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**PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS/DENMARK
AND
DANCHURCHAID**

**VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS
IN
BURMA**

REPORT OF A FACT-FINDING MISSION NOVEMBER 1997

by

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PREFACE

Previously known as “The Asian Ricebowl”, Burma was once one of richest countries in that part of the world, far ahead of Thailand and Singapore. However, in January 1998 as Burma celebrates 50 years of independence from the former British rulers, the country is one of the poorest in Asia with millions of under-nourished people and refugees often with no access to health or education.

The 48.3 million inhabitants are living under a military dictatorship introduced by General Ne Win in 1962. Under Ne Win the country was almost completely isolated and his way of “Burmese Socialism” failed totally. Since 1989 and until recently the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has ruled the country, and they disregarded the election results of 1990 where Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, NLD, won 82 per cent of the votes.

In November 1997 SLORC changed its name to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), but the dictatorship changed very little. SPDC is today more a result of an internal battle between the generals with supporters for General Khin Nyunt winning over General Tun Kyi’s group.

Burma opens up

In this decade Burma has tried to lure foreign investment in order to strengthen its economy. However, the results have been limited, especially after the economic collapse in many Asian countries in 1997. Aung San Suu Kyi’s call for sanctions, which the USA introduced last year on new investment in Burma, could also have had some effect.

Tourism boomed during the 1990’s, but suffered a downturn after December 1996, when students in Rangoon launched demonstrations against SLORC, and reports of violence scared visitors away. The campaigns launched by the Burma Committee against tourism may also have some effect.

Rich country, poor people

The Burmese population is living on a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of USD 650, ten times less than Thailand. Burma, fertile and 676.000 square kilometers wide (15 times bigger than Demark,) has plenty of oil, gas, tin, plutonium, zinc, copper, cobalt, gold, rubies, jade and teak, but the resources-apart from teak-have used very scarcely.

Burma's former major export, rice, has decreased from 2 million tons in 1962, when Ne Win introduced his dictatorship, to only 20,000 tons in 1996. The "Burmese Socialism" tried to introduced subsidised prices for rice and other necessary commodities, so that even poor people could get sufficient to eat, but this system collapsed more than a decade ago for civilian people. Only the government still uses artificially low prices when they force farmers to sell rice to them, thereby weakening the livelihood of these farmers. Farmers often claim that they are forced to sell rice for next to nothing to the government only to buy expensive rice on the free market for their own families' survival.

Another problem for food stability is the internal refugees and forced relocation. Approximately two million people have been moved away from town and villages, leaving empty farms behind.

All together the result was that at least 7-10 million people-often rice-farmers and internal refugees-were mal-or undernourished in Burma in 1996. After the severe flooding in 1997, when 40 per cent of the crop was lost, the amount of hungry people may be even higher today. Starvation level is predicted in ethnic areas.

Gas and opium

But the government is getting rich on two major products: Gas and opium. According to the USA opium production has increased dramatically since SLORC came to power, and 60-70 per cent of the 1994 estimated production of 2400 tons entered the USA. For the moment opium is probably the major source of income for Burma, but in the near future money from gas will also fill government coffers in Rangoon. Two pipelines are under construction in the southern part of the country, from the Indian Ocean through Burma to Thailand. The oil companies Total, Unocal and Texaco have been criticized by human rights groups for their investments in the pipelines, and Texaco withdrew from its project in Burma after the criticism.

The people

Burma is a patchwork of different tribes and people, from almost black-skinned persons who look like Bangladeshi, to nearly white-skinned with Chinese origins. According to measuring methods, 25-40 percent of the population are ethnic tribes, the rest is ethnically Burmese.

The unrest in Burma is often believed to be due to wars between the tribes, and sometimes it has been true, especially when Burma got its independence in the late 1940's. But in the 1990 election, there was surprisingly an understanding between the tribal groups and ethnic Burmese in support of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD-party.

84-85 per cent of the population is Buddhist, the rest are animist (5 per cent), Christian (4,5-5,5 per cent), Muslim (4 per cent) and Hindu (1,5 per cent). The

Mon-people in Burma brought Buddhism to South East Asia from India and 'Sri Lanka almost 2,000 years ago and they are, together with the ethnic Burmese, mainly Buddhists. Christianity is seen mostly among the ethnic tribes, and Islam and Hinduism among immigrants from India and Bangladesh.

