

8. Torture, and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment and Punishment

Numerous reports of acts of torture and ill-treatment committed by the SLORC/SPDC security forces and soldiers continue in 1997. At least six departments of the SLORC/SPDC security forces have been implicated in torture and ill-treatment of former detainees, including political prisoners. The six departments are as follows: 1) SLORC/SPDC army or Pyithu Tatmadaw (people's Defense Forces); 2) the People's Police Force; 3) the Directorate of Defense Service Intelligence (DDSI); 4) the Special Investigations Department (SID); 5) the Criminal Investigation Department (CID); and The Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI). The activities of DDSI, SID, CID and BSI are coordinated by the national Intelligence Bureau (NIB), under the direct control of the SLORC/SPDC. The DDSI is also commonly known as the MIS or Military Intelligence Service; the MIS is most consistently identified as using torture as part of its interrogation.

Twenty primary detention centers, where brutal interrogation proceedings and other methods of torture take place, have been identified throughout Burma. The detention centers include the secret DDSI interrogation center at Ye Kyi Aing camp, right outside of Rangoon, and over fourteen other military intelligence centers located in Rangoon. These include the following: the DDSI and BSI headquarters; Insein Prison and its annex; Yankin township military registration camp; Sanchaung police station; Mingladon DDSI interrogation center; Kyaikasan old race course; Hmawbe Ye Nyunt training camp (all in Rangoon Division); Bassein township MIS office (Irrawaddy Division); Special Branch II office; Police station NO.8 and Mandalay prison (Mandalay Division); Tharawadddy and Pegu township prisons (Pegu Division); Regiment 3 Headquarters, Thanbyuzayat township and Moulmein MIS office (Mon State); Pa-an township MI-5 office (Karen State); Regiment 59 headquarters, Maw Chee township (Karenni State); Myitkyina central prison, No.8 (Northern Command) army headquarters; and Special Branch II office (Kachin State).

Political opposition activists often endure particularly severe treatment while in detention. These activists must endure both physical and mental torture during the often prolonged period of detention following arrest while they are isolated from public scrutiny and protection.

8.1. Torture in Detention

SLORC/SPDC's use of cruel and unusual torture techniques have been well-documented by survivors of such techniques and human rights groups. SLORC/APDC's method of torture include beatings rigorous enough to cause permanent injury; shackling of the legs or arms, both in prison cells and in work place; burning victims with cigarettes; applying electric shocks to the victim's genitals, finger tips, toe, ear lobe, and elsewhere; suffocation; stabbing; rubbing of salt and chemical in open wounds; forcing victims to stand in unusual and uncomfortable positions for extended periods of time; including "riding the motorcycle," which entails standing with arms outstretched and legs bent and the "helicopter" in which the victim is suspended by the wrists or feet from a ceiling fixture and then spun around; deprivation of light and sleep; denial of medicine, food, exercise, and water for washing; employing the "iron road" in which iron or bamboo rods are rolled up and down the shins until the skin is lacerated; ordering solitary confinement with extremely small and unsanitary cells for prolonged periods; and using psychological torture, including threats of death and rape.

Prison punishment is often very similar to the cruel treatment endured during an interrogation period. Prisoners are severely beaten, placed in solitary confinement, transferred to other cell-blocks, and denied contact with the outside world. Political prisoners are often sent to police dog cells, intended for dogs, where they are subjected to beating and placed in leg-irons made of chain or of an iron rod thrust between the feet.

8.1.1. Solitary Confinement

An iron rod, about 1 ½ to 2 feet long is often placed horizontally between the shackled legs of prisoners in solitary confinement, forcing them to stand or lay with their legs astride. Prisoners are locked in tiny cells during their confinement. Normally, small chamber pots are placed in each cell. The pots are never emptied, so the smell becomes unbearable and the cell damp and wet. In the worst case of solitary confinement, prisoners are forced to stand with both arms tied above their head; they are forced to urinate and defecate while standing. Small daily food rations of soup made from rice, are slid through the iron bars from outside of the cell. No blankets or mats are provided; prisoners are forced to sleep on the concrete floor. Most days, prisoners are taken out of the cell, forced to stand in the standard position, with their legs splayed apart, and beaten. Solitary confinement usually lasts for at least one month and may continue for up to three months. In some cases, political prisoners are forced to remain in solitary confinement indefinitely.

8.1.2. Beatings

The SLORC/APDC uses many forms of beatings to intimidate and torture prisoners and detainees. Soldiers use typical as well as unusual implements to beat their victims, including their fists, combat boots, rifle butts, leather-coated pipes, wooden sticks, sticks made from three interlaced pieces of cane, solid bamboo sticks, about three to four feet in length, and hard plastic water pipes. Victims often sustain serious permanent injuries including paralysis and even death.

