

NO CHILDHOOD AT ALL



CHILD SOLDIERS IN BURMA

IMAGES ASIA

"NO CHILDHOOD AT ALL"

A Report about Child Soldiers in Burma

By
Images Asia
1997

"Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall not be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances."

Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 37

"States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in the hostilities."

Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 38/2

"... The exploitation of childhood...constitutes the evil the most hideous, the most unbearable to the human heart..."

Albert Thomas, first director of the International Labour Office (1919-1932)

"A son or a daughter is the most precious treasure."

Burmese proverb

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ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

IMAGES ASIA (IA)

Images Asia was formed in 1993 as non-profit and non-governmental organisation dedicated to development and human rights in Burma and Southeast Asia. Our organisation views human rights as a tool for development.

Images Asia is engaged in implementing material and non-material development projects with the aim of empowering the Burmese groups we work alongside. We provide education materials and technical training intended to stimulate appreciation of the diversity and creativity necessary for human rights and development education at the grass-roots level.

Images Asia is an alternative media organisation involved in the documentation and dissemination of current information. We maintain a library of slides, video, and photographs from throughout the region, spanning the last nine years. These materials are distributed by Images Asia to educate and lobby the international community about the situation in Burma and within the region.

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PREFACE

This report is dedicated to all the child soldiers who have suffered and died in Burma's civil war.

This document was prepared by members of Images Asia with the assistance of other non-governmental organisations who have extensive experience dealing with refugees and displaced communities on the Thai-Burmese border, as well as in the field of human rights abuse documentation. The majority of interviews were conducted by field workers of these groups directly with child soldiers, between October 1995 and January 1996. Green November 32, a Burmese indigenous environmental and human rights NGO, and the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB), assisted with some of the interviews.

The interviews were also supplemented with information from the commanding officers, teachers, medical workers, and other adults who have had contact with child soldiers during and after their service. Some of the information concerning the Burmese military and interviews conducted with SLORC defectors was provided by the Karen Human Rights Group, another human rights documentation NGO.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the help of all those whose information or assistance made this report possible. We give special thanks to both interviewees and translators, who for reasons of safety cannot be named. In order to protect the identities of the child soldiers and of the field workers who assisted in the writing of this report, real names have been omitted and replaced by aliases given in quotation marks, and some identifying details in the interviews have been omitted. Some interviews are cited as (NGO:...). This system has been used to protect the identity of some NGOs and their staff involved in the project. Images Asia is referred to as IA, and the Karen Human Rights Group as KHRG. Images Asia would also like to thank the UN Quaker Office (Geneva) for commissioning the research; the European Human Rights Foundation, the Overseas Service Bureau (Australia), Trocaire, and the Open Society Institute (Burma Project) for their support of our documentation work; and Terre Des Hommes (Germany) for funding the publication and dissemination of this report.

* It should be noted that in this report, under the definitions provided by the United Nations Graca Machel Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, the term "child soldiers" refers to all combatants 18 years of age and under. However, according to the SLORC's Union of Myanmar Child Law (14 July 1993), a 'child' is a person who has not yet attained the age of 16 years, and a 'youth' is a person who is 16 or older, but has not yet attained the age of 18.

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Additionally, throughout this report, we shall refer to the country as "Burma," although Burmese themselves call the country both Burma and Myanmar. In 1989, Burma was officially renamed "Myanmar," historically the name of the country in Burmese language. However, as the change was instituted by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), it is strongly associated with the military junta. Most pro-democracy and ethnic opposition groups continue to refer to the country as Burma.

Finally, the Burmese armed forces are also referred to by their Burmese name, transliterated into English as the *Tatmadaw*.

Images Asia
Human Rights Desk
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THE SITUATION FOR CHILDREN IN BURMA

The phenomenon of child soldiers in Burma can only be understood within the context of militarization of the society as a whole. War in Burma has affected every segment of society, its fallout having severest repercussions for the most disadvantaged groups. The political instability engendered by civil war has left the country in economic crisis and has isolated rural conflict areas from receiving badly-needed development assistance. NGO activities have been severely curtailed, mitigating most attempts to correct the situation. Consequently, many children in Burma are living in grinding poverty, uneducated and in poor health, with under-age labour one of their few choices to make ends meet. The ever-present reality of armed conflict is also deeply embedded in the consciousness of all Burma's peoples. With 36% of all Burma's inhabitants under the age of 15,¹ most of the country's population have grown up under the shadow of civil war. The rapid expansion of the armed forces since 1988 has both forced and encouraged recruitment of minors into the ranks. Army entrance is sometimes perceived by children, especially orphans, as offering a protective haven from hunger and abuse. Many children therefore see joining the armed forces of any of the warring parties as their only means of survival. Unfortunately, research suggests that they are likely to find it just the opposite. While Burma has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as yet there is little indication that its provisions are being followed in good faith, or that recruitment of children into the Tatmadaw has decreased.

In Burma, the participation of children in armed conflict has become routine, as the country has been at war for most of this century. Any visitor to the central urban areas, or to the border regions where most of the civil war's battles take place, can see heavily-armed teenage boys toting automatic weapons: standing sentry duty at the Mandalay railway station, guarding the base-camps of Taunggyi, lounging in the markets of Rangoon, and further from the public view, drilling on parade-grounds on the Thai-Burmese border, and fighting in the front-lines.

Since 1948, Burma has been home to one of the most complicated civil conflicts in the world. This conflict has given rise to over 70 military groups, of which 28 are known still to bear arms.² Since 1989, the State Law and Order Restoration council (SLORC) has agreed on cease-fires with 15 armed ethnic minority groups, including most recently, the Mon and Karenni. The SLORC often refers to the armed groups as having "returned to the legal fold" even when there have been no comprehensive peace settlements.³ As a result, these peace agreements remain unstable; and, as in the case of the Karenni KNPP in 1995, some have broken down entirely, and fighting has resumed.

¹UNICEF, *Women and Children in Myanmar: A Situation Analysis*, 1995, p. 1.

²Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948*, White Lotus Books, 1995: p., 422-437.

³Amnesty International "No Law At All," 1995, p. 18.

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Especially since 1988, the government's primary concern has been keeping itself in power, an exercise which necessitates diverting a huge number of resources from other concerns, particularly spending for health, education, and other social services, which together comprise less than 10% of the state's budget in rather dubious officially reported figures.⁴ According to an economic report by the US Embassy in Rangoon,

*"... the undemocratic form of government contributes greatly to Burma's macro-economic instability and retards development of a healthy and educated workforce. The government's reliance on armed force rather than popular support is directly related to its disproportionately high levels of defence spending. Its lack of the popular support and administrative integrity and competence needed to collect internal revenues effectively underlies its reliance on the external sector for a disproportionately high share of its revenues. Together, these effects slow growth, crowd out both legal credit to the private sector and government spending on health and education, foster corruption by depressing real government wages, and contribute greatly to chronically large fiscal and BOP (balance of payments) deficits, and to chronic double-digit money supply expansion and price inflation."*⁵

Unwillingness on the part of the government to allocate social services funding has been further exacerbated by the suspension of most of the country's overseas bilateral aid programs after the bloody military coup of 1988. The junta are still at a loss to fill the hole left in the national budget which was previously occupied by foreign aid. Attempts by international NGOs to provide assistance have been stymied by the junta's extreme suspicion and contempt for foreign groups, who are often accused of aiding and supporting insurgents. Intransigence in allowing access to many areas, lack of financial transparency and co-operation on the part of the SLORC have led some of the NGOs who had gone back into Burma after 1988 to withdraw again. Citing reasons of a lack of proper access to political prisoners, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) officially closed its office in Rangoon on 15 August 1995.⁶

The inability of major international organisations to work within the country paints a grim picture for the solution Burma's burgeoning health and social problems. As one example, the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country is growing out of control, prompting one UNICEF report to refer to the country as,

"... a future basket case requiring massive aid efforts.... (T)hey may also require health quarantines... (W)ith India and Thailand. Myanmar has the highest HIV incidence in Asia, with the least 'control capacity' ".⁷

⁴Averages as quoted in UNICEF, 1995, calculated from official state reports of 1992-1995 budgets in the state-controlled press (Working People's Daily and New Light of Myanmar, 31/3/92, 26/3/93, 30-31/3/93, 25/3/94, 29/-31/3/94, & 1/4/94).

⁵Richard J. Patard, U.S. Embassy, Rangoon, "Foreign Economic Trends Report: Burma," July 1996, p. 101.

⁶Amnesty International, "Myanmar: Human Rights after Seven Years of Military Rule," October 1996, p. 29.

⁷UNICEF, Draft report, "Contributions to an Integrated UN Peace and Development Initiative in Myanmar", 1992, p. 2.

The SLORC, in co-operation with NGOs and UN agencies, have begun education campaigns country-wide on the issue, yet the effectiveness of these remains to be seen. This epidemic is exacerbated by the narcotics problem in the country. Burma is the world's major supplier of heroin, and a large number of its people are opium and heroin addicts, especially in some of the ethnic areas, where drugs are more readily available. Confidential ethnic minority health reports from Shan and Kachin States in 1994, allege that heroin addiction, and HIV/AIDS infection is as high as 95% in villages such as Hpakan in northern Burma. Containment of the interlinked HIV/AIDS-narcotics addiction crisis has been entirely unsuccessful to date. While the junta continues to limit access to the most afflicted regions, and NGOs continue to find co-operation with the SLORC untenable, there are few avenues from which to attack the problem. The situation, symptomatic of many social welfare problems affecting Burma today, poses a dire threat to the country's youth.

Under the current conditions, many international NGOs have expressed alarm over the prospects for Burma's younger generation. UNICEF view the situation of children in Burma with grave concern. In 1992, they produced a confidential draft report in the hope of a peace initiative by the UN, the contents of which were leaked, and the plan subsequently discarded. It stated:

*"Many children are orphaned abandoned, trafficked exploited in the labour force, institutionalised or jailed. Some are used in drug-running, while others are targets of ethnic discrimination. In the civil war, children have become victims or participants in armed conflicts, at times used as porters, human shields or human mine-sweepers."*⁸

According to Anti-Slavery International, children in Burma are suffering extreme deprivation and exploitation:

*"There is little welfare support, even for those who have lost parents in the armed conflict, less than twenty percent of schoolchildren complete more than four grades of primary school, and across the country many children enjoy **no childhood at all** — they are simply put to work."*⁹ [emphasis added]

As a result of the failure of economic policy and diversion of funds away from social spending, children in Burma suffer extreme poverty. Despite the SLORC's own glowing reports of the "economic miracle" taking place through foreign investment, Burma remains one of the seventh poorest nations in the world. Inadequate food and medical care adversely affect children's chances of survival. Surveys have shown a high prevalence of stunted growth in primary school-aged children, with nearly half suffering from malnutrition¹⁰. According to UNICEF,

*"Health expenditure as a proportion of the gross national product in Myanmar is one of the lowest in the world."*¹¹

⁸UNICEF, Draft report, "Contributions to an Integrated United Nations Peace and Development Initiative in Myanmar," 1992: p. 2.

⁹Martin Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma*, Anti-Slavery International, 1994, p. 119.

¹⁰UNICEF, "Children and Women in Myanmar: A Situation Analysis," 1995, p. 31.

¹¹UNICEF, 1995, p. 48.

Although children under five make up only 15% of the population, they account for half the country's annual death rate. Infant mortality below age five is estimated at 147/1,000: with 175,000 children dying every year, 15% of Burma's babies do not live beyond their fifth year.¹² Most of these deaths are due to easily preventable or treatable diseases, including malaria.¹³ In the ethnic border areas the situation is worse. In war-torn Karen areas, infant mortality may be as high as 200/1,000, and in Shan State 300/1,000.¹⁴

*"In the most remote border areas, some ethnic communities have had virtually no public services because of armed conflicts and problems of accessibility."*¹⁵

No comprehensive survey of health conditions in border areas has been possible over the last five decades because of continuous conflict. Medical agencies working in the border region report that the infant mortality rate is extremely high, due mainly to endemic malaria, widespread dysentery, and malnutrition.¹⁶ Medicines are rare and expensive, and usually administered by "quack" doctors. In Burma, education in government schools, where parents must supply all school materials, is a luxury. An estimated 80% of students enrolling in primary school drop-out before completing high school matriculation.¹⁷ Some 39% of children never enrol in primary school at all, and of those that do, only 27% complete the five year cycle.¹⁸ In one survey, 26% of parents surveyed cited poverty or the inability to pay expenses as a reason for their child's non-enrolment.¹⁹ One group of researchers found that households must assume an average of 30% of the total costs of education, usually amounting to from 1/3 to 1/6 of a family's income.²⁰ They state,

*"The difficult economic situation in Myanmar households means that even the most negligible financial costs associated with primary education be of critical significance."*²¹
and,

*"Only the richest families would easily be able to meet all the direct and hidden costs of a full secondary education."*²²

Ethnic border regions of the country are severely under-serviced. Even in areas where some groups operate schools independent of the central Burmese regime, education systems are routinely disrupted when villages are forced to relocate due to the conflict. Once home to one of the most educated populations in Southeast Asia, Burma still reports a nation-wide adult illiteracy rate of 22%, with significant

¹²UNICEF, 1995, p. 19.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Martin Smith, *Fatal Silence?* Article 19, 1996, p. 37.

¹⁵ESCAP/UNICEF, "Myanmar Country Programme Recommendation," 1992: p. 2.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ministry of Education, /UNDP/UNESCO, *Education Sector Survey*, 1992: p. iii.

¹⁸UNICEF, 1995: p.33.

¹⁹UNICEF, 1995, p. 52

²⁰Mark Bray, *Counting the Full Cost*, World Bank/UNICEF, 1996, p. 38-40.

²¹Ibid., (quoting a study done by Kiri Evans and Adam Ross, "Cost-Effectiveness of Primary Education in Myanmar," Yangon:, UNICEF, 1994), p. 46.

²²Ibid., p. 46.

variations.²³ However, this figure is expected to increase dramatically over the next few years, as the inadequacies of the education system for the country's exponentially expanding younger population are felt.