Outside Burma

According to the exiled National Coalition Government of United Burma (NCGUB) 370,000 refugees were living outside Burma in 1996, most of them in Thailand. Dan Church Aid, which is the major non-government organisation in Denmark supporting Burmese refugees, used DKK 7 million (approximately USD one million) in 1997 to support the 125.000 refugees in camps along the Thai-Burmese border.

Including illegal immigrants, Thailand gives shelter to approximately one million Burmese. During Thailand's economic boom they worked on construction sites, but they are currently facing problems after Thailand's economic collapse in the autumn of 1997 and the concurrent increase in unemployment.

Thailand only accepts Karen and Karenni from Burma in the refugee camps. Mon have been asked to go back to camps in Burma after a ceasefire was reached between SLORC and New Mon State Party in 1995. Shans have never been allowed to stay in camps, despite request to the Thai government. Therefore, all the approximately 200.000 Shans presently in Thailand are there illegally.

The members of the NCGUB government live in different countries, but keep close contact to each other and Aung San Suu Kyi. The last NCGUB meeting was held in Frederiksdal in Denmark in July 1997 on the invitation of The Danish Burma Committee. They had to meet without Aung San Suu Kyi, because she would, needless to say, be prohibited from re-entering Burma, once outside the country.

One of the major problems for NCGUB is that Burma was accepted in 1997 as an ASEAN-member. This could "white-wash" the reputation of the military dictatorship, and open the doors for Burma to the rest of the world, especially other ASEAN-member countries.

In Denmark Dan Church Aid cooperates with The Danish Burma Committee. Both organizations want international sanctions against Burma, which the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Niels Helweg Petersen, supports. In 1996 the Minister tried to convince other EU-countries to introduce sanctions against Burma, however he was not successful.

In 1998 Human Right is a major theme for DanChurchAid, and cooperation with Physicians for Human Rights Denmark is a major element in our work to help people who have been victims of violation and abuse.

Bjarne Ussing

Mr. Ussing is coordinator for DanChurchAid's Burma campaign, and travelled together with the four physicians to Thailand in November 1997. Information in this article is only on behalf of DanChurchAid.

Sources: Human Development Report 1996 (UNDP), Human Rights Yearbook 1996 (NCGUB), Embassies in Rangoon, The Danish Burma Committee, Gyldendals Dictionary and Euro-Burma Office Bruxelles.

INTRODUCTION

Various organizations have described the violations of human rights in Burma during the past years (1-11), all committed by the Burmese army. These studies mostly describe selected episodes and events without relating them to the overall situation in the country. The problem has been similarly mentioned in a few scientific journals (12-14).

To our knowledge there has been no previous systematic epidemiological study of the Burmese population's exposure to human rights violations, apart from that of Allden et al. (15). Because of the safety of the involved persons, such studies must take place outside Burma.

Thus, Allden et al. examined 104 Burmese, mainly students who had fled to Bangkok after the 1988 uprising. The purpose of the study was to assess them psychologically, including the possible presence of PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and depression.

In 1991, Physicians for Human Rights/USA also made a study in Thailand: they obtained 47 eyewitness accounts from refugees along the border with Burma (16). The study was not epidemiological, and clinical examinations were not done.

The present study was primarily an attempt to examine the exposure of the rural population to various violations, and when relevant to perform a clinical examination in order to evaluate the validity of the accounts given.

Furthermore, we wanted to study whether the past years had seen a change in the conditions of the rural populations, and if possible to compare the conditions of various ethnic groups in Burma.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was planned as a cross-sectional examination. We wanted to find out about Burmese refugees' exposure to various forms of violations of human rights in

their home country. According to available information, the exposures included: forced labour and work as porters for SLORC's armed forces, forced relocation, arbitrary arrest and detention, physical violation including torture, either during detention or on other occasions, threats in various connections, killing of family members or disappearances, e.g. following arrest or during service as a porter, and rape. These forms of violation were registered from testimonies of members of the family or the household.

Furthermore, questions were asked about violations against other people, i.e. people living in the same village or people with whom the interviewee had done forced labour or porter service. The questions concerned physical violations, executions, cases of rape in the village, and disappearances of persons other than family members. Questions were also asked about deaths and injuries from land-mines, involving household members family, fellow villagers, or fellow forced labourers.

The individual examinations started with use of an overall questionnaire concerning basic demographic data, e.g. age, sex, family and household pattern, occupation, and name of village or township. This questionnaire included all the forms of exposure we expected to encounter based on our studies of the literature, as well as a space for "other" forms.