SLORC/SPDC beatings are designed to physically harm and humiliate their victims. The following are a few of the typical types of beatings: the prisoner is beaten while he/she stands and embraces a post and both hands are held firmly by another person; the prisoner is beaten while laying prone on the ground; the prisoner is beaten while being forced to stand with both legs chained; the prisoner is beaten while being forced to crawl along the ground; the prisoner is shackled, a long iron bar is placed in between their legs, and they are forced to crawl while being beaten; prisoners are beaten while being forced to do continuous squat-jumps. Authorities do not hold back during these beatings; they strike victims in the face, chest, abdomen, and back; they also jump on the backs of prisoners while they are being forced to crawl on the ground. Prisoners are routinely seriously wounded; they suffer severe internal bleeding, fractured skulls, broken bones, and paralysis.

SLORC/SPDC uses various methods of psychological torture along with their beating. For example, a SLORC/APDC officer might ask his victim if he is afraid and force the prisoners to reply in a demeaning manner. The prisoner is forced to reply: I am afraid of you, "Shint." "Shint" is a Burmese suffix used for politeness by females; the term is not meant to be used by men. When a prison officer asks, "What is your name?" a prisoner must reply, "My name is 'Ma'[name], shint." Ma is a Burmese prefix for the names of younger women; it is never used by men. The use of these terms is meant to degrade the prisoners. Some prisoners, infuriated by what they are being forced to do, refuse to answer the officers in that way; they are severely beaten by the officers until they comply with the orders. Some prisoners are beaten until they fall unconscious, when they awake, they are beaten again. There have been reports that some prisoners, who can no longer stand the torture, knock their head against the stone wall to fracture their skulls and render themselves unconscious. When prisoners sustain fractured skulls or severe bleeding from the head, they are finally sent to the hospital. However, once at the hospital, the prisoners still do not receive adequate medical attention. If they cry out in pain, they are often beaten for being noisy. Prison officers are not charged with any crimes in these cases, even if a prisoner suffers permanent paralysis or gangrene; the SLORC/SPDC authorities protect their security forces at all costs. (*Source: ABSDF*)

8.2. Ill-treatment during Forced Portering and Labor

Reports indicate that SLORC army still uses torture and ill-treatment against ethnic minorities in Shan State, Mon State, Karenni State and Tenasserim Division. Members of ethnic minorities are forced to serve as porters for the army. Any person who cannot carry the required is beaten with bamboo sticks or rifle butts. Deprivation of food, water, rest and medical care is also a common method of punishment.

Local civilians arbitrarily seized by the military and forced to serve as porters during military offensives to carry heavy army equipment and supplies. Some porters are held in army custody for periods between a few days to a month or more. Porters who have managed to escape have given consistent and horrific accounts of extrajudicial executions, beatings, and lack of food and medicine. When porters become exhausted from being overworked, underfed, and sometimes beaten, they are subjected to torture and sometimes beaten to death and left in the jungle. Female porters, mostly ethnic women living in combat areas, are subjected to gang rape and other sexual crimes.

8.2.1. Other Ill-treatment During Forced Labor

The use of forced labor on SLORC/SPDC's infrastructure projects is widespread across Burma. During the past nine years, SLORC/SPDC has increasingly forced hundred of thousands of civilian laborers to build railway lines, airports, dams, quarries, and road without compensation. Conditions at work sites are often harsh, in many cases soldiers use inhuman and degrading treatment to keep laborers working; forced laborers are often shackled in chains and received inadequate food and medicine.

8.2.2. Ill-treatment in the Ethnic Area

Ethnic people living in areas of counter-insurgency operations are subjected to harassment, abuses, and ethnic persecution by SLORC/APDC troops. Troops systematically forced nearby civilian villagers to relocate in order to deprive ethnic armed forces of potential logistical support. Civilians found in their villages after relocation deadlines are shot on sight. Moreover, civilians are routinely tortured by SLORC/SPDC troops for allegedly having contact with ethnic armed groups or for being "sympathizers."

- At the beginning of February 1997, SLORC military troops arrived at Mae Taw village, Kywe Thon Nyima village tract, Yebyu township, Tenasserim Division and rounded up some villagers including women and village headman. The soldiers

cut the village headman's body with a knife.