In addition, many children do not have time to go to school. Under the difficult economic circumstances many families face, often children in Burma must work from a young age to contribute to the household income. According to Secretary-General of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi,

*"I myself have seen children working on construction sites, some of them as young as 11 -- they have to work because they need to work or else they will not be able to eat properly. Whole families have to go out to work to make ends meet. Inflation is terrible in Burma. . . . The way prices are rising people have to work hard just to eat 2 square meals a day. Children have to work hard, they have to help their parents, otherwise they would not be able to make ends meet."*²⁴

This is especially true in areas where forced labour is common. The ICFTU, in supplementary evidence to its complaint to the ILO under Article 26, states,

*"The practice (of exacting forced labour), which affects hundreds of thousands of residents of Myanmar, involves the use of forced labour for public purposes as well as for private benefit. The labour is exacted from men, women and children of villages and towns in various parts of the country. . . . The military government of Myanmar is perpetrating severe physical and sexual abuses on many forced labourers, including beatings, rape, executions, and deliberate deprivation of necessary food, water, rest, shelter and access to medical care."*²⁵

Children stand in as forced labourers themselves, usually in physically demanding jobs such as road work or construction, in place of older wage-earning family members, or work in order to supplement and replace earnings lost when their parents are taken as forced labourers. This situation has led Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to comment,

*"It is the forced labour of children that is building SLORC's new Burma."*²⁶

Economic exigency has contributed to migration from Burma, as the hemorrhage of workers over the borders seeking employment in neighbouring countries grows daily. Among them are many Burmese children. Hundreds of thousands of these children are currently exploited in sweatshops, and in prostitution in nearby Asian countries such as Thailand.²⁷ UNICEF estimate that over 40,000 Burmese children are now working in Thailand's sex industry.²⁸ Figures given by NGOs working on the ground are even higher.

²³UNICEF, 1995: p. 52.

²⁴IA interview with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi: August 1996.

²⁵International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Supplementary Evidence to the Complaint under Article 26 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation, Submitted 20 June 1996

²⁶IA interview with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, July 1996

²⁷*A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand*, Asia Watch and Women Rights Projects, Human Rights Watch, December 1993, p. 4.

²⁸UNICEF, Draft Report: p. 3.

Many children in Asian societies work from an early age in family businesses or agriculture, and admittedly, not all child labour is harmful. However circumstances force most of Burma's working children to be separated from their families, where they are vulnerable to abuse and exposed to risks, including sometimes life-threatening physical danger and disease. Needless to say, children sent to work have few opportunities to acquire an education, a right guaranteed under the SLORC's Child Law, Article 20 (a: i). The disadvantaged circumstances in which Burmese children find themselves play a large part in encouraging their early entry to military service.

It should be noted that Burma's military history also plays an important psychological role in encouraging children to become involved in the military. Due to the prominent role that General Aung San played in liberating the country from the British and Japanese occupations, the Burman public have turned him into an idolised national hero. Children, especially young boys, are raised to revere General Aung San and other military leaders of the past, and to look on military induction as a sign of manhood. In much of the popular media, the soldier is held up as the perfect role-model. Particularly among ethnic groups, where many children grow up watching their fathers go to war, as their families and villages are tyrannised by the *Tatmadaw*, devotion to the revolutionary cause is seen as the highest calling to which one can aspire. The ethnic groups have their own revered military leaders, whom children are taught to adore and often fear from an early age. Among all ethnicities, to be a soldier is to occupy a position of great honour and self-sacrifice. The emotional pull of such prestige should not be underestimated.

It is therefore not surprising that, though international law forbids the use of children under the age of fifteen as soldiers, almost all of the Burmese groups which the authors and their organisations work alongside have child soldiers within their ranks, as does the *Tatmadaw* under the control of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Although all parties to the conflict in Burma use child soldiers, the treatment of them, recruitment methods and conditions of service, duties and post-service situations vary a great deal both between, and within, these armed groups. Not only are there differences between child soldiers experiences with each army, there are also variances from region to region, and command to command.

It is, however, apparent in all the ethnic armed forces and the *Tatmadaw*, when an impending large-scale battle is approaching more child soldiers are recruited and used in the front-lines as more man-power is required. In the experiences of the researchers, the treatment of child soldiers in the *Tatmadaw* deserves separate treatment, because it is so much more severe than that of other groups.

It is currently impossible to obtain figures on the numbers of child soldiers fighting with the *Tatmadaw*, due to a great number of geographical, logistical, and political reasons, not the least of which is the SLORC's desire to conceal the strengths of child troops. However most observers agree that very young people comprise a significant portion of troop numbers.

It is equally difficult to obtain numbers of deaths, and statistics on injuries of child soldiers, given the inaccessibility of medical and military statistics and records. Although the *Tatmadaw* require all recruits to be eighteen years old officially, the researchers have interviewed a number SLORC defectors who were forced or advised to falsify their ages for their records, by SLORC officers themselves.

Observers note that the number of child soldiers in the *Tatmadaw* increased has increased dramatically since 1988. When the SLORC took power in 1988, one of their first major decisions was to implement a far-reaching plan to expand and modernise the armed forces. From a standing force of approximately 170,000 in 1988, SLORC troops now number over 350,000.²⁹

*"The SLORC's ultimate goal is to have an army of about 475,000 of all ranks by the end of the decade. This increase in manpower is being accompanied by a massive arms procurement program . . . if these goals are achieved, then by the turn of the century the Myanmar Army will be one of the largest ground forces in Southeast Asia."*³⁰

This is a remarkable expansion in a very short time. In order to achieve it, in the early 1990s, previously stringent entrance requirements were eased for a massive recruitment drive, mainly in impoverished rural areas where there are many unemployed youths. The ages of new recruits were dropped, and formerly tough medical examinations were made easy to pass. When even this failed to provide the necessary numbers, according to human rights organisations, most rural villages were ordered to provide at least one recruit for the army. Since then, the *Tatmadaw* have resorted to recruiting boys aged fourteen and younger. UNICEF officials have even discovered boys "officially conscripted" at fourteen into special military training as Ye Nyunt Youth.³¹ Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has questioned the use of child soldiers to expand the ranks of the *Tatmadaw*.

*"Why are they recruiting children? Is it because they want to expand the troops? Why do they feel the need to expand the troops? They have achieved a number of cease-fires, we're not at war with any exterior enemies. So, I think there is a lot to the political situation of Burma that is not very good. The political situation affects lives of children. That's why we can't say 'improve the standards of living by developing the economy and everything will be all right.'"*³²

There are other reasons for the use of child soldiers. Some ethnic military commanders claim that child soldiers are more obedient, do not question orders, and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers. Others, however, state that child soldiers are still children, and that they often misbehave, are unruly, and require frequent scolding, as young boys usually do. One captain claimed that the child soldiers he had commanded often had to be taught the most basic life skills, such as how to wash, cook and take care of themselves.

²⁹Andrew Selth, "The Myanmar Army since 1988: Acquisitions and Adjustments," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 3, December 1995, p. 237

³⁰Ibid., p. 238.

³¹Smith, *Ethnic Groups*, 1994, p. 118.

³²IA interview with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, August 1996.

He believed that the use of child soldiers was more of a hindrance to battle than a help. One point is clear, that many child soldiers interviewed for this report seemed to either fear or revere their commanders, and stated that they would follow their every order. Fear is a major determining factor in their obedience and performance. However in extreme cases, when child soldiers could no longer tolerate their own, or others', mistreatment by their senior officers, they were driven to either suicide or murder.

Although most of the warring factions in Burma have forcibly recruited some children, most of the children we know of joined the ethnic armies voluntarily, usually because they saw no other way to survive. Children say that they joined for various reasons: to avenge the killings of family and friends, to protect their families and communities from the opposition army or armies, or to get food for themselves, and in some cases, for their families. Not infrequently, when the child's family had been killed, there was no one left to take care of them. They therefore took the only option that they thought open to them, to join a military force, ethnic or Burman. Ethnic military leaders state that many child soldiers, both volunteers and recruits, are orphans, who volunteer due to lack of options. Some ethnic armies and the *Tatmadaw* are known to have institutions to train these orphans as child soldiers.

Many child soldiers have never studied formally in civilian schools, or have barely started their schooling before it is interrupted by military duty. Military training makes a poor replacement for civilian education, even in a country where most schooling is sub-standard. Military training under the auspices of different armed groups varies in length and content, however it can be stated unequivocally that most child soldiers do not receive significant instruction to enhance literacy or vocational and occupational skills. Lack of educational opportunity for young recruits has significant ramifications for their post-military futures, and indeed, portends even more difficult prospects for Burma's economic and social development.

Children have played various roles in the conflict: they have performed front-line/active combat duties, done cooking and other menial labour, stood sentry/check-point duty, acted as body-guards (a feature common to the ethnic armies especially), served as porters carrying ammunition and supplies, and been used as cannon fodder to draw the fire of their adversaries, and sometimes in human-wave attack tactics in which hundreds have been killed. Most child soldiers on all sides of the conflict are male, and neither the researchers nor ethnic combatants interviewed for this report were aware of the use of female child soldiers in combat situations. Some of the armies do, however, have female recruits.

The widespread use of child soldiers has ensured that many thousands of children in Burma have suffered exceptional cruelty during the war: many child soldiers have been killed or wounded, or have witnessed terrible atrocities. Many children have taken part in these human rights abuses themselves. The youngest SLORC child soldier interviewed for this report joined at 12, however eyewitnesses of battles recount stories of inductees as young as 10. The use of children as soldiers in Burma results in serious human rights abuses.

Children are killed, forcibly conscripted, unwillingly separated from their families, kidnapped, tortured during their service, forced to kill and torture, and due to the rampant corruption in the military, are underpaid, or are not paid at all. As one ABSDF soldier stated of the situation of children in Burma: "They are forced to grow up too quickly."³³

Although many children join the army seeking advantages for themselves or their families, almost all interviewed told of receiving inadequate food and clothing, and few received benefits for their families. Most *Tatmadaw* soldiers also spoke of being regularly punished, and often of being beaten and abused by their senior officers. In addition, while it is sometimes believed that children are less cognisant of atrocity and death, the child soldiers interviewed for this report made frequent reference to the fear, despair, and horror they felt, especially when they were ordered to beat porters, witnessed rapes committed by their senior officers, or engaged in combat situations. As there is no formal demobilization procedure in most of Burma's armed groups, and little understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder counselling, the physical and mental scars these young soldiers bear again bode ill, for their own futures and for that of the country.

Burma acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. At the same time, they signed the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children. The National Program of Action (NPA) for the Survival, Protection, and Development of Myanmar's Children in the 1990s was completed in September 1993. In 1993, the SLORC also promulgated the Child Law for the country and established an Intersectoral Committee on the Rights of the Child. These movements are reason for some optimism, as they indicate that there are mechanisms in place which can be used to improve the situation for children in the country. However, the first country review conducted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child has suggested that much is wanting in terms of the SLORC's understanding and implementation of the Convention.

Despite the SLORC's extraordinary initial reservations to the UN Convention, (Article 37: prohibiting the use of torture or other inhumane treatment, and Article 15: the right to free association and assembly, which were both withdrawn after condemnation from the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the ECOSOC report of 1994), their accession to the Convention has broadened the UN mandate inside the country concerning human rights, child rights and the issue of child soldiers. However, as previously stated, from our research the SLORC continue to use child soldiers, more so now than ever before due to the swelling of the numbers of the *Tatmadaw* in recent years. We recommend that in future, more research be conducted from inside the country, with defectors in the border areas, and with child soldiers in ethnic armies, to clarify whether Burma's commitments to international instruments are effecting real change with the country. In this report we hope to describe the context in which many boys become child soldiers, and to document their experiences.

³³IA: Ma Mi Suu Pwint, June 1995.

BURMA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES



Map by © R. Reijers

MAP OF AREAS AFFECTED BY INSURGENCY IN THE EARLY 90s



BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Located in mainland Southeast Asia, Burma shares its borders with Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China, Tibet, and India. With a population of approximately forty-five million, Burma is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world; inside its boundaries, over one hundred different dialects and languages have been identified. The different ethnic sub-groups have been generally classified into four main families: the Tibeto-Burmese, the Mon-Khmer, the Shan (Tai) and the Karen. Unfortunately, the last reasonably accurate population census was conducted by the British colonial administration in 1931, so even estimates of the current ethnic minority populations are impossible. It is commonly assumed that ethnic Burmans make up approximately two thirds of Burma's population.

Not only extremely culturally diverse, Burma is rich in such natural resources as fertile soils, natural gas, gems, minerals, timber, fish, and wildlife. However, decades of economic mismanagement, corruption, and civil conflict have reduced Burma to one of the poorest nations in the world. With a per capita income of US\$200 per year,³⁴ Burma was designated "Least Developed Country" by the United Nations in 1987.

Historic tensions between Burma's different ethnic groups were intensified by sixty years of British colonial rule, during which time the British, in a "divide and rule" policy, set one group against another. These tensions had escalated to armed conflict by the time Burma had won her independence from Britain in 1948. The independence accords inadequately addressed the nationalist aspirations of many of the ethnic minority groups. Continued harassment of the ethnic people including the Karens, Kachins, and Chins by the Burma Independence Army, for siding with the allies during World War 2, further exacerbated the problems. In 1949, the Karen National Union (KNU) took up arms against the central government. The Karenni, Mon, Pa-O, and Rakhine were the next to follow suit. Since then, most of Burma's ethnic minority groups have formed armies and revolted against the central government at one time or another. The size of these armies presently ranges in strength from the Chin National Front with approximately 100 soldiers, to the United Wa State Army with a troop force of approximately 15,000 - 20,000.

For the last thirty-five years Burma has been governed by military dictatorships, against which most of the energies of the insurgent armies have been directed. From 1962 to 1988, the ruling party was known as the Burmese Socialist Program Party, led by General Ne Win. Since September 1988, Burma has been ruled by the military junta known as the SLORC, currently headed by General Than Shwe, though he is expected to step down within the next year.

³⁴UNICEF, 1995, p. 3.

In addition to the ethnic minority opposition groups, there have also been a number of predominantly Burman armed opposition groups. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB), with a troop strength estimated at 23,000 at its height, presented one of the most formidable threats to the central government. Led by ethnic Burmans, the rank and file of the CPB was made up of ethnic minority peoples who eventually mutinied in 1989, leading to the collapse of the party. Unsuccessful revolts against the government have also led to the formation of predominately Burman opposition groups.