Exposure-specific questionnaires had been prepared for each registered category of exposure with respect to its character and quantity, including the identity of the responsible persons. When the interviewee confirmed exposure to specific forms of violation, the relevant specific questionnaire was also used.

When considered relevant, a physical examination was carried out, and the findings were compared with the information about exposure in order to find evidence of agreement. With respect to evidence of torture, the methods used have been described previously (17). The examinations were conducted in English, with local interpreters.

We aimed at getting access to refugee camps or other areas with a large concentration of refugees in order to select representative groups of the refugee population, a method used previously (18). This proved impossible. The people who were examined according to the above mentioned programme (group A) were selected by our contact persons, mainly people living in the local area and knowing the whereabouts of the Burmese refugees and how to contact them. Thus, group A (92 persons) consisted of selected refugees from different parts of Burma, i.e. of various ethnic origin.

During the last days of our stay in Thailand we got access to a private institution

attended every day by many Burmese refugees. Due to lack of time we chose to carry out the examinations of this group B (96 persons) according to a modified questionnaire, omitting details about the character and amount of the exposure. Apart from the demographic data, the questionnaire included time of flight from Burma, and the following types of violation: forced labour, porter service, forced relocation, killing of family members, rape of family members or others, as well as injuries from land-mines of family members or fellow villagers or fellow workers in forced labour or porter service.

Both groups were asked if the flight had resulted in breaking down of the family, such as parents leaving children under the age of 18 years of age, or if a person under the same age had lost contact with one or both parents.

Thus, the material comprised two refugee populations, groups A and B, which were analysed separately. In both groups the participants were analysed according to their ethnic origin. When a group's size was large enough, the amount of its exposure was compared with that of the whole material.

In order to obtain an estimate of any recent change of the exposure to violations of human rights in Burma, the two groups were analysed according to whether the flight had taken place within or before the previous 12 months.

The examinations took place in November 1997 in the northern part of Thailand in areas near the border to Burma.

ETHNICS

The examinations started by informing the contact persons and participants about our aim, i.e. publication of the obtained information on human rights violations in Burma.

It was stressed both to our contact persons and participants that participation was voluntary, and that, in order to protect the participants, there would be no publication of data that might identify them, e.g. their names, their villages or townships, photographs of their faces.

In order to safeguard the participants and their families and our contact persons, the present paper will not contain names of people or localities, nor of refugee camps or institutions that were visited.

DATA ANALYSIS

The material was analysed according to ethnic origin and time of fleeing from Burma.

In group A each participant was given 2 points if he or his family/household had been exposed to the following: porter service, forced relocation, torture, other violations such as being fired at, rape, killing, disappearances, accidents from land-mines.

One point was allocated for each of the following: forced labour, arrest, and for the following exposures for persons other than family/households: killing, rape, disappearances, accidents from land-mines.

In group B 2 points were allocated for each of the following exposures: porter service, forced relocation, killing of family/household members.

One point was allocated for each of the following: forced labour, rape in the village, and mine accidents involving family member, fellow villagers or people with whom the participant had done forced labour or porter service.

As mentioned, the participants were grouped according to ethnic origin and time of flight from Burma. The scores of the groups were compared using a t-test and a Mann-Whitney test.

The above grouping was not used for the description of the individual forms of exposure.

RESULTS

GROUP A

Group A comprised 92 persons, of whom 80 (87%) were farmers. The most essential results are shown in **table 1**.

Of the 46 participants in the Shan group, 31 (67%) had been exposed to 2 or more violations against the family: porter service, relocation, physical assault, torture, killings, rape, disappearances, and/or mining accidents. The corresponding number in the non-Shan group was 30 (65%). For those who had fled during the 12 months before the study, and more than 12 months before, the corresponding numbers were 24(71%) and 37 (64%), respectively.

In 13 cases (14% of group A), the flight from Burma had resulted in breaking up the

family. Six persons under the age of 18 had left their parents, 5 had left spouses and 2-4 children, and 2 had left one child. Nine were from the Shan-group, and 9 had fled during the period November 1996-November 1997.

Individual exposures or traumatic events will be described later, but the details will not be complete in all cases.

The SLORC troops were held responsible for all the given violations of human rights, apart from the placing of land-mines.

A few had bought themselves free from forced labour or porter service.