- On March 31, 1997, SLORC troops from LIB. 515 arrested four male villagers who were tending an onion farm near the temple of Wan Parnng village in Wab Heng tract, Laikha township, Shan State. They accused the villagers of defying their orders by refusing to move away and of having connections with the Shan resistance. They tied them up with ropes, beat them and forced them to answer their questions. After a while, when the villagers could not tell them what they wanted to know, they tied hay to the body and arms of one villager, set fire to the hay and let him loose. They tied another villager to a post of a hut and burned him with the hut. While this was being done, they forced the other two villagers to watch and threatened to do the same to them if they did not tell what they knew. They beat the two men several more times and finally threw them into Nam Tawng stream east of Wan Parnng. (*Source: SHRF*)
- At the end of February 1997, the soldiers from LIB. 273 arrested Nai Thein, village headman of Cha Bon village, Kywe Thon Nyima tract, Tenasserim Division. He was kept for fifteen days and tortured badly at Pauk Pin Gwin and Nat Kyi Zin military outposts. He was beaten up by the soldiers during his detention and the soldiers covered his face with plastic bags and held his head underwater. (*Source: KHRG*)
- On March 17, 1997, a 22-year-old villager from Dooplaya district, Karen State was arrested for allegedly having a gun with him. The SOLRC soldiers held him for three days. The soldiers punched him and they also poured water in his nose. He was tied to the betelnut tree and beaten the whole night. (*Source: KHRG*)
- On April 4, 1997, SLORC troops arrested seven villagers from K'Paw Baw Kyo Lu Koe village, Papun district, Karen State, including a woman with a 13 month old baby. The SLORC troops tied them, beat them and took them away from the village. On the same day, soldiers randomly shot at a house in the house and wounded two villagers in their legs. (*Source: KIC*)
- In early April 1997, Loong Pingnya, a villager of Kan Kan, Murngpan township, Shan State, was tortured by SPDC troops. His hands and feet were bound and he was stuffed into a gunny sack. The troops tied the mouth of the sack and submerged him in the water under a bridge near the Pho Ti temple, pulled him out after a few minutes and trampled on his chest until water gushed out of his mouth while interrogating him. Then the troops submerged him in the water again. The

procedure continued until he died. (*Source: UN report*)

- On April 13, 1997, SLORC troops from Laikh-based LIB. 515 arrested Loong La, a 60-year-old villager from Pang Tet Teo, Wan Heng tract, Laikha township. He was arrested while he was tending a small plot of onions in his farm. The SLORC troops accused him of supporting the Shan resistance and tortured him. They tied him up, beat him, rolled a piece of bamboo on his shins and finally cut off his lips. "Because of your stomachs and mouths, we have had no rest," they said. (Meaning that they blamed the villagers for going out to look for food, which meant they had to follow them) (*Source: SHRF*)
- On May 18, 1997, SLORC troops led by Major Aye Thant and his troops from IB. 277 in Murngton township, Shan State went to Wan Mawk Zali village in Mae Ken tract. They arrested three young men in the village. They were Sai Vi, 21, Sai Vilarsa, 24, and Sai Sawta, 25. The troops accused them of being SURA soldiers. They tied them up with rope, beat them, put them into sacks and submerged them in water several times before killing them. (*Source: SHRF*)
- On July 1, 1997, SLORC troop led by Major Htun Mya ransacked Keng Lom area and arrested 96 villagers of Waeng Kham, Kun Mi, Wo Long, nar Taw, Wan Parn, Ho Ha, Nar Poi, Karng Nar, Nar Yao, Son Sarng, Nar Khar Awn and Nar Khar Long villages. They were all gathered together at the village of Kun Mi and were beaten, tortured and questioned. On July 3-4, SLORC troops put plastic bags over the villagers' heads until they suffocated and threw the bodies into the Nam Parn River. The women were raped before being killed. (*Source: UN report*)
- On September 19, 1997, there was a skirmish between a column from LIB. 356 and KNLA troops near Ma-U village, Kyar-ein-seik-kyi township, Karen State, resulting three SLORC soldiers wounded. After that, three villagers from the village were severely beaten and taken to the camp. (*Source: PDF*)

(Also see under "personal Accounts," interviews 3, 19, 27, 29, 30, 35, 36, 38, 39, 46, 47, 48, 50, 53, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 67, 68, 69, 70, 75, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89,90,91, 97, 98 and 100)



17-year-old boy who was shot on sight by a SLORC patrol while looking for vegetable in the forest a month after his village in Karen State was destroyed. (Photo by KHRG)



“Htun Win”, 28, a Muslim villager from Myawaddy township, Karen State, was taken as a frontline porter, kicked and beaten unconscious by the SLORC troops. He had a permanent corneal scar, a broken rib, serious damage to his arm, and the muscles of his thigh were so badly beaten that he will never walk properly again. (Photo by KHRG)



Villager who stayed in his village during the SLORC occupation, only to flee later, showing how he was beaten in his face by SLORC troops. (Photo by KHRG)