The most recent of these came in the wake of the brutal oppression of the 1988 pro-democracy uprisings, when people in cities and townships throughout the country took to the streets to protest the authoritarian rule of General Ne Win's military regime. Within weeks General Ne Win resigned, appointing an interim council of hand-picked generals to take his place. The new junta, calling themselves the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), announced they would hold free and fair elections the following year. Before elections occurred, the SLORC placed the most favoured candidate, Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and daughter of independence hero General Aung San, under house arrest for, ". . . endangering State security and public law and order."³⁵ Following the 1990 elections, the SLORC refused to hand over power to the elected representatives including delegates of the National League for Democracy (NLD), who won 83% of the popular vote.

In the two years following the *Tatmadaw's* brutal suppression of the August 1988 uprisings, approximately ten thousand high-school and university students, from all over the country, fled to the border areas and formed a student army, the All Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF). Members of the NLD also fled later in smaller numbers, and formed the NLD - Liberated Area, when oppression by the SLORC became overpowering. This exodus to the jungle of Burmese students and politicians is not unprecedented in modern Burmese history. Similar flights occurred following student demonstrations in 1962 which ended abruptly when the *Tatmadaw* blew up the Student Union Building at Rangoon University; and in 1974, when demonstrations occasioned by the funeral of former UN Secretary General U Thant were ruthlessly suppressed.

Currently, the ABSDF claims to have approximately 1,500 - 2,000 members living along the Thai-Burmese border, of which around 500 are armed, estimates probably true for the years preceding 1993. According to more conservative calculations by observers, the ABSDF are now likely to have approximately 400-600 members, of which 300 are armed. The ABSDF does not recruit, depending entirely on volunteer recruits, among them child soldiers. The group also controls little territory of their own and are therefore dependent on the ethnic groups and alliances who do control 'liberated areas'. The difficulties of revolutionary life in the jungles have forced thousands of these young people to return home or seek asylum in other countries since 1988.

³⁵Amnesty International, 1995, p. 5.

Throughout the years, many of the armed groups have combined their forces in various, sometimes short-lived, alliances. Among the most important of these has been the eleven-party National Democratic Front (NDF) made up of various ethnic armies opposed to the BSPP/SLORC. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which formally disbanded in 1989, maintained fragile alliances with various ethnic groups until its collapse. Following the 1988 uprising, the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) was formed in 1989, uniting the NDF and other Burman and ethnic political and armed forces in an alliance of twenty-two groups. The most recent alliance of armed ethnic and Burman opposition groups is the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) in 1991. However with the SLORC's policy of making cease-fire offers to these groups separately, unity amongst these alliances has become increasingly fragile. As stated in the introduction, 15 of these ethnic groups have ceased military operations, yet no far-reaching peace settlements have been made.

The armed conflict has consisted of a mixture of guerrilla warfare and attack/defence of fixed positions both by the Burmese army and the opposition armies. While people frequently refer to a 'front-line', this is something of a misrepresentation. Seldom is there a single battle-line clearly delineating territory controlled by one party. Rather, there tend to be fairly large, undefined areas of contested control. It is not unusual for a village to be controlled by the SLORC by day and by the KNU, for example, by night. With the exception of a number of large-scale battles, engagements only tend to last for a few days at most, generally resulting in few deaths.

Civil war and dictatorship have led to the militarization of Burmese society. As stated previously, since 1988, the SLORC has expanded the Burmese military considerably towards its announced goal of 475,000 by the year 2000.³⁶ According to Andrew Selth, Australian academic and defence analyst,

*"Before 1988, the Myanmar Army was a lightly-equipped infantry force organised and deployed for internal security operations. Its heavier equipment urns obsolete, its logistics and communications systems were weak and operations were hampered by shortages of transport, fuel, and ammunition. Under the State Law and Order Restoration Council, however, the army has grown from about 170,000 to more than 300,000 men. This increase in manpower has been accompanied by a massive arms procurement programme, designed to modernise the army's weapons and equipment, and upgrade its operational capabilities. The Myanmar Army is now a much more formidable force but, until a number of serious problems are overcome, its capabilities will remain limited and its professionalism suspect."*³⁷

Although Burma has no external enemies at this time, since 1991 the junta has purchased billions of dollars of armaments, mainly from China. According to most observers this massive arms build-up is aimed at crushing ethnic unrest, and suppressing any further dissent from the Burman populace. The US Embassy in Rangoon estimates that,

³⁶Selth, p. 237.

³⁷Ibid.

.. . (I)n 1994/95, defence operating disbursements may have amounted to as much as 19.533 billion kyat and constituted 41.3% of declared central government operating disbursements and 4.5% of the legal GDP, in unadjusted terms . . . (P)rovisional 1995/96 budget data suggest that defence operating disbursements. . . constituted 33% of the government's operating disbursements. . . it seems very likely that defence disbursements have made up over half of central government operating disbursements, in exchange-rate-adjusted terms, every year since FY 90/91."³⁸

In September 1988, Burma's most senior military officer became the SLORC's chairman, Prime Minister and Defence Minister, as well as Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. Accordingly, though the junta tend to function as a consensual body, officially General Than Shwe exercises both political supremacy and operational control of the armed forces at the most senior level. The ten commanders of the military regions have also been promoted to the rank of Major General, and since 1988 become chairmen of the local Law and Order Restoration Councils (LORCs), thus they are also vested with administrative and military responsibility for their areas.³⁹

As a result, at every level of government, the civilian administration is subservient to the *Tatmadaw*, which has enforced its control through the use of arbitrary military practices such as martial law decrees and military tribunals. Although since 1992 some martial law decrees such as curfews have been revoked, orders greatly restricting freedom of expression and association remain in place.⁴⁰ Front-line soldiers, using tactics from the battle fronts, have been used to suppress dissent and in mundane civil policing duties. Most of their security activities are controlled and co-ordinated by the Military Intelligence Services (MIS) under the control of General Khin Nyunt, however even low-ranking troops, including child soldiers, have immense power. The pervasiveness and competence of the MIS ensure that approximately one in five people in Burma are suspected to be agents or informers, creating a climate of constant fear within the country.

The *Tatmadaw* and SLORC have also thoroughly entrenched themselves economically. Largely due to the "Burmese Way to Socialism", a disastrous economic plan implemented by the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) between 1962 and 1988, the country was finally accorded Least Developed Country status by the UN in 1987. Since 1988, the succeeding SLORC have abandoned this program and implemented an 'open door' policy to foreign investment, a significant step for a formerly isolationist country. However, most foreign investment is overseen by the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH), established in 1990, with 40% ownership in the hands of the *Tatmadaw* via the Directorate of Defence Procurement.⁴¹ The UMEH owns businesses and jointly operates most concessions on natural resources with overseas and local partners. Through it, a large portion of

³⁸Patard, p. 23-24.

³⁹Selth, (quoting Tin Maung Maung Than, "Neither Inheritance nor Legacy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 15, No. 1, June 1993, p. 60), p. 245-6.

⁴⁰Amnesty International *Report 1997*, p. 238.

⁴¹Patard, p. 21; Smith, 1994, p. 29.

the finance accrued from foreign trade and investment is used for and by the SLORC and *Tatmadaw* in arms acquisitions.

At the same time, the country's economic situation has become progressively more precarious, as foreign reserves continue to dwindle. Further foreign investment is now threatened, as the regime have shown themselves unable to support infrastructure expansion and heavily reliant on forced labour. The increasing number of overseas boycotts launched in response to the SLORC's abrogation of political freedoms and the grim human rights situation in Burma promise to seriously impede further attempts at economic growth. In early 1997, subsequent to hearing complaints brought by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the European Trade Unions' Council, the European Union withdrew its reduced import tariffs offered under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Burma. On 20 May 1996, President Bill Clinton signed an executive order for economic sanctions, citing severe repression and serious abuses by the military regime as reasons for the ban on further American investment. In addition, 12 American city councils have passed selective purchasing legislation banning civic and state governments from making contracts with companies doing business in Burma. More such legislation is pending.

The SLORC seized power as a self-proclaimed "peace-keeping" force, to restore order during the 1988 democratic uprising. Currently, the SLORC continue to rule by decree in the absence of the constitution, which was made null and void by the military in 1988. In 1993, the SLORC convened a 'National Convention' of some 700 hand-picked delegates, including ethnic insurgent leaders with whom they had recently made cease-fires, such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA - formerly under control of the CPB), in order to draft a new constitution for the country. By this time the top leaders of the NLD, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, had been placed in detention and could not participate. The SLORC deemed the Convention and the completion of the constitution necessary prerequisites to the transfer of power. The Convention proceedings have been marred by ethnic and other ideological disputes over the writing of the constitution, and plenary sessions are chaired and controlled by the SLORC, with public dissent punished at the least by expulsion, and at times by long-term imprisonment. In November 1995 most of the NLD representation walked out in protest of the Convention calling it a 'sham'. According to Amnesty International,

*"No date has ever been set for the end of the National Convention, and there has been no indication of the next step in the transition to civilian government."*⁴²

Many observers concur that the SLORC are stalling to ensure they will be able to guarantee their future role in governing the country.

⁴²Amnesty International, 1995, p. 1.

Since the early 1990s, pressure on political dissidents still resident in the country has steadily increased. Though Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself was released from house arrest in July 1995, her own movements remain severely restricted, and since then hundreds more of her supporters have been arrested and imprisoned. In May 1996, the NLD party managed to proceed with a planned congress, despite detentions and arrests of over 260 delegates and supporters. When a second congress was planned for September, over 600 of those planning to attend were rounded up, and the weekly addresses held by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the gate of her home were ended as blockades, still in place at the time of writing, were erected on the streets around her house. In May, former honorary consul and friend of Suu Kyi's, James Leander Nichols died in prison under suspicious circumstances, after being arrested for possessing unregistered fax machines. In November, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade was attacked by a mob, widely believed to have been organised by the junta and manned with members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), the SLORC-controlled mass organisation. The year ended with massive arrests of student protesters, who in December staged the largest public protest since 1991, demanding greater involvement in university affairs and the reformation of the student unions.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other refugee and relief monitoring organisations, have consistently stated that the SLORC has one of the most appalling human rights records in the world, and that in 1997, the human rights situation there remains critical. In 1992, the UN appointed a special Rapporteur to Burma, who has annually censured the SLORC on its human rights record. The SLORC, however, have contended that there are no human rights abuses in Burma. They also claim that there are different versions of human rights standards which vary from one culture to another. The SLORC view human rights as a means for other countries to interfere with the country's sovereignty. According to a SLORC newspaper report,

*"... indeed, a country can accuse another with differing cultural systems of violating human rights and proceed to harass that country... In fact the human rights issue is a tool for big nations to interfere in the internal affairs of weaker nations."*⁴³

Most external groups assert that ongoing human rights abuses are a direct result of the SLORC's attempts to cling to power and to enforce their rule, particularly in ethnic areas where the civil war is ongoing. Human rights abuses perpetrated by the *Tatmadaw* in the countryside, most of which is not accessible to outsiders, are flagrant and widespread. Arbitrary arrest, torture, forced labour, rape, summary execution, and forced relocation are routine. Calculated to undercut support for the opposition groups and armies, and employed by the central government as a means of quenching ethnic revolt, they have served to consistently fan the flames of insurrection. The Burmese army carries out particularly harsh reprisals, including execution or torture of villagers, rape of women, burning of houses and rice barns, forced labour, and forced relocation, against villages suspected of sympathising with opposition groups.

⁴³Editorial, "New Light of Myanmar," 3 July 1995.

Documentation of such abuses remains difficult and dangerous, so most continue unwitnessed, and thus they receive less attention in the foreign press than events in Rangoon. In 1996-97, ethnic regions saw massive forced relocations in Karen, Karenni, and Shan States, wide-scale offensives against the Karen and Karenni armies, causing the flight of thousands of civilians, massacres in southern Karen areas, and forced labour throughout the border regions, but particularly in Chin and Arakan States. In its annual release of findings, Amnesty International called 1996 the worst year for human rights in Burma since 1988.

Currently the opposition armies completely control only a small amount of territory, and most have steadily lost areas to the *Tatmadaw* since World War 2, especially since the introduction of the 'Four Cuts' Program (*Hpyat Lay Hpyat*) in the mid-sixties.⁴⁴ The 'Four Cuts' Strategy, similar to the 'Strategic Hamlet' operation employed by the United States' forces in Vietnam, is a primary example of how military policy results in institutionalised human rights abuse. The program aims at cutting off food, finance, intelligence and recruits, from civilians to opposition armies through continual military harassment of the civilian population. Large contested areas are declared 'Free-fire Zones,' their inhabitants are dubbed 'insurgents,' and entire villages are forcibly relocated. Anti-Slavery International has compared this policy to Ceausescu's 'Social Engineering' program in Rumania, and the Khmer Rouge's population redistribution policies in Cambodia.⁴⁵

The program has proved successful. The KNU, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the various forces operation in Shan State have all suffered huge losses of territory through the 'Four Cuts' policy. During the 1980s the KNU controlled a significant area along the Thai-Burmese border. This area shrank steadily through the decade, as Karen villages were effectively garrisoned through the establishment of new *Tatmadaw* battalions in their areas, which monitored all the villagers' activities, oversaw increased forced labour, and continually confiscated rice stores and livestock. Eventually, the 'Four Cuts' strategy was supplemented with successful attempts to inflame internal religious divisions amongst the Karen. A series of dry-season offensives by the Burmese army, culminating in the seizure of the KNU headquarters at Manerplaw in 1995, critically reduced the ethnic army's area of control. Further offensives in early 1997 prised most of the remaining territory from the KNU's control, though there remain areas inside Karen State where the KNU continues to carry out military operations.

In Karenni and Shan States, increased occupation has been deemed insufficient means to control rebel activities. Instead, over 100 villages in Karenni State,⁴⁶ and over 600 villages in Shan State⁴⁷ have been ordered to relocate to army-controlled sites similar to concentration camps, effectively severing most links between the armies and the underground. In some cases, villages have even begged ethnic rebel

⁴⁴Selth, p. 244.

⁴⁵Smith, 1994, p. 46.