Four people said that they had been indirectly involved in relocation because people from other villages had been relocated to their village. These 4 were not classified as exposed to relocation.

“Assault against family members” does not include being beaten, e.g. during porter service, because being beaten is almost taken for granted during such service.

Looting was not included in the questionnaire, but the examination revealed that this was common; 21 people, 17 of them Shan, reported that SLORC troops had come to their houses and had demanded or taken food or animal stock, within the previous 12 months in 10 cases. Of the 21, 20 were farmers had been exposed to this violation.

“Killings (family and others)” does not include deaths due to mine accidents.

The allocated scores showed no difference between the exposure of the Shan group compared with group A as a whole ($p > 0.90$, t-test). Nor was there any difference between the exposure of those who had fled during the previous 12 months and of those who had fled earlier ($p > 0.30$).

Forced labour

Sixty-one persons (52 male, 9 female; aged 15-70 years, median 32 years) reported forced labour. Ethnically, 35 were Shan, 16 Karenni, 9 Karen, and one of other ethnic origin. It was common for individuals to have carried out forced labour periodically during the 2-30 years before they fled Burma; 41 reported forced labour on 1 to 20 days per month (median 8 days) during the 12 months before their flight.

A few reported that they had worked 6-7 hours daily, the rest that they had worked 8-11 hours, or “all day”.

Fourteen said that they had worked on extensions of military camps, 29 that they had taken part in constructing roads (14) or railways (7), and 4 had done other sorts of work.

The 48 people questioned said that they had worked without salary; 39 had had to bring their own food, while 9 received some kind of food.

For 28 of 44 questioned, recruitment had been through the village headman, but for 12 it had been directly by the army; 4 had been recruited sometimes by the army, sometimes by the headman.

All the 47 people questioned said that all the village households took part in forced labour. When questioned, 36/37 reported that women took part in forced labour, and 4 people said spontaneously that women replaced their husbands when they could not take part.

Children aged 8 to 15 years (median 13) also took part, as reported by 26/40 (65%).

Beatings during forced labour were reported by 14 out of 43 (33%), while 24/32 questioned (75%) said that they had seen others being beaten.

Killings during forced labour (a total of 8 persons) were reported by 4 people. Three of the 8 had been shot and 2 beaten to death, while one died in a work accident because he was overexhausted. The cause of death was not given for the 2 remaining cases.

Porter service

Porter service was reported by 58 people, and by 2 involving family members. They comprised 57 men and 3 women, all aged between 18 and 70 years (median 34 years).

Thirty-six persons reported that they had worked 3 to 120 days (median 40 days) during their last year in Burma. 23 persons reported working the whole day, and sometimes also at night, up to 20 hours per day.

The weight they had to carry was given as 20-30 kg.

Nineteen had been recruited through the village headman, 25 directly by the army; 12 out of 15 questioned said that they had been explicitly threatened.

Every village household took part in the porter service, according to 25 of the 26

questioned, though according to two the village headman was excepted. Twelve of 23 questioned reported that women also did porter service, and 9 out of 20 that children aged between 11 and 15 years had taken part.

Beatings were experienced by 22/40(55%), and 32/37(86%) had seen fellow porters being beaten.

All 34 refugees questioned said that during the porter service they had been guarded at night by armed soldiers, either locked up or tied up.

All 41 questioned said that they had worked without salary and that the food was insufficient.

Killings of fellow porters were reported by 18/38 (47%). These reports described 51 killings; 36 persons had been beaten to death, or were left unconscious in the jungle, while one had been tied and left in the jungle; 6 had been shot, 2 while trying to flee; one had had his hands tied behind his back and was thrown into a river after trying to escape; 3 had been killed in an armed encounter between the guerilla movement and the soldiers having been ordered to go in front of them during the fight; 2 had been killed by mines, one because he had been ordered to go in front of the soldiers into a mined area. The circumstances of the deaths of 2 persons were not given.

The clinical examination of 15 refugees showed small non-specific scars on the shoulders, but we were given 2 photographs of scars on persons who claimed that they had extensive lesions from the traumas of the porter service [figs. 1(a) and (b)].

Forced relocation

Forced relocation from their home villages by SLORC troops was reported by 47 refugees; 16 had fled during the previous year, 31 earlier.

We obtained information from 30 of these interviewed persons about the circumstances surrounding forced relocation. One said that his village had been destroyed in 1962, while the other relocations had taken place from 1977-July 1997 (median 1996).

