPDC policy in non-Burman rural areas of Burma. In the past, the regime would strategically destroy 2 or 3 villages at a time when there was resistance. Now when they perceive a possibility of armed resistance, they delineate the entire geographic region and forcibly relocate and destroy every village there is, as many as hundreds of villages at a time. In many cases, these villages have had little or no contact with resistance forces and do not even understand why they are being targeted.

The worst example of this example is in central Shan State, where SLORC/ SPDC has destroyed over 1, 400 villages since 1996, making over 300, 000 people homeless. The campaign began by relocating and destroying about 400 villages in an attempt to undermine the Shan Untied Revolutionary Army (SURA). Villagers were given 3 to 7 days to move to Army-controlled sites, after which many of their homes were burned and anyone seen in their villages was shot in sight. When this operation failed to have any effect on the SURA, SLORC/ SPDC expanded the relocation area and also forced many of those already relocated to move again, to even more crowded and tightly controlled sites. By early 1998 this forced relocation campaign had expanded to cover all the villages in an area of 7, 000 square miles, totaling over 1, 400 villages, and the area is still being expanded despite the fact that many of these villages have never had any contact whatsoever with Shan opposition groups. The SURA has now joined with other groups to form the Shan State Army (SSA) and is seeking negotiations with the SPDC, but the junta has refused negotiations and vows to crush them. The villagers are starving in the relocation sites, where the SPDC gives them nothing and uses them as forced labour building Army camp and an air base

and maintaining and guarding roads into the area. Many villagers can be seen begging for food along these roads, while many others have been shot on sight or massacred by SLORC/ SPDC troops because they try to return to their villages to find food. An estimated 80, 000-100, 000 refugees from the region have already fled to Thailand so they have no option but to enter the illegal workforce, ending up as cheap labour on plantations, constructions sights, in sweatshops and as bonded labour in Thai brothels. The SPDC freely allows the ethnic Shans to flee to Thailand, and has now begun a practice of stripping them of their Burmese identity papers as they leave, probably in order to assure that they can never return.

In Karenni (Kayah State), over 200 villages have been forcibly relocated and destroyed since 1996, after the SLORC broke a cease-fire agreement to attack the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Almost every hill village in the entire state has been destroyed. First the Army issued orders that all villagers move to military-controlled camps within 7 days or be "considered as an enemy". Patrols then went from village to village, burning and destroying everything and capturing or killing any villagers found. Some villagers are still struggling to survive in hiding in the forests, but most have fled to the towns or gone to the relocation sites, where they live in starvation conditions and are used by SPDC troops as forced labour maintaining Army camps and as servants for soldiers. Since the beginning of 1998, SPDC troops have swept and destroyed villages in the south of the State where the relocation orders had not previously been strongly enforced, and have now begun expanding the relocation to include villages in northern Karenni along the Shan border, which had previously not been relocated because they are in an area partly controlled by the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), a group which has a cease-fire deal with the SPDC.

In northern Karen State, SLORC and SPDC have destroyed at least 200 Karen villages since March 1997 as part of their campaign to consolidate control over this rugged region adjacent to the Thai border. Villages close to Army garrisons in Papun, Nyaunglebin and Toungoo districts were ordered to move to Army sights by mid-1997, and some were used to build military access roads while others were taken as porters by troops setting out to