⁴⁶See Green November - 32, "Exodus," 18 August 1996, and All Burma Students' Democratic Front Documentation and Research Centre, "Forced Relocation and Human Rights Abuses in Karenni State, Burma," May 1997.

⁴⁷See Shan Human Rights Foundation, "Uprooting the Shan," December 1996.

soldiers to discontinue operations in their areas, despite the villagers' ideological support for them, because *Tatmadaw* harassment has become so intense. Previous to 1995, the situations of the Kachin and Mon opposition groups were similar; currently, both are observing cease-fire agreements with the SLORC, with varying degrees of success.

It should be noted that relocation has also been used in towns and cities. Especially in areas of urban dissent, and among families of dissidents, the 'Urban Redevelopment Programs' forcibly remove people from their properties and move them to 'satellite towns'. The relocations are often used to clear strategic or politically active areas, but have also been employed to "beautify" sites being exploited for their tourist potential, as occurred when the entire village of old Pagan was ordered to vacate. According to international human rights organisations, the new housing areas often have inadequate food and water supply, and the dwellers are in most cases inadequately financially reimbursed for the value of their former residences.

In a more common form of harassment, the Burmese army routinely abducts people in large numbers from all areas of Burma for forced labour, whether on public works projects like road-building, or as 'porters' for the military. So prevalent is the practice that the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon has credited forced labour with supplying the market equivalent of 3.1% of Burma's legal GDP, and as much as 6% of the agricultural sector's share of the legal GDP.⁴⁸ For military operations alone, it is estimated that the Burmese army takes one porter for every soldier heading to the front-line,⁴⁹ as the terrain in many areas is too difficult to carry the goods required for military operations by alternative transport. Porters are forced to carry loads for the *Tatmadaw* for weeks and sometimes months. They are often beaten, starved, used as human mine-sweepers, raped if they are female, and killed if they become too weak to carry their allotted supplies, which are usually food or ammunition and can weigh up to sixty kilos.

Most of the ethnic armies are known to use porters also, however the small amount of documentation which exists on this issue shows that their treatment is far better than has been recorded from porters who have escaped *Tatmadaw* military duty. The KNLA, NMSP, MTA and KNPP are all known to have regularly used porters for front-line operations. These groups often use prisoners and insubordinate soldiers for this job. They are usually fed as well as the ordinary soldiers, are given the same medical treatment, and are rarely beaten or executed. There have also been allegations of reprisals by ethnic minority armies against uncooperative villages, as well as human rights abuses perpetrated by soldiers against civilians, however these complaints appear to be relatively few and have never been systematically documented.

⁴⁸Patard, p. 87

⁴⁹Smith, 1994, p. 89.

As a result of the fighting and human rights abuses, thousands of refugees have made the dangerous journey over Burma's borders to seek asylum, usually temporary, in other countries. Since the early 1980s over 100,000 Karen, Mon, and Karenni, have fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Their numbers have grown steadily, despite cease-fires by the Mon and Karenni groups, and show no sign of decreasing now that the SLORC have conquered the greater portion of territory once controlled by the KNU. Karen camps in particular have been subject to repeated cross-border attacks by the *Tatmadaw* and SLORC-supported troops since 1995, which have resulted in murders, abductions, and large-scale arson, leaving thousands of refugees homeless and fearing for their lives. In response to this crisis, a number of the camps have been consolidated. Apparent changes in Thai policy in early 1997 resulted in the forced repatriation of some refugees fleeing an offensive by the *Tatmadaw* against the KNU. The Thai army have stated publicly that as soon as cease-fires now under negotiation can be concluded, all Burmese refugees on Thai soil will be sent back; however, the Thai government have yet to issue a decisive pronouncement on this issue.

Between 1991 and 1992, more than 260,000 Rohingya refugees fled to camps in Bangladesh. Although many of them have been repatriated since 1992, 26,000 remain.⁵⁰ By May 1996, 10,000 new refugees had joined them in Bangladesh, fleeing human rights abuses of the *Tatmadaw*, particularly forced labour.⁵¹ The UNHCR maintains a presence in the border area, but human rights organisations fear that once they have withdrawn, the human rights situation may deteriorate further. Confidential reports of a consortium of NGOs in July 1997 from the Bangladesh and India borders indicate no improvement in the human rights situations in the regions from which these refugees fled.

Between 1990 and 1995, tens of thousands of Kachins and other ethnic groups moved to camps in China and India to escape SLORC abuses and abject poverty. Subsequent to the cease-fire between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the SLORC in 1994, many were repatriated to Kachin State. They are now struggling to survive with the limited assistance ethnic groups are able to provide and little assistance from the SLORC.

Following the capitulation of former MTA leader Khun Sa in January 1996, and the massive relocations of 1996-97, in the last two years alone, an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 Shan are believed to have crossed Thailand's northern border.⁵² The Shan have never been permitted under Thai policy to establish refugee camps. With the a large number of long-established ethnic Shan communities in northern Thailand, and the similarities between northern Thai and Shan culture, some are able to find work as poorly paid migrant labourers, however they risk exploitation, and are subject to extortion, arrest, harassment and deportation. There is no way of knowing the total number from Shan State who have fled to Thailand.

⁵⁰ Amnesty International *Report 1997*, p. 238.

⁵¹ See Burma Centrum Nederland, *Rohingya Readers I & II*, October 1996.

⁵² Information from Shan Human Rights Group, quoted by a representative of the Migrant Assistance Program, Chiangmai, in an interview 3 July 1997.

In addition to those living outside the country's borders, due to the civil war and the economic situation, UNICEF and indigenous relief organisations, estimate there to be over one million internally displaced people inside Burma, predominantly in ethnic minority areas.⁵³ The human rights abuses by the Burman-controlled SLORC against civilian ethnic populations have merely served to sustain the ethnic hatred and distrust which gave rise to the civil war.

The armed conflict and the dominance of the military have yet to end in Burma. In 1989, after the collapse of the CPB, the largest of the opposition forces, the government changed its tactics somewhat to a two-pronged approach, involving political diplomacy: cease-fires with the ethnic groups, negotiated by the faction of the military dominated by intelligence chief and Secretary No. 1, General Khin Nyunt; and military offensives against those ethnic groups non-compliant to negotiation on SLORC terms, led by the veteran front-line senior officers, including Generals Than Shwe and Maung Aye. It is widely suspected by Burma-watchers that General Ne Win is still active behind the scenes, and he and his followers play these military factions off against each other in order to maintain control over the *Tatmadaw*.

While sending increased numbers of troops into action against the opposition forces, the SLORC's overtures to various groups to make cease-fires have resulted in agreements with fifteen of the seventeen significant ethnic groups who were still opposing SLORC at the end of 1996. The largest group yet to agree to a cease-fire, the KNU, are at the time of writing engaged in cease-fire talks with the SLORC. Following a massive 1997 offensive in which they have lost most of their territory, they have been left in a poor bargaining position, and they have little choice but to agree to the terms offered them. However, as in the case of other cease-fires, the SLORC overtures to the KNU to date have not included any discussion of long-term political solutions to existing conflicts. Cease-fires generally have not led to demobilization of troops, as ethnic minority armies have been allowed to retain their weapons under the terms of most agreements. Some groups have actually expanded their numbers.

There have been little reduction in human rights abuses by the SLORC in most areas as a result of cease-fires. The taking of porters, forced labour, and relocations continue in some ethnic minority areas where cease-fires are in place. For example, a cease-fire between the NMSP and the SLORC was finalised in 1995. However, at the time of writing, new Mon refugees continue to arrive in Thailand, reporting first the persistence of the practice of rounding up porters for forced labour since the cease-fire, and increased demands for porter fees in lieu of labour. Further, many ethnic minority groups such as the Wa who have reached cease-fire agreements have not received the full development assistance promised them as a component of the package.

⁵³Smith, 1996, p. 65.

Generally, the cease-fires are fairly fragile and do not represent a permanent peaceful solution to the armed conflict. Until satisfactory political mechanisms can be found to address the grievances of the various warring factions, there is little hope for lasting peace and change within the country. Whether the cease-fires now under negotiation are completed or not, as long as the hidden war still rages, solutions to Burma's political, social and economic problems are unlikely to be found.

RECRUITMENT AND REASONS FOR CHILDREN JOINING THE ARMED FORCES

"States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of 15 years but who have not yet attained the age of 18 years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to the oldest. "

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 38/3

"To promote the principle of non-recruitment and non-participation in armed conflict of children under the age of 18 years."

Commitment adopted in the "Plan of Action Concerning Children in Armed Conflict," Council of Delegates, Red Cross and Red Crescent, December 1995

Recruitment by the *Tatmadaw* is systematic, however policies appear to differ over time and between various areas and commands. Although there are methodical recruitment drives, manpower needs for planned battles, or expected attacks, usually provide the rationale for the concentrated drafting of, in many cases, child soldiers. While the SLORC claim that the Burmese *Tatmadaw* is a volunteer army which does not accept recruits below eighteen years of age, there is very strong evidence to suggest that children are widely and regularly conscripted into its forces. In Martin Smith's description,

*"Ever since Ne Win's coup, the Tatmadaw has concentrated on recruiting adult teenagers (in this context, 16 and over) from peasant backgrounds for its basic army of foot soldiers. Recruitment has been from virtually every ethnic group, making it, the generals claim, the only integrated ethnic force in Burma. "*⁵⁴

According to defence analyst Andrew Selth and a number of the SLORC defectors that we interviewed, prior to 1988 all battalions in the *Tatmadaw* were made up of volunteers serving commitments of two to six years, and there were tough entrance requirements for inductees. Approximately 50% of those applying were refused entry. Since 1988 and the beginning of the military's rapid growth, the *Tatmadaw* have begun recruiting boys at fourteen and below. At present, the SLORC's Child Law does not outline any procedure preventing the recruitment and use of children by the army. However, as Selth states,

*If the regime is unable to fill the vacancies created by the army's expansion, they can invoke the 1959 National Service Law, which permits the conscription of all citizens between 18 and 45 for two years of military service. The 1974 BSPP Constitution also states that all Myanmar citizens shall undergo training and undertake military service for the country's defence.*⁵⁵

SLORC defectors who have fled to the ethnic areas provide the most plausible information about the number of standing child soldiers in the *Tatmadaw*.

⁵⁴Smith, 1994, p. 118.

⁵⁵Selth, p. 247.

According to one defector, 'Aung Soe', who joined when he was 12, the *Tatmadaw* prohibited conscription or recruitment of boys younger than 18 before 1988, however after that time they have accepted anyone who claimed he was 18 or older. Others have claimed the SLORC require recruits weigh at least a hundred pounds (a little more than forty-five kilograms) before they are accepted.

Forced recruitment is particularly common before and during large offensives. According to Bertil Lintner,

*"More than ten thousand soldiers were mobilised for the campaign [against the KNU in 1992], and thousands of civilians were rounded up to act as porters for the troops... The SLORC threw hundreds of ill-trained teenagers into the battle [at Sleeping Dog Mountain]."*⁵⁶

KNU leaders attest that child soldiers were used by the SLORC in 'tidal-wave' attacks on the mountain.

*"Even battle-hardened KNU commanders were astonished by the continued waves of daylight attacks on heavily fortified defence lines; more experienced troops, they believed, were being kept in reserve. Certainly a number of 15 and 16 year old prisoners were taken."*⁵⁷

On the battlefield at Kawmoorah in 1995, one porter described the SLORC soldiers he saw as,

*"(a)round 16 mostly, but even 14 year olds. I'm telling the truth. They were scolding us, their elders, and some had voices that hadn't even broken yet. Little boys, swearing at us."*⁵⁸

The reports of escaped porters, opposition soldiers, and defected child soldiers themselves vary a great deal.⁵⁹ One former child soldier from Light Infantry Battalion 202 claimed that almost two thirds of his battalion was composed of boys under 18. However, another from Infantry Battalion 39 estimated that only 10% of his battalion was made up of child soldiers. The true number probably lies somewhere between these extremes.

- "They never check the registration papers showing your date of birth. In LIB 202 alone there were over 200 child soldiers. I think there were more children than adults."
(NGO: 'Aung Soe': November 1995)

⁵⁶Lintner, 1995, p. 322.

⁵⁷Smith, 1994, p. 120.

⁵⁸Karen Human Rights Group, Commentary #95-C1.

⁵⁹In evaluating the following figures given by child soldiers, it should be borne in mind that *Tatmadaw* battalions rarely operate at full capacity. In one Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) there are usually three rifle companies consisting of 45-60 men, plus the administrative and headquarters staff, making the number of soldiers approximately 200 soldiers for each LIB at a generous estimate. Infantry battalions have four rifle companies each, and thus slightly more manpower with around 245 men. Some western scholars state that full troop strength is 750 men, yet in fact battalions are rarely seen to exceed 500 men. Ethnic military commanders and observers agree that generally *Tatmadaw* battalions and divisions usually operate at half to two-thirds of their full troop strength.

- Many children died in the front-line fighting. In Shan State, at the training at Pinlaung, there were altogether about 200 children between 15 and 18 years of age, in the 800 who were training."
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)

Another boy, who joined the army to escape punishment for a crime he had committed, confirms the *Tatmadaw's* lack of adherence to formal registration procedures.

- "I was 17 then, but I lied about my age because to become a soldier, you had to be 18 years old. I knew people who were 11, 12, 13, and they all claimed they were 18. Anyone can become a soldier."
(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April 1995)

Although some enter voluntarily, many of these children are conscripted, often through a lottery system. Almost all SLORC defectors corroborate stories of systematic forced conscription of children from their villages over a period of months or years, reflecting the change in SLORC's policy especially since 1991. As stated previously, it is believed that the country-wide demands for at least one recruit from each village began when the SLORC determined to greatly increase the size of the *Tatmadaw* shortly after they came to power. The following section includes fairly long quotes, as they are illustrative of experiences faced by young *Tatmadaw* conscripts in different parts of the country.

- "In Waw town, the local authorities divide the town into areas, and the head of each town has to provide recruits. They might demand 25 people from each area, or one person from each house. Each month our whole township had to send 300 recruits for the army. The township is divided into about 150 wards and villages. We can't refuse to send the recruits. If the township authorities can't get as many people as the SLORC demands, then they have to go themselves or else be put in jail. So if they don't have enough people for one month, they go and grab anyone, just so they won't be put in jail. All they want is just to get 300 people, no matter who... The very youngest conscripts are 15 years old.