The reason for 20 of these relocations, according to SLORC, was that the villagers had given support to the guerilla movements. In 2 cases the reason was given as war in the area.

The time given to leave the village had been 0 to 15 days (median 5 days).

In 12 cases the villages were burnt down, and 4 were pulled down. In the remaining cases the refugees knew nothing about what had happened to their villages.

Four refugees reported that they had been ordered to house villagers, relocated from other villages by SLORC. These 4 persons were not included in the total number of 47.

Thirty people said that they owned a house and land in our near the village, but none had received any form of recompensation.

In 22 cases the order to leave the village had been accompanied by explicit threats, for instance of being shot if they did not obey the order (9case).

There were 2reports of rape by SLORC soldiers in connection with the relocation.

Two reported that villagers had been shot (a total of 10 people, the youngest 10years old) in connection with the expulsion from their own village. There were also reports about family members being killed in connection with expulsion from other villages.

Arrests

A total of 23 stated that they (21) and/or family members (10 people) had been arrested and detained and/or imprisoned during the period 1984 to 1997. Four were women, the rest men, all aged between 17 and 52 years.

The background for the arrest of 14 people was political activity or suspected guerilla activities. Three were suspected of criminal acts. One was accused of illegal border crossing, and one had refused to take part in forced porter service. One person had defied a curfew, while details about the circumstances were missing in the remaining cases.

The duration of imprisonment was from one day to 6 years (median 1 month). Four people had been through regular court procedures, but only one was assisted by a lawyer.

Three reported that they had been beaten. Eight had been exposed to systematic maltreatment, i.e. torture. Another person described how his two brothers had been tortured in prison. One of his sisters had been threatened with rape while in prison.

One reported how a co-prisoner had been beaten to death. Another that his uncle had died in prison of dysentery without getting medical treatment.

Torture

Thirteen people reported how they (12 men, aged 26-70 years) or family members (2 persons) had been tortured. One person had been tortured at a police station, while SLORC soldiers were responsible in the remaining cases- 4 locally in the village or forest, and 7 in military camps or prisons. The torture took place during the period 1980 to 1997, 5 of the cases during 1996-97.

Four had been accused of guerilla activities, 5 of political activity, 1 of manslaughter, 1 of misguiding SLORC troops in the jungle, and one was suspected by the SLORC troops of knowing about a mine field where explosions occurred while the suspected person was doing porter service. The last person was so exhausted that he could not continue his porter service.

The torture methods used were various. Eleven of the 12 had been beaten or kicked, 8 with bamboo sticks and/or rifles. One had been injured by a saw, one with a bayonet. Three had been stepped upon by soldiers. One had been forced to crawl on sharp stones. Four had been suspended.

Four had had their shins scraped by bamboo sticks or similar items. While they were lying on the ground, two soldiers scraped the stick up and down their shins with maximum pressure.

Three reported torture by suffocation procedures, either with a plastic bag or by having their heads forced under water. Four reported electric torture. Two reported that a gun had been fired close to their ears. Six that they had been exposed to other forms of torture: drenching with cold water, burning with cigarettes, mock execution, pulling out of hair, chili put up the nose, blows on the ears with the flat hand, confinement to a hole in the earth covered by branches across which the soldiers walked.

Five stated that they became unconscious in connection with the torture. Two reported vomiting blood and passing blood in the urine after torture. One developed an eye infection following a direct eye injury. One had been left unconscious in the jungle where he was found and helped by local villagers.

Clinical examination showed remarkable scar formations on the shin in 3 cases, which were said to be due to maltreatment with sticks. One had a characteristic group of linear scars on his thigh, said to have been inflicted by a saw. One had lost an eye from infection or trauma. One had typical signs of a neglected fracture of the femoral bone, said to have been caused by a bayonet wound, and reduced hearing, allegedly due to gunshot trauma.

One person reported that his two brothers, father and mother had been imprisoned in Rangoon because of political activities. The two brothers had both been beaten. One had been suspended and forced to crawl on sharp gravel; he was trodden on, his shins were scraped with sticks, and he became unconscious when his head was forcibly held under water.

Other assault of household/family members

Ten persons reported that they (7) or family members had been exposed to traumatic events or trauma that had led to invalidity.

Seven persons had been hit by gunshot or shell splinters. Three of them had lost a foot (amputation of lower leg). One had a chronic shoulder injury with reduced movement. Clinical examination showed that 3 had scars from bullet wounds or shell splinter lesions. Impaired function of a shoulder joint was confirmed in one case, and 3 had amputations at the level of the lower leg.