"The ward authorities already have lists of which houses have boys and which don't.... The boys who are taken have to become SLORC soldiers for 5 years... Those who go and get killed at the front-lines, their families don't get any compensation. It's as though the SLORC is strangling the people to death. 55 or 60 boys already have to go out of every 100 households in my area."
(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint': June 1995)

"I joined on February 27, 1993 (at the age of 15). I was forced. Five people had to go from each part of town every month. . . . My only brother had already joined the army before the 1988 uprising because he had a fight with our mother. He's still in the army now. I was trained at #6 Divisional Training Center at Oke Twin for 4 months. There were 250 recruits in our group.

The oldest was 50, and the youngest 15 or 16. Before they didn't force people to join the army, but now they force every young strong man to join. These boys need to support their parents, but now every place has to send 5 new recruits every month. All the parents are losing their sons, so families don't have enough labour to support themselves anymore. Every family is getting poorer and poorer..." (KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)

- "I was forcibly conscripted into the SLORC army when I was a student. It was March 1992. We were leaving school at the end of the day and the SLORC soldiers surrounded the school. I was in the 7th Standard then and we were writing our examinations. We'd just finished one or two subjects that afternoon. There were 40 or 50 of us all leaving together, and we were all arrested. We were all 15, 16, 17 years old, and we were all afraid of the soldiers. We were students, we looked like students, because we were all wearing our white shirts and green longyis. Our teachers all ran away in fear. Everything was in chaos. There were 10 villages with high schools in that area. I was from _____ village, _____ township, Pegu division. We were all terrified, but we couldn't even call out to them to let us go and that we were under 18, because we were so scared.

"They sent us to the exhibition ground at Aung San Stadium and we stayed there one night. The next day they sent us to Mingaladon [airport and military base] to register. Our parents had no idea what happened to us. They weren't told anything and neither were we. Some people had money to pay off the SLORC officers, but most couldn't. I didn't know what was going on, and they didn't explain anything to us."

(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': November 1995)

- "In Taunggyi township, each quarter was ordered to provide five recruits, so I was forced into the military in 1989 when I was 16 years old. There were 20 trainees around 15 at my training in Meiktila. After that training, I was transferred to the 250 LIB in Loikaw. There were 200 soldiers . . . who *were* under 15.

"When I first joined the army, I was conscripted. Five persons were taken by quota from every quarter per year. The names were drawn by lottery, and all five had to go. If your family had 10,000 kyats, they could pay the army to draw another substitute to go in your place. This method of conscription became more and more common every year after the year of my induction, 1989. After 1989, the conscription lotteries occurred frequently, three or four times a year. A lot of 16 and 17 year olds were conscripted this way. I think while I was serving, boys between the ages of 10 and 15 made up about 40% of the total rank and file soldiers. All of the soldiers regardless of their age, had to go to the front-lines."

(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

- "I joined the SLORC army on March 23, 1993 (at the age of 16). In my village they have a secret lottery and my name was picked so I was forced to go. I have two brothers already in the army."
- (KHRG: 'Maung Tin Sein', August 1994)

- "I had to join the army on June 1992 (at the age of 17), because my name was picked in the lottery."
(KHRG: 'Maung Win Naing': August 1994)

Not all SLORC recruits are conscripts, though. Young men and boys volunteer for a wide variety of reasons: for the glamour and prestige associated with the uniform; because they are enticed by the regular income, and the chance to earn enough to support their families; to protect their families and villages from harassment by SLORC troops. Some could be more accurately termed "induced" than voluntary recruits, fearing the repercussions of avoiding recruitment, even when they are not literally threatened to join. Others are orphans for whom no support system or safety net exists under the current socio-economic system.

- "I joined in June 1993 and finished my training in August. I was 14 years old when I joined, now I'm 16. I was in 7th Standard in _____village high school in _____township. One day when I was walking home from school, near the market a group of soldiers grabbed me. There were about 6 or 7 of them. The soldiers said, 'You must join the army. Life in the army is very good. If you join the army you'll have good food and a good place to stay, it's no problem.' I was too young and didn't understand anything so I agreed to join. . . They sent me to the military recruiting centre at Mingaladon, where they did my medical check-up for 2 days. They asked me my age and I lied. I said, 'I'm 18 years old.' The others there advised me, 'You should say you are 18'. . . . My parents never knew I'd joined the army."
(KHRG: 'Thein Mya': August 1994)
- "I joined the SLORC army in October 1990 (at the age of 17). My father was beaten by the SLORC soldiers, so I joined the army so my father could feel safe from more beatings."
(KHRG: 'Khaing Soe Aung', June 1994)
- "I joined the SLORC army in October 1990, when I was 18. I joined because I was so scared of the SLORC. People in my village and my family were all beaten by the SLORC, and they forced my father to be a porter. The SLORC sent orders to the headman they'd appointed for the village, and he came and called my father to be a porter. My father was 45 years old then. They also arrested my older brother. So I joined to be safe from them."
(KHRG: 'Kyaw Hla': June 1994)
- "The SLORC soldiers asked for recruits. They said, 'If you're interested, come along. If you're not interested no problem.'" They spoke to each village and said if any young people want to join us we will pay salary and give clothes and food. Some people joined them, some didn't. Then they'd go on to the next village. . . . I joined the army when I was 16. Most of the soldiers were 14, 15 or 16 years old."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)

- "I was born in _____ in Arakan State. My father died when I was only 2 years old. For most of my childhood I lived with my uncle, who lives in Bassein. I was admitted to a monastery for my education until I was 9 years old. After that I used to help my uncle's family make charcoal. That was our livelihood. At 11, I started wandering around with my friends, here and there. I went to Arakan. I spent my time wandering around with my friends. Finally at the age of 17 I joined the Burmese army. I was recruited in my hometown, sent to Mingaladon, then I stayed 5 days at the centre before I was sent to training at Bagalee, where I did basic training for 4 and 1/2 months."
(IA 'Aung Hay ': April 1995)
- "I joined on June 18, 1991, when I was 14. My elder brother was drafted in the lottery, but he'd already passed 10th Standard in school, so I told him, 'You carry on with your school. I'll go into the army.' I pretended to be him. Now he's in college.... I never wanted to be in the army in the first place."
(KHRG: 'Maung Soe Min', August 1994)
- "In 1988 I joined the [pro-democracy/anti-dictatorship] uprising, so after the SLORC took power I was afraid of being arrested. First I went home to my village, but I left it again and I had no aim in life for a while. Then my parents called me home, but I was still afraid I would be arrested so I joined the army, thinking that it would make me safe from arrest. I joined in October 1989 [at the age of 17]. Burmese troops don't come to our village very often, so I didn't know much about what they do to people."
(KHRG: 'Maung Thein Soe,' June 1994)

Other children ran away to join the Burmese military to escape problems at home or to support their families.

- "I joined the military at 16 in November 1993, in order to earn a wage. I had only completed second standard at school. My family are very poor as my father who was a fisherman had left us. I was the oldest of four children and had to join the *Tatmadaw* to earn money to support the family."
(NGO: 'Tai Lin Aung': November 1995)
- "I joined the army of my own free will, because my father's income was not enough for our family's survival. I had to fill up the entrance form in 1991, when I was 15 years old. I was asked to write 19 on the form by the military officer in Latpadan township. There were 250 recruits in that training, 20 of them were about 20 years old and the rest of us were around 15."
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "Although my father was a Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) Local Administrative Council member, he was an alcoholic, and my family therefore lived in poverty. My mother tried to solve the financial problems of the family and led us. I passed the fourth standard and although I wanted to continue my study, my family was too poor. I felt constantly distressed at my friends

constantly mocking of me because of my father's situation, so I ran away and joined the army in April 1991 at the age of 15."

(NGO: 'Aung Soe': November 1995)

Some boys volunteer because the army affords one of the few positions in Burmese society where one can exercise power over others, through a post that is neither inherited nor attained through merit. Many former SLORC soldiers, even those who have now joined opposition forces and condemn the abuses of the *Tatmadaw*, have mentioned the seductive lure of being able to command others, and of no longer being prey to their dictates.

- "I mean when I'm a civilian, I'm just another person, but as a soldier I had power. The soldiers who are under my command cannot disobey me. So when I was a soldier, that power made me feel really strong. Most of the soldiers around were 15, 16 or 17 years old."

(IA: 'Aye Myint': November 1995)

THE YE NYUNT YOUTH

UNICEF officials have found out that under the auspices of one special program, boys could be 'officially conscripted' into the military at fourteen. These boys are placed in training centres where they receive military style education. Designated the "Ye Nyunt Youth," the boys are also said to receive political training, and are taught to be loyal to the government and the army. They are eventually assigned to serve in the army, in intelligence units, or as security for high-ranking officers. Most of these recruits tend to be orphans, street children, children captured from enemy positions or those abandoned in front-line villages. Anecdotal reports exist of such children being taken to places like Pegu, Prome, and Mandalay, cities at some distance from their homes, before they are forced into armed service. UNICEF also identified at least one residential SLORC military camp, near Kengtung in Shan State, where children aged seven and above (believed to be orphans) were being trained for a future life with the military.⁶⁰

Ethnic armies such as the Mong Tai Army (MTA) in Shan State, formerly controlled by notorious drug warlord Khun Sa, had similar institutions. In Ho Mong, former headquarters of the MTA, "Tiger Camp" served a comparable purpose. Young orphans, and some who are sent by their parents receive a basic education in exchange for military service later. As a Shan MTA commander commented to one of the researchers in Ho Mong in January 1994,

"What choice have they got? Opium addicts and sellers, Burmese soldiers or porters, farmers always harassed by the military?.... These children make more disciplined, brave and ... nationalistic soldiers... They make the best fighters. "

(IA: name unknown: December 1994).

⁶⁰Smith/ASI, 1994 : p. 118.

According to reports of Mong Tai Army sources from the Shan Herald Agency News in February 1996, up to 2,000 former MTA child soldiers were merged into Burma's armed forces, and of these, boys between 15 and 19 were to undergo the Ye Nyunt training scheme in the Mingaladon Military camp in Rangoon. These recruits are mainly of ethnic origins (Shan, Lahu, and Akha) and it is widely believed that they will be used to suppress ethnic unrest in Shan State.

A former student provided a description of the Ye Nyunt middle school in Kan Tee township, Chin State. It sounds in many aspects not dissimilar to other military academies world-wide, except perhaps for the meagre rations the boarding students ate. There were students from the local village and boarders from more distant areas. Discipline was strict, and in addition to regular studies, the students had to wear military uniforms two days a week and spent their Saturdays practising parade drills. While students were told they could choose to attend the local high school after graduating, it appears that many or most of the 180 students were sent to train in the army.

- "If anyone fails their exams, they are transferred into the army. Those who pass their examinations can transfer to the Development Institute (a school for hill-tribe people, which has a yearly quota of new students. There are 3 or 4 such schools). Only the boarding students are eligible for this transfer. Our school went to 8th Standard (end of middle school). If the students graduate, they also have the option of going to Kan Tee High School. I heard that if people argue a lot with the officers during school, they will be sent to Rangoon after 8th Standard and into the army.

"I also heard that if they graduate from the Ye Nyunt school, they have a chance to go directly into the army and take only clerical or whatever other training is needed. They can start at a higher level than rank-and-file soldiers, possibly sergeant, or warrant officer, or second lieutenant if they do more schooling.

"When the officers recruit the students from the village, they say that the students can choose whatever they want to do in the future, but in fact the school decides the students' futures. The students enter voluntarily. I wanted to join because I am Naga and our area is so poor, so I wanted a chance for a better education. I think that there are three Ye Nyunt schools, but our school's name was No. 4 School.

"When I passed 6th Standard, the IB 54 commander called me to ask if I wanted to go to the Development Institute. He told me I was not eligible for the DSA. I wanted to be an officer, so he didn't agree with the commander and decided to escape. My commander's name was Aung Myint Thein. He told me, 'You can't choose for yourself, we'll decide for you.' I also heard my friends say that those who pass 6th and 7th Standards are transferred to the army (as ordinary soldiers). I didn't want that. I heard that some students who wished to study engineering or medicine had been sent to Rangoon, but instead of going to university they were forced to join the army.

"When I first escaped they followed me, so I had to hide. After a year, it wasn't a problem any more. One time I met with the military police, but I still had an army intelligence pass, so I told them I was on leave, and they didn't give me any trouble. I heard that those who escaped and were arrested again were also sent into the army."

(FTUB: "Khaplang", June 1997)

Undoubtedly there are other SLORC child-soldiers who join simply out of desire to be in the military, or who come from military families which would like their sons to carry on the military tradition. These children, however, have not yet become accessible to the interviewers from this side of the border.

ROLES AND DUTIES

Children play many roles in the Burmese military ranging from preparing and serving meals for their seniors, to fighting in front-line encounters. The duties and daily activities that children perform include:

- Collecting, preparing, cooking and serving food
- Doing menial tasks such as cleaning living quarters, and other heavier labour such as digging trenches, constructing barracks, and repairing roads
- Doing office work, such as receiving and sending information, sometimes via signals
- Doing routine patrol trips
- Acting as messengers
- Working as medics
- Manning check-points
- Acting as bodyguards
- Fighting in front-lines
- Planting landmines
- Executing suspected insurgents
- Capturing villagers for porter duty and other forced labour
- Performing sentry duty and guarding prisoners, especially porters, and overseeing
- Doing labour on roads and infrastructure projects
- Carrying rations
- Acting as spies and informants
- Scouting and reconnaissance

SPECIAL DUTIES GIVEN TO CHILD SOLDIERS

There are certain tasks for which children are seen as particularly suitable. For example, they are sometimes used for intelligence, as they are likely to be less noticeable than adults. Because of their size, they can hide more easily, and they have more innocent appearances.

- An Images Asia representative interviewed a 14-year old recruit in one of the opposition forces 1990, who told an autobiographical story that seemed normal. The next day he was caught in the ammunitions supply room. He was accused of spying and suspected of sabotage. While being interviewed he changed his story many times, and it was discovered that the *Tatmadaw* recruited him as an informer and were threatening him that they would kill his grandmother who had taken care of him since he was a baby. He was later executed by the opposition group involved for spying, despite his young age.

Likewise, child soldiers are sometimes used for planting mines, or retrieving enemy weapons from battle fields because they are able to manoeuvre more easily. They are also probably seen to be more expendable than their older comrades, as the SLORC and the CPB have used thousands of children as cannon fodder in large-scale attacks. At the same time, there are tasks that child soldiers are obviously particularly unsuited for, especially those that require a great deal of physical strength, such as serving with heavy weapons units.

DUTIES OF *TATMADAW* CHILD SOLDIERS

In a great number of the interviews conducted, though, teenagers reported that their duties were similar to those of all rank and file soldiers. *Tatmadaw* soldiers in particular stated that distribution of duties had little to do with age. All of the *Tatmadaw* defectors we interviewed had been in active combat and had spent most of their tenure in the front-lines doing the same fighting as the older soldiers. They had all fired weapons, and most believed that they had killed people. They usually receive a maximum of four months basic training before they are deployed.

- "Sometimes we patrolled and fought, sometimes we stayed on the hilltop (at Battalion 434, Hill 1653). When we were on the hill, in the morning from 6:00 to 10:30 we had to cut bamboo for fences, split it and carry it. While we were cutting bamboo all the villagers had to cut wood. Then in the afternoon we had to make fences. If we finished enough fences and had time before dinner, we had to dig trenches. Then at night we had to stand sentry duty."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "Sometimes we were ambushed on our rounds, and we fought in different areas of Karenni state. The first time I didn't know anything. The SLORC military officers ordered us to go to the front-line. Then when I arrived there, they said: "You have to fight here". The next morning at 6:00 am, we won and the KNPP lost. After that we went back to Wah Plaw camp."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)
- "We fought because they are my enemy, and I am theirs. I am fighting for my struggle, they are fighting for their revolution. I am human and they are also human. Any person who opposes me is my enemy. I finally escaped to [an opposition military camp] with two friends and some guns."
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "We had to carry G3 guns [German-designed self-loading rifles] to the front-lines. . . . I have fired an RPG No 7. We have 12 shells in one basket that is carried by two porters. In the [village name] clash, I fired six RPG shells. . . . In that fighting I was able to sink three boats. I hit the boats with RPGs. . . my unit was ordered to go in front as a penalty because one of my colleagues had fired a bullet without orders."
(IA: 'Aung Hay': April 1995)

- "Camping at a village, we had to patrol in the area. . . . after finishing patrolling we used to go back to base. Our usual patrol trips took 2 - 5 days. We had to make these trips at intervals of every 3, 4 or 5 days."
(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April 1995)
- "Since my arrival in this area, we have often had clashes with ethnic minority groups operating in the area. My battalion lost over 50 soldiers in different clashes which often occurred in this area."
(IA: 'Aung Hay': April 1995)
- "The offensive I always remember is the battle at Ho Paung in 1992. In this battle we had 300 porters and 500 prisoners at the front-line. We were there for 9 months. At the end of the fighting there were only 20 porters and prisoners left in total. Over 200 soldiers died during that time in the 250 Infantry Battalion alone."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

Many of the SLORC defectors also mentioned that they were regularly ordered not only to round up porters and forced laborers from villages, but also to beat them if they could not perform their assigned tasks. Several cited this as the reason that they eventually defected. Young soldiers are also often used to guard prisoners and porters. From their descriptions, it is evident that abuse of their charges was also considered one of their duties.

- "[The first time I went to the field]. . . it was my first experience of it and I saw many times with my own eyes what the soldiers did to the villagers. Under the second corporal and the Captain's command, we were forced to work and to take porters under their orders. . . . (T)he officers beat and shot the porters, and even their own soldiers if they could not keep up. I was shocked and horrified by what I saw."
(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)
- "There was an offensive in Mawchi, Kayah State. When we entered a village there, we shot all of the villagers because we thought of them as our enemies. We took all of their pigs and chickens, all the livestock, every usable piece of equipment and all household goods. Then we burnt the village. We took all the women and raped them, and finally we murdered them."
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "My senior officer ordered me to beat the porters who couldn't keep up with us. He told me if I didn't beat them, he would beat me. Twice when I was ordered to beat the porters, they died. The first man was 52 years old. The second time at Ho Paung, I ordered a porter to carry my medical kit and the man tried to escape with it. I ran after him and shot him in the leg. He bled to death from the gunshot wound. Nobody treated him, because we were ordered not to give medical treatment to porters and prisoners... If I did not kill that porter, I would have been killed myself, or punished severely by my senior officers. But I felt terrible about it. The second man was 57 years old."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

- "My commander ordered me to beat and swear at the porters by beating and swearing at me."
(KHRG: 'Kyaw Hla': June 1995)
- "Sometimes I had to look after 60 or more porters. When my duty was to stand sentry, I released them all and they escaped. I escaped to this area because I saw so many porters killed. Sometimes we had to travel 3 or 4 days. At that time, I saw with my own eyes over 200 porters killed along the way. Some didn't get enough food and water and were too weak to walk. The soldiers hit the porters and shot them. Some porters were just too tired to go on, and they were shot also. I think altogether over 500 porters died."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)
- "After I joined the Army, I was in the Ywa Hee Lu battle and I saw many porters die because the soldiers killed any of them who were sick or who could not carry their loads. I saw them kill four porters for this, and I saw them shoot dead two others just because they couldn't feed them anymore. Other porters were just sent away on their own, very weak after getting very little rice to eat."
(KHRG: 'Maung Thein See': June 1994)

Some *Tatmadaw* child soldiers also reported being regularly ordered to execute uncooperative local villagers and those suspected of collaborating with enemy troops. One explained,

- "Beside village, there's a stream. So we used to kill people beside the stream, where we could dig a hole easily and bury them easily. If we didn't bury them properly, animals might come and find them. Also we had to worry that the villagers might see. Sometimes if we killed two people, we'd put them in the same hole. If the villagers knew the people we caught, they'd question us about them. We'd say we released them, but actually we killed them."
(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April 1995)

From the foregoing, there is little indication that special provision is ever made for younger or smaller members of *Tatmadaw* forces, to spare them from tasks that are physically or emotionally demanding. They are simply expected to follow all orders from their senior officers, as all soldiers are, old and young. It even appears that in some cases child soldiers are chosen for heavy labour and other onerous responsibilities simply because they are less likely or able to protest. Assignment of such tasks to children and teenagers in itself directly violates numerous international codes regarding child labour, and contravenes, both in letter and spirit, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, the routine reports that child soldiers abuse and even execute villagers and porters, usually under explicit orders from senior officers, suggest that generally, the duties of *Tatmadaw* soldiers often fall outside the range of those conventionally included in military service. Widespread commission of all such tasks to children should be seen as tantamount to institutionalised child abuse.

TREATMENT AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILD SOLDIERS

It should be stated again that in this section, all the quotes unless otherwise noted come from soldiers who are under the age of 18 or were during the time of their conscription into military service.

Everywhere front-line troops suffer the worst privations among those in the armed forces, and as most of these children served as foot-soldiers, some of their grievances are not wholly unanticipated. However, all of the young SLORC defectors interviewed for this report gave testimony of suffering physical abuse and a variety of privations while in military service. The complaints were universal among both those who had been conscripted and those who had volunteered for service. Most cited the abusive treatment they received under their officers and their revulsion with the army's ongoing abridgement of civilian human rights as amongst their reasons for defecting. The fact these teenagers were driven to defect by the ill-treatment they witnessed and experienced suggests their stories represent a series of worst case scenarios in the *Tatmadaw*. The authors are necessarily unable to provide a counter-balance in the words of child soldiers who enjoyed their service under the SLORC, if it does exist, as naturally such recruits do not defect to opposition groups.

The abuses experienced by young SLORC soldiers interviewed run the gamut of service conditions. Soldiers reported being frequently beaten by commanding officers, sometimes as punishment, but as often simply as random but regular occurrences. Salaries owed were consistently underpaid. Child soldiers and rank and file recruits received far less food than commanders and officers, and what they did receive was of highly inferior quality. Medicine and medical care were also said to be grossly inadequate, and soldiers were frequently left to die without treatment if it was thought their care might slow down a column. Leave was rarely granted, and most recruits were allowed little or no contact with their families after entering the service. As a result, many reported suffering despair and severe depression which sometimes led other comrades to commit suicide.

Most SLORC soldiers were given basic physical training in the use of weapons. None reported being given any instruction in the conventions of war or human rights. Nonetheless, as stated earlier, many recruits were shocked by the human rights abuses they were forced to, or chose to, commit against civilians, especially porters, and many defected for this reason. In balance, it appears most rank and file soldiers, especially children, are at the bottom of their battalions in terms of experience, respect and recourse to protest, and as a result are treated scarcely better than porters or prisoners. All three seem to occupy a level of common contempt in the *Tatmadaw* officers' eyes.

ABUSE OF CHILD SOLDIERS AND PORTERS

Child soldiers in the *Tatmadaw* suffer severe physical abuse at the hands of their commanding officers. Young soldiers reported being beaten when they could not keep up, often due to their size and inexperience, injury, illness, or weakness, which

often resulted from inadequate food during heavy labour. Often, beatings were meted out in lieu of reprimands, or as punishment for failure to perform duties. However, both physical and emotional abuse appears to have been used to reiterate the importance of rank and subordination, involving debasement and humiliation of the younger recruits. Sometimes, this abuse was linked to the young soldiers attempts to protect porters, villagers, or other soldiers from comparable treatment. (Similar stories are also related previously in "Roles.") In extreme cases, child soldiers were summarily executed without reason. The following quotes require little introduction.

- "When I was a SLORC soldier, there were so many of us who were only 14 or 15 years old. There was one 12 year-old who served as the attendant to one of the corporals. His name was Chiko. I think he was from Rangoon. There were also 3 or 4 soldiers who were only 12. They couldn't carry their rifles properly because they were so young and small, but they had to do the same training as all the regular soldiers. One day, Chiko was beaten very badly by the corporal and had to be sent to hospital. He ended up blind and half-paralysed from it. I actually saw this beating. The corporal was punished by the commander afterwards and arrested.

"I was often beaten too. Once I was carrying a rice sack that was too heavy for me, and the corporal screamed at me, 'You are in the army, you get an army salary just like everyone else, so work just like everyone else. It's your duty!' I cried, there was nothing else I could do. I cried often, and many times I just wanted to kill myself. When I was at base 850, I just wanted to commit suicide. Sometimes when I fell asleep when I was on sentry duty, I was beaten by my corporal. He beat me like a dog, like I was an animal, not a human being. There were 2 or 3 suicides during that time, of boys who had been hospitalised and finally shot themselves. One guy went out at midnight to use the toilet and just stuck the barrel of the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger with his toes."
(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)

- "When the battalion commander and leaders were drunk one night, there were three young soldiers sleeping, all of them about 14 or 15. The leader was very drunk and he woke up at midnight and called to the three of them to wake up. But the three of them still slept. The leader was very angry and he said, 'Why can't you wake up?' So he shot them with his gun and all of them were killed. They couldn't wake up because they had been making bricks all night and were exhausted."

(IA: 'Aung Tay', December 1995)

- "The ... officers would beat the soldiers if they couldn't keep up. Some were beaten to death. The porters were shot if they couldn't keep up. When they beat you, they use the butts of their rifles to cause internal injuries. These often result in death."

(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

- "Most of the soldiers were very young, but the senior officers always told us and the officers that as we were all to be treated as men and soldiers, we should all be given the same duties and discipline. So when they punished us, they showed no mercy. Teenagers and adults were given the same beatings."
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)

Escape attempts are severely punished. One boy was caught running away. The commander ordered him beaten by his entire battalion.

- "All those who revolt against them are their enemies. Now I am their enemy. . . . I felt pity for (the boy) because 250 people had to beat him. I beat him lightly and the sergeant said, 'You beat him too lightly, I'll show you how.' Then he beat me severely."
(IA: "Htin Kyaw", December 1995)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLORC OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS

The SLORC child soldiers interviewed also reported that the relations between officers and the lower echelons of the military hierarchy, which are usually composed of young recruits, are generally not good. It appears a great deal of the animosity between the different ranks stems from the preferential treatment officers accord each other, and the widespread graft within the army. The officers also display a lack of regard for personal property and even families of the lower ranking soldiers.

- "The officers and non-commissioned officers generally get along with each other, but they're very bad to the soldiers. When Corporal Than Tun got drunk at night, they'd call the soldiers to come and massage him, and if the soldier didn't go or if they thought we were grumbling about it they'd beat us. If they thought a soldier was sleepy on sentry duty they beat him and then made him stand sentry duty the whole day in the hot sun. (This happened to me). Than Tun put his knife in the fire and tortured me by putting it on my back. I was also beaten many other times."
(KHRG: "Maung Hla Tint", August 1994)
- "At the base there was always enough room for all the soldiers to live, but we had to live in very cramped and crowded conditions. There were often fights between the soldiers and our personal things were often stolen. The wives of some soldiers lived at base and sometimes when their husbands had to go to the front-line, the other soldiers gave the wives money, condensed milk and rice to sleep with them."
(KHRG: 'Kyaw Hla': June 1995)
- "At the base, when the soldiers went to the front-line, the officers did not care about our families. Some of the officers slept with the wives of soldiers who were at the front-line."
(KHRG: 'Maung Thein Soe': June 1994)

- "Sometimes we disagreed with each other and fought, because they always cut our food and rations. The names of the people who fought were written in a log and then these people were punished. Sometimes the soldiers weren't guilty of what they were accused of, but they were still punished and sent sometimes to prison or jail, or beaten severely. . . . So the soldiers knew what the leaders were doing, but they couldn't do anything. The soldiers and leaders were always disagreeing and fighting with each other and the leaders sometimes killed some of the soldiers. I thought it was wrong to abuse human rights so badly, so I decided to escape to this area."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)
- "Sometimes I told my Captain, 'you're wrong!' or something like that. Then he said, 'why did you say that' and hit and kicked me. . . . (I left) because of their treatment of us. There are some soldiers that the superior officers like, and others that they don't like. The soldiers they like don't get too much work, but if they didn't like you, you would get a lot of work, and I don't think that's right. . . . When I was visiting another area and returned, they hit me. If anybody moved around without permission, they were beaten."
(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April 1995)
- "Relations between the officers and the soldiers were always bad. When the soldiers join, they get a number, and the senior recruits always abuse the junior soldiers. It's the duty of the younger soldiers to do the cooking, which includes finding the food, sometimes foraging in the forest for bamboo and things like that. If you don't find enough food or don't cook enough, you aren't allowed to eat and are punished by being kicked or pushed round. I was jailed for three months the first time I tried to defect with a friend of mine. We told the village headman to tell our commander we had gone out hunting. But we were caught before we could leave the area. They believed we were hunting, but because we were AWOL we were jailed."
(NGO: 'Thein Soe Naing': November 1995)

THE MASS DEFECTION

For one group of child soldiers, the abuses they suffered became so degrading and unbearable that they were driven to kill three of their senior officers before defecting to areas controlled by opposition forces. Under the guidance of a 22-year old, who himself had joined the army when he was 16, the group of ten teenagers plotted the murders and fled together. Although their interviews have also been used throughout the body of this report, the story of these young defectors merits special notice. The explanation of it follows in their own words.