One reported that his cousin had broken his femoral bone during porter service. Another reported that his mother and brother had been confined in a hole in the earth for 24 hours by SLORC soldiers.

Killing of family members

Thirty-three persons (20 Shans, 8 Karennis and Karens) said that family members had been killed by SLORC soldiers, or in fighting or near their villages.

A total of 46 family members (36 men, 10 women; aged 11-70 years, median 26 years) were reported killed during the period 1980 to June 1997 (median 1996); 19 of them were reported by refugees who had fled within the previous 12 months.

Twenty-nine had been shot, 10 beaten to death, 4 stabbed to death (one in connection with rape), one had been tied up and thrown into a river, and one completely exhausted person had been kicked down a slope. The way in which the last person was killed was unknown.

The circumstances surrounding the killings were given in 27 cases: 4 were killed in their homes or at another place near the village during fighting between SLORC forces and rebels, 2 were beaten to death during detention by SLORC forces, 7 were killed during porter service and one during forced labour, 10 were killed in connection with forced relocation. One was killed in connection with rape, one headman probably because he did not show sufficient cooperation with the SLORC

forces. One was shot when he left his house despite a curfew.

Rape

18 persons (8 Shans, 6 Karennis, 4 Karens) reported that they knew about cases of rape, all committed by SLORC soldiers. In 7 cases it was a question of family members, in one of which both daughter and wife were raped, while the remaining cases concerned a grandchild, a sister, a wife, and a niece, respectively.

One person reported that a family member and others in the village had been raped. The ages of the victims ranged from 12 to 40 years (median 16 1/2 years).

In 7 cases the rape had taken place in or near the village, in 2 cases in the victim's home, one case in the woods, and one in a military camp.

The reported cases of rape took place from March 1993- October 1997. One was killed in connection with the rape; the family found the corpse with stab wounds of the chest.

It was reported that, some months after being raped, an abscess developed in the anal region of one woman, who died from blood poisoning (case JL 5).

Disappearances

Thirteen people reported that they knew about somebody who had disappeared. In 5 cases it was a question of family members, while 7 had disappeared in connection with porter service or forced labour during the period 1987- December 1996.

Killings of others than household members

Twenty-eight refugees reported killings of fellow villagers or people with whom they had done porter service. These reports included the killing of 89 people, all by SLORC soldiers; 32 persons were shot and 39 beaten to death.

Fifty one of these deaths were in connection with porter service. Twenty-five were beaten to death, while 11 were left exhausted and beaten in the jungle. One was tortured to death, one had his hands tied and was thrown into a river. One died in a mine explosion while ordered to walk in front of the soldiers in a mined area. Six were shot, three were killed in crossfire between SLORC soldiers and rebels while they were ordered as porters to walk in front of the soldiers.

Three were reported shot in connection with forced labour, while one died from an accident due to exhaustion from forced labour. Fifteen were reported shot in connection with forced relocation. Two were reported beaten to death in their village under unknown circumstances.

Landmines

Twenty-seven refugees reported being wounded by landmines, and 5 had family members who were killed by mines. Apart from one of the family members, all were men. The median age of the examined victims was 25 years (range 16-70). The accidents occurred from 1965-November 1997 (median 1990).

Six of the examined refugees said that the accidents had happened during fighting activities, one that it happened while placing a mine, one while doing porter service, 5 while working in the field or forest, 3 while fleeing from SLORC forces or in connection with forced relocation. One had been wounded while he tried to help another mine victim.

Of those examined, 16 had had a leg amputated, either at the thigh or the lower leg. One of these had also had a finger amputated on his left hand. One had the front of one foot amputated. One had lost fingers on both hands. One had lost both eyes and both hands, the explosion having happened when he tried to place a mine himself. One had a chronic ulcer on his shin, allegedly due partly to a splinter from a mine, partly to torture with a bayonet in the already existing wound.

Several refugees had numerous small scars from splinters from mines (fig.5). Seven stated that other people had been killed or wounded by the same explosion that wounded themselves.

GROUP B

Group B comprised 96 persons, aged between 14 and 60 years (median 28 years). Of them 38 (30 Karens, 6 Burmese, 2 with other ethnic origin) had fled Burma during the period November 1996- November 1997 (median, 3 months before our examination).