- "(If we didn't capture the villagers), we were arrested and put in the camp jail. . . . Me, I was beaten on my back with an iron bar for this. Warrant Officer Than Tun hit me 20 or 30 times with the iron bar and my back was cut open and bleeding — I still have the scar. Then they kept me tied up in the hot sun all day without food or water, with my legs in the stocks and nothing but short pants on. They kept other soldiers tied up in the hot sun like this too. Sometimes if the villagers

saw us, they'd come and pretend to work in the field and sneak a bottle of water to the soldier because they felt sorry for him. After that torture, I was wounded for twenty days. All the commissioned officers beat us often, including Capt. Hla Myint Soe, Capt. Aung Naing, and the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Tin Maung Aye."

(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint': August 1994)

- "The leaders beat me and punished me because I couldn't keep up with the training. They also beat me when I got sick because I could not keep up with the others. They beat me especially during the parade drill, because my health was not good. I had diarrhoea. After the training I was sent to 434 Battalion, to Hill 1653. At first it was okay, but then the non-commissioned officers started drinking all the time and they yelled at us and beat us, so I was unhappy and didn't want to stay there. Sometimes I was so sick, I couldn't go down the hill to carry water. I had malaria. The officers said, 'You're just lazy. You're a liar.' They beat me with a cane. I had fever and was vomiting but they didn't care about me. Even if they had medicine, they wouldn't give me any because they said I was faking. The food was also very bad. The SLORC makes trouble for their own soldiers, beating them and treating them very badly. I feel very bad about that."

(KHRG: 'Thein Mya': August 1994)

- "We were also beaten. When soldiers were sick with malaria, the officers didn't care, they just ordered them to the front-line anyway. The soldiers were too sick to walk so the officers yelled at them and beat them. Some of these soldiers got so depressed they committed suicide. My friend was staying together with me in the clinic one time. He was almost always sick, so the officer came in and said to him, 'You must put on a woman's sarong and walk around the camp!' and then he punched him in the face. When I was doing refresher training at the front-line there were also some things I couldn't do because I was sick with fever, so the officer kicked and beat me. They also beat me whenever I gave a wrong answer. They beat me in front of all the other soldiers. The officer ordered me, 'You must do this,' and I answered him, 'I'm very sick,' so he got angry and said, 'I'm an officer. You're a private. Why do you answer me like that? You're insubordinate!' and he punched me in the jaw."

(KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)

- "At Hill 1653 when I had sentry duty and I got sleepy, they beat me. We also had to go do labour cutting bamboo every day, and the officers ordered us, 'Make bricks. You'll get money.' But then they sold the bricks and never gave us any of the money. We never got any of the good rations like milk and sugar either. We had to work constantly for the officers, and they also took porters to work for them. We had to provide security for supply convoys and the officers forced some very old men to carry ammunition, but they couldn't carry it so the officers kicked them... When we went to carry rations, I was too slow climbing the mountains so the officers kicked me. I was very unhappy, so I decided to run away from the camp."

(KHRG: 'Maung Tin Sein': August 1994)

- "The officers and non-commissioned officers oppressed us and made trouble for us, not only for the soldiers but also for the porters and civilians, and we never got our full salary because they cut it every time. We were all unhappy, so we decided to escape."
(KHRG: 'Maung Win Naing': August 1994)
- "In the army I got no time to sleep, no time to eat, no good food, and I was tortured by the non-commissioned officers, so I discussed it with my friends and we decided to escape. We decided to shoot the non-commissioned officers and the warrant officer before we ran. It's terrible the way the non-commissioned officers torture the soldiers. They don't care at all about the soldiers, they only think of their own interests. I couldn't bear to stay with them because they're very bad men."
(KHRG: 'Maung Shwe Hla': August 1994)
- "After 3 months at the Hill I was very depressed and I didn't want to stay there anymore. Later 3 of us discussed it and we decided to run away. It was me, Ye Kyaw and one of the medics. Then Zaw Myint said, 'You are all very young, so I'll help you plan the escape, and I'll escape with you.' After that we shot our officers, took our arms, and escaped."
(KHRG: 'Thein Mya': August 1994)
- "The night we ran away the officers were drinking and playing cards. Every night they were drinking and playing cards. If one of them was losing he yelled at the soldiers, beat us and abused us. That night all the non-commissioned officers were drunk and they beat every soldier. Corporal Than Tun was losing at cards and he beat every one of us. After that, we discussed escaping. Zaw Myint said, 'If you want to escape we must kill the NCOs first.' That night at 11 or 12 o'clock Zaw Myint, Ye Kyaw and one of the medics shot him. I was on sentry duty at the time."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "We all discussed running away. I shot Corporal Thein Win myself. After killing him I was very happy! At night the warrant officer, Han Tun, slept beside on the medics. Corporal Than Tun slept beside Zaw Myint, and Corporal Thein Win slept beside me. At 11 o'clock that night we went to our beds but we didn't sleep. We just sat down and shot them."
(KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)
- "When we left we took 65 grenades, bullets, our guns and the 81 mm mortar. There were eleven of us, and we all had torches, but we didn't know our way in the jungle, and we were all inexperienced. We arrived at village at 5 in the morning, but we were afraid to enter the village, because we feared the KNU or ABSDF might be there and kill us. We stood hiding in the marsh and slept standing up. Our older brother told us, 'Don't be down-hearted. We'll meet the villagers and explain what happened, and it will be okay.' Some of the youngest ones just wanted to try to make their way home. Finally we went into the village and the villagers fled in fear. We met the village headman and explained how

we had defected to him. At first he really didn't want to believe us. We put down our guns and '*shikohed*' [a sign of supplication, similar to kowtowing] to him. The next day he arranged for us to meet with the KNU. So in total we killed three of our officers. During that whole time, we had no contact with our families. When we arrived in the KNU area, it was 7 June 1994. We stayed with Bo____[a KNU officer] for a month after arriving at [a Karen village], then we lived at Manerplaw with Bo____for about one month."

(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)

These soldiers subsequently decided to join the opposition forces.

Some soldiers did not undergo as harsh treatment, but still complained of favouritism among their officers.

- "I was punished by my officers because I complained about their unfair treatment. They gave favour to some soldiers who always obeyed any orders of them, whether they were right or wrong. If they don't like someone, he will be beaten for some trumped up reason, and will have to do a lot of work. Also, he will have no chance to get a pass to leave the base."

(IA: 'Maung Aye Win-: December 1995)

- "Children weren't treated fairly and equally in my battalion. They got more work, more punishment, and less care than the adults did. There was no chance for promotion if you were young; you just didn't have the same opportunities. Adults always took advantage of us, and we had no recourse through army regulations against them. Anyone who was older and stronger than you were had power over you. They got the best of everything and we got the worst. I was punished on occasion. The first time I was punched for being sleepy while I was on duty, and when I complained I got more work to do. Then I was punched and kicked by Major Phone Maung Shwe, deputy commander of LIR 202, for using a few kyats to get a snack when I was doing the marketing. It was common every day to see child soldiers being harshly punished for things like this."

(NGO: 'Aung Soe': November 1995)

- "I was beaten once for sleeping while on duty. I was told I had to be disciplined so that I could learn when I have committed an offence. I have seen other child soldiers in my group punished the same way."

(NGO: 'Thein Tint': November 1995)

Only one SLORC defector we interviewed claimed to have a close relationship with his senior officers.

- "... we were like brothers. We were the worst kind of soldiers. If we saw people, we hit and kicked them. Some people were innocent, but if we were drunk, we would verbally abuse the villagers and proceed to beat and kick them. Sometimes if the chairman of the village was unlucky, we beat and kicked him too."

(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April 1995)

Despite the fact this young man initially claimed his relationships with his seniors were good, he eventually shot at his commanding officer, a sergeant, in an argument over money, and fled to an opposition area to escape court-marshal.

TRAINING

For the majority of *Tatmadaw* recruits, training consisted of basic physical drilling and weapons instruction. Some reported attending further more specialised trainings after their initial basic training had been completed. No political orientation or education concerning the Geneva Conventions or the treatment of prisoners of war was ever given to the *Tatmadaw* recruits we spoke to. This is significant, as the SLORC claims that all its soldiers are briefed in international conventions of war as part of their recruitment, and that they receive training regarding the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No soldiers reported being given instruction to make up for ordinary schooling, even those who had been forcibly recruited from their schools.

- "Training lasted four and a half months. There are 250 new recruits in each group, but there isn't only one group ~ six groups are trained at the same time, every day. From the beginning we were taught how to salute, how to stand in front of officers, and so on. Then we learned how to set and defuse landmines, strip and repair weapons, 60 mm and 2-inch mortar training, how to shoot accurately 100 yards, 200 yards, 300 yards, obstacle training, how to carry a gun and move at the front-line, and so on. *[Interviewer's question: Were you ever taught anything about how to treat civilians and prisoners of war, the Geneva Conventions, human rights or politics? Answer: "No, never." [The SLORC has repeatedly stated to the UN and others that all of its soldiers receive such training.]* (KHRG: Zaw Myint: August 1994)
- "We were taught small arms, 2-inch mortars, mines and parade drill. *[Interviewee's question: Were you taught anything about how to treat civilians or POWs, the Geneva Conventions, or human rights? Answer: "Not at all."]* During the training, they were very strict." (KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)
- " I didn't receive any education apart from basic training, and we didn't have any procedures to toughen us up for battle, just physical drills and equipment training. I don't think there are any post-service educational opportunities for child soldiers, because by the time you get out you're too old." (NGO: 'Thein Soe Naing': November 1995)
- "When I first joined, I had to do basic training at No. 5 Training Battalion at Yetarshay, Pegu Division, then six months of training (course 2/91). I was transferred to Infantry Battalion 34 (Kyauk Phyu, Arakan State) and in late 1992 I was sent to Light Infantry Battalion 202 (Thin-gan-nyi-naung, known as point 1450 in Myawaddy) under the guidance of Light Infantry Division 22. Before I arrived, I was selected to undergo three months squad leader training (course

8/92) in April, 1992. I was trained how to control the squad and how to move it in the front-lines."

(NGO: 'Aung Soe': November 1995)

- "We only learned small arms, some parade drill, and especially how to shoot. They treated us very harshly and cruelly. If we made any mistakes they beat us with a cane. At night when the trainers were drunk, they called all the trainees to the parade ground and punished us by making us sit on the parade ground all night."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "During my training days I was given all kinds of training for light guns."
(IA: 'Aung Hay': April 1995)
- "When I joined the (Burmese) army in 1990, I was 12 years old. In my Battalion there were 40 or 50 other kids and they sent us to military school. I can't really remember my parents."
(NGO: 'Myo Minn': November 1995)
- "It is common practice for SLORC to take orphans and train them in military schools. If they are good, they get sent for officer training."
(NGO: 'Aye Maung': November 1995)

Some young soldiers work as medics, however, very few of them receive adequate training to do their jobs properly. One SLORC defector, whose parents were both health workers, was drafted at the age of 15 and served as a medic. He relates,

- "As a medic in the *Tatmadaw*, I had medical and military administrative training, as well as training in light guns and military tactics. In 1993, I was given 4 months military training at Taunggyi. My initial infantry training was at Meiktila in 1989. It was the first time I'd ever been to Meiktila. I had only passed 5th Standard in School, so working as a medic I didn't really have the qualifications to carry out my medical duties properly, but I tried my best at my work. Of course, we never got a chance to study apart from this when we were in the army."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

MEDICINE

Another frequent complaint among *Tatmadaw* child soldiers was the lack of medical care within the army. It should be noted that in Burma, especially in the remoter regions of the country to which troops are often deployed, particularly virulent strains of malaria are endemic. As in the case of food, inadequate medical provisions are tied to the general lack of essentials in front-line areas. With the gross under-supply of medicine throughout Burma, trade in pharmaceuticals is another aspect of the rampant corruption that exists in most administrative and governmental institutions.

It appears that in most units, child soldiers receive insufficient medicine and medical treatment because a great deal of the allotted medicine is sold by the senior officers. In some cases, officers resort to this step in order to obtain a greater amount of medical supplies, of an inferior quality and at a lower price, because the army's resources are inadequate. At other times, the profits from the sale of medicines are simply used to line the senior officers' pockets.

Provision of medical services is again illustrative of the attitude of officers towards lower ranks. Even where adequate medicines may have existed, child soldiers complained that treatment was administered unequally, with the younger, lower-ranking recruits receiving the least care. In many cases, ill and injured child soldiers could only expect treatment when they were in a position to purchase the medicines themselves.