58 had fled before November 1996 (median, 5 years before the examination). They comprised 24 Karens, 24 Burmese, 5 Muslims, and 5 others. The main profession of Group B was farming (70 %). Essential data are shown in Table 2.

As judged by the scoring used, the people who had fled Burma from November

1996-November 1997 had been more seriously exposed to violations of human rights than those who had fled earlier ($p < 0.02$). This hold also for the sub-group of Karens ($p < 0.005$).

The SLORC troops were held responsible for all the violations of human rights, apart from the placing of land-mines.

Breaking down of the family unit because of the flight was reported by 20 Group B refugees.

Eleven refugees reported that they had paid money to be free of porter service. Six refugees reported that villagers from other villages had been relocated to their villages, but they are not included under forced relocation.

The killing of 56 family members was reported by 28 refugees, while 2 reported disappearances- a sister who had disappeared after being arrested by SLORC forces, and an uncle who disappeared during porter service. These two cases have been classified as killing of family members.

Seven refugees spontaneously reported the killing of other than family members. One reported about 6 deaths from mines when they were ordered to walk in front of the soldiers in mined areas.

Mine injuries were reported by 46 people, of whom 34 reported 125 deaths, and 25 about 87 persons wounded by mines.

In Group B, 59 (61%), including 39 Karens, reported that the family had been exposed to one or more of the following violations: porter service, forced relocation, killing of family members. Of these 59, 27 had fled during the 12 months before our examination. Group B was not asked about exposure to torture, but one person said that he had been imprisoned in Rangoon after taking part in a student demonstration. He had been held for 6 months, and was beaten and kicked and given electric shock. Two of his ribs had been broken.

DISCUSSION

By far the majority of the refugees we examined represented Shan, Karenni and Karen groups, and they described how they had been exposed to various violations of human rights. Our examinations do not reflect the exact extent of violations of human rights in Burma; however the numerous testimonies we received were

remarkably identical and in consistency with information from other sources on the situation in Burma (1-12).

We reached our target group, since 150 refugees corresponding to 80 per cent of the examined were farmers; however similar to the difficulties experienced by Allden & al (15) in tracing target persons we were only to a limited extent able to carry out examinations of inhabitants in refugee camps.

Moreover, our study cannot be compared with Allden et al's study (15), since they primarily examined the psychological health of refugee students, while we focused on traumatization of the rural population.

An exact comparison between group A and B is not possible since the quantity of information on exposure to violations of human rights varies quite substantially. However, it is evident that both groups have been severely exposed to among other things forced labour, porter service, relocation, killing, rape and other violations, including torture.

Added to this numerous accidents in connection with land mine explosions, the fact that the accounts from the individually interviewed refugees were relatively identical clearly indicates that the violations are systematic.

The Shans we examined in **group A** had been exposed to the same degree of violations of human rights as the rest of the group. We found no difference in exposure to violence between the people who had arrived in the period November 1996-1997 and the people who had arrived earlier. In **group B** the people who had fled within the last year had been more severely exposed than those who had arrived earlier.

The difference between group A and group B may be due to dissimilarity of selection. As already mentioned group A and group B are not comparable as regards the quantity of information; however, our results do not in the least indicate any improvement in the human rights situation in Burma during the last year.

Family breakdowns are not included in the score used for expositions, since we consider breakdown of families to be a result of extremely difficult conditions of life. It is thus remarkable that 14 per cent of group A and 21 per cent of group B reported a breakdown of family structure. This observation confirms that the families have been subjected to extreme violations.

Our plan included questions about exposure to threats. However, this soon proved pointless. As it clearly appears from our results at least part of the rural population lives in an atmosphere of imminent danger of being pressed to do forced labour or porter service as well as relocation; especially the two last mentioned factors involved a severe risk of losing one's life. In the areas from where we interviewed refugees,

there is also a substantial risk of losing either your life or limbs due to more or less accidental shootings by SLORC troops or land mine explosions.

SLORC but also local guerrilla groups are responsible for putting out land mines. SLORC troops were singled out as the only responsible for all the other reported violations of human rights.

CONCLUSION

The interviewed and examined refugees from Burma represent groups from mainly rural districts who have been exposed to massive violation of human rights. Our examinations do not indicate any improvement in the human rights situation over the last year. Shan people examined by us had been subjected to just as severe violations of human rights as the other groups.

Apart from the land mine problem where local resistance groups are involved SLORC is fully responsible for all the reported violations of human rights.