- "When I or the others were sick and went to the clinic, if we were seriously ill the officer demanded medicine for us from Headquarters. Then he got the medicine but we never got any of it. He sold it. Usually we were sick with malaria." (KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)
- "Access to medical treatment (in the *Tatmadaw*) wasn't equal. Those who were friendly with the officers got better treatment than others." (NGO: 'Thein Soe Naing': November 1995)
- "After I arrived there, I was often ill with malaria. We never had enough food. The only medicine we had was Quinine and we had to buy the injections, which cost 30 or 40 kyat each [most child soldiers reported receiving approximately 500 kyat per month salary]. The longer we stayed the harder it was to stand the conditions and orders of the officers." (IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)
- "... we never had enough medicine. Most child soldiers died from insufficient medical treatment and lack of medicine, not from an injury, or a disease, that was necessarily fatal." (IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)
- "... most of the young soldiers started to suffer from malaria, and other common diseases, but they were never given enough medical care and treatment. And then some of them died because of the lack of medical treatment. Sometimes they got wounds from mine explosions, but they could not get any treatment in time — that's why they died unnecessarily." (IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "I never had access to proper medical care when we were suffering from malaria in the outpost, so some of the soldiers died from not having proper medical treatment." (IA: 'Sein Myint': SLORC)

- "The situation is getting so bad because the higher authorities steal all the supplies. For example, now if you get malaria instead of giving you a whole pill of Chloroquine, they only give a small piece of one. If you have money you can buy medicine for yourself, some sick soldiers who have no money shot themselves."
(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint', August 1994)
- "When we got sick, if we had money we could go to the battalion clinic and buy an injection. If we had no money, we could get only tablets, and they were always past the expiry date. If they didn't even have that, we couldn't get anything, so we had to buy medicine from outside."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "The only medicine we had there was quinine. The soldiers all had to buy their own medicines."
(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)

The afore-mentioned medic gave extensive and detailed testimony of the use and sale of UNICEF medicines by officers in the *Tatmadaw*. When UNICEF medicines were used by the army, they were given only to the senior rank and "VIPs", as the quality was far superior to that of the Chinese medicines administered among most of the forces.

- "(W)e were ordered not to give any medical treatment to porters and prisoners. All the medicine was for the soldiers only and it was especially for the officers, not the ordinary soldiers. If I did want to treat anyone, I had to get permission from the 3 star captain... In the SLORC army we received a number medicines I think were from America, including tranquillisers, morphine, and particularly malaria medicine. We also had UNICEF medicine. The medicine was clearly from UNICEF ~ the boxes were printed with the UNICEF symbol of the nursing mother and child. However, this medicine was not used by women and children. It was used by the soldiers, and not just by the soldiers, but usually by the captains and commanders. I wasn't allowed to dispense it. The captains and commanders kept the boxes themselves. I used mostly Chinese medicines, marked 'CMA'. All important 'CMA' medicine was to be used for the officers only (the second lieutenants, captains, etc.) For the ordinary soldiers, I used the ordinary Chinese medicines from the market.

"I was trained at Taunggyi and I saw the UNICEF medicines there in the military hospital. We distributed the UNICEF medicines to other infantry units, about 12 to 15 boxes to the other light infantry units in the neighbouring area. First the medicines were secretly repackaged into other unmarked boxes, but I recognised the symbols on the bottles immediately. My father was a township medical assistant, so it was a symbol I'd known from childhood, and I knew it was meant for women and children, especially infants.

"If we got BPI medicines (Burma Pharmaceutical Institute, a joint venture with a Swiss company), they were most valuable, because they're very high quality, so the officers would sell them and use the money to buy Chinese medicine. Sometimes we sold it ourselves. But often the officers sold a week's worth of better medicine and bought cheaper Chinese medicine. This was the only way we could get enough, because actually the medicine we were given for a week was never enough for our needs.... We got a lot of Pedesin (an anti-malarial medicine). The officers would usually take 250 bottles out of the crate for use, then sell the other 250 bottles allotment for the year."

(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

Young soldiers interviewed also spoke frequently of commanders ordering injured soldiers, often young men and boys, to be left behind untreated at the front-lines during withdrawal, or to be killed.

- "As for the wounded, if the soldiers were badly wounded, they just killed them. If they were only slightly wounded and could follow us, they let them come. But if they can't follow, even when they're not seriously injured, they kill them. Sometimes the officers kill the men themselves, and sometimes they just leave them there. All the soldiers who are seriously wounded, they kill. Sometimes they shoot them, sometimes they use a bayonet. I saw this myself one time. When we were coming up from Thaton we had a battle in Nat Kyi. One of our point men ran into an ambush and a landmine. He lost part of a leg and had bad wounds on his body, face and head. He was nearly killed, but after the battle, he wasn't dying so the officer said to shoot him. At first they just left him there, because he couldn't walk and they didn't want to carry him. Then the officer went back to look at him again, and he was so serious he thought he would die so they shot him. At the time we were with a column from 44 Division."

(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)

- "Along the way one of the soldiers from Battalion 60 was wounded. The lower part of his left leg was blown off during a battle, so the company commander of company #4, Major Kyaw Zayat, ordered the Sergeant to shoot him. The medic had already treated him the whole day, and given him 2 bottles of blood and his situation wasn't so bad The company commander gave the order, 'We must move from here.' The medic said, 'We should send this wounded soldier back to headquarters.' But Major Kyaw Zayat said, 'Don't send him. If we send him back he might get worse on the way,' and then he gave the order to shoot him. This happened at night."

(KHRG: 'Maung Khin Soe': August 1994)

DRUGGING OF COMBAT TROOPS AND PORTERS

Young SLORC defectors, in particular the medic who witnessed the sale of UNICEF medicines, testified that young soldiers were given amphetamines, tranquillisers and alcohol before being sent into battle.

- "We also distributed tranquillisers to the soldiers in the various camps around our unit. Before battles, we would take tablets the size of goat pellets and mix each with a lemon. Then they would be given to the soldiers out behind the barracks where no one could see. In the Ho Pang area, they ground 5 of these tablets and mixed them with army rum and gave them to 30 porters. The porters were sent to mined areas to sweep for mines. All of them died. Often the officers would mix 4 tablets with a bottle of rum for the soldiers or the porters, to increase their strength and courage, and dull their sensitivity and ability to feel pain."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

Similar assumptions had been made by observers after the battle of Twee Pah Wee Kyo [Sleeping Dog Mountain] and the human-wave attacks on the almost impenetrable stationary KNU base on the border, Kawmoorah. KNU commanders were shocked both the youth of the dead soldiers and their bravery, if not stupidity. These observations were made after other major KNU-SLORC battles.

- "I don't know what the SLORC soldiers were given, but some defectors told us that were given whiskey before they went into battle. I don't know if they put something the whiskey. But at Phalu, there were a lot of boys rushing the field, screaming like banshees when they rushed the barbed wire (barricade in the field). It seemed like they thought they were immortal or impervious or something, because we shot at them but they just kept coming. We had no choice: it was kill or be killed."
(IA: 'Captain Htay Gaw': December 1995)

INCIDENCE OF INJURY AND DEATH AMONG SLORC CHILD SOLDIERS

Throughout the interviews we conducted with child defectors from the *Tatmadaw* (see above), frequent mention was made of child soldier casualties, especially in combat situations. Again, however, no statistics are available on the numbers of injuries and deaths. An officer from the KNU gave this observation.

- "The defectors we've talked to here have told us that when they joined the SLORC they were told, 'Don't worry, they [the KNU soldiers] die very easily. The Karen don't have good guns. They will run away when you shoot at them one or two times.' We don't usually kill the soldiers who surrender to us. But sometimes there are seriously injured soldiers who have no chance of survival. In order that they don't suffer, we help them to 'be born again. At one time most of the dead SLORC soldiers we saw on the battlefield were the same age as me, but now there are a lot of young boys."
(IA: 'Captain Htay Gaw': December 1995)

SALARIES

[*Please note: US\$1 = 6 Burmese kyat (official exchange rate); at the more commonly used black market rates, in mid-1997 the rate fluctuated between US\$1 = 180 kyats and 260 kyats]

Although all SLORC soldiers, whether voluntary recruits or conscripts, are supposed to be paid regular salaries, the defectors that we interviewed unanimously complained of having their regular wages curtailed. This was an issue of considerable importance to those interviewed and was mentioned by every defector we spoke to. Some gave examples of rife corruption in the dispensation of salaries by officers, the most extreme being the collection dead soldiers' wages by commanding officers. It should be kept in mind that for voluntary recruits, one of the primary incentives for enlisting in the armed forces is financial security, and that the favourable living conditions for those in the service are regularly used as inducements by recruiting officers.

- "My pay when I left was 600 kyats per month. We usually didn't get our full salaries though, because a portion of it was always taken for fees: water fees, firewood fees, things like that. So in the end we received about 400 kyats per month. If the soldiers died in the front-lines, the officers wouldn't inform their families till much later, or sometimes not at all. They would sometimes tell the families that the soldiers had defected, take the wages, and charge the families for the defection. Any money they got this way would be put in a fund to be used for the battalion's entertainment. For example, if a soldier died in January, the officers would continue to collect his salary until December before they made an official note of the death."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)
- "We were never paid our full salaries, they were always reduced for medical and other fees. We were supposed to receive 750 kyats per month but actually we usually received about 450. There was nothing we could do to protest this. We tried to explain to our group leader that it wasn't fair, but he didn't tell the senior officer and he punished us for complaining."
(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)
- "When I served as an ordinary soldier in that battalion, we were not given vocational skills for civilian life. I knew that our monthly salary was 650 kyats but we didn't even receive our full pay. Our monthly salary was always cut for so-called fees of religious ceremonies', 'social activities', 'superannuation fees', etc.
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "I got 450-650 kyats. Sometimes they collect the money for funerals, and take it from our salaries. We only received 400-500 kyats per month."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)
- "Our salary per month was 600 kyats, and there was no rations available to us."
(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April '95)
- "With the money they cut out (of our salaries) they buy things and give presents to the leaders or battalion. We had enough uniforms, but I didn't get enough for shoes. They always stole our sugar and milk and then lied and said, 'We haven't got sugar and milk to give to the leaders.'
(IA: 'Aung Tay': 15 December 1995)

- "Our wage was supposed to be 600 kyats a month, but that was just on paper. When I first joined, I was given 500 kyats and some salt and fishpaste, all of which I gave to my mother. That was the last time I saw my family. There were always deductions in my pay and usually I received 350 kyats a month, because the officers take the pay that's supposed to go to the soldiers. I received three uniforms when I joined, but they were all of poor quality."
(NGO: 'Thein Soe Naing': November 1995)
- "Every time we were supposed to get paid the leaders took deductions and made excuses for it. We never got our full salary, they always cut it for things like 'bridge and construction', 'social welfare', cut for the officers, and so on. We got only 300 to 400 kyat each month."
(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint': August 1994)

FOOD AND CLOTHING

Lack of supplies to front-line troops is a problem in most combat situations. In Burma, it is confounded by the dearth of transport infrastructure in many regions. In interviews with SLORC child soldiers, distribution and availability of food and clothing were again always discussed within the context of corruption, with the higher rank taking the lion's share of rations. Lower ranks were expected to provide what they could not get for themselves, a system linked to the plunder of local villages.

Under the Four Cuts strategy, officers in the Burmese army order their soldiers to take food from local villagers by force, a method commonly known as the "Easy Rations Policy." That way, moving troops are spared the necessity of carrying rations with them. The policy is well-documented by human rights groups working in the peripheral regions of the country. Any meat that SLORC soldiers in border regions enjoyed was probably obtained this way, as is borne out by the descriptions of the defectors. With one exception, the defectors interviewed reported inadequate food rations during their service; except for this one, they reported being given fishpaste and rice, often full of worms. Most child soldiers interviewed also reported that clothing supplied by the army was insufficient and had to be purchased when needed with whatever salary the soldier received after deductions. The problem of misappropriations of resources and favouritism also came up in discussions of rationing.

- "Officers' food and soldiers' food were not the same. We only got fishpaste and beans which were very bad and crawling with insects, and roselle leaves [a local plant]. The officers got chicken and fish which was sent from Headquarters for the front-line troops. They also had tinned milk, coffee, and other good things. These rations are supposed to be for all the soldiers, not just the officers, but the officers take all the good things for themselves and don't share anything with the soldiers."
(KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)

- "The food was very bad — rice, fishpaste and beans with insects in them. We had to climb all the way down the mountain to get our water, and that's when we could take a bath. We only got rough uniforms - 3 pairs of trousers and one shirt. If they were destroyed we were supposed to be able to exchange them once every six months, but it only happened once a year. This wasn't enough, so we had to buy our own uniforms from our salary."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "(The officers) beat us a lot in training, and they also abused our food - they put sand in our rice and we had to eat it... Each soldier gets 3 milk tins of rice per day [this is about the same as a normal villager eats each day], but it was worm-eaten, so once we washed it we were only left with about 2 or 2 1/2 tins, so we didn't have enough rice to eat each day. We bought rice from the villagers, but often we didn't have enough money for this because we never got our full salary... The villagers felt sorry for us and gave us some rice. The best food we got was the bean-paste and fish-paste we bought from the villagers. Then if we were going to attack the Karen Army the officers ordered us to catch the villagers to carry our supplies, but we didn't want to do this because the villagers helped us all the time and we felt pity for them."
(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint': August 1994)

One soldier interviewed gave reports of adequate rations in his initial service.

- "During our first four and a half months of training at Thanbyuzayat, we got a lot of food. It was like we were cattle and they were fattening us up for the slaughter.... We usually had enough rice to eat every day, and we got meat, but not much. That was in 1994. The first time I went to the front-line was in 1995. I stayed there three months before I escaped to [an opposition army] in August 1995."
(NGO: Thein Soe Naing': November 1995)

LEAVE

Despite the fact that some volunteer recruits joined so their families would receive protection from the abuses of the *Tatmadaw*, many were sent away to remote areas where contact with their home was difficult, impossible or forbidden. Some observers have speculated that distant field placements are chosen in order to make it more difficult for soldiers to desert or defect. None of those we interviewed were given regular leave after their deployment to their field positions. Leisure activities were severely curtailed.

- "We were not allowed to write to our family and relatives. Any kinds of contacts with family were prohibited. ..."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)
- "Saturday and Sunday are supposed to be free, except if there is an emergency, such as a battle or a stand-by order. But in fact there's often an emergency and the soldiers can't get days off."
(NGO: 'Thein Soe Naing': November 1995)

- "We weren't allowed to listen to the radio or to read any newspapers. We were allowed to write to our families but the officer reads the letter before sending it and if there is anything written against the officers, the soldier is punished. For example, Private Thein Myint and Private Soe Win were beaten and put in the camp jail for 4 to 6 months, accused of rebelling against the State. Their letters home complained about the food, that there were no good cheroots to smoke, etc. Just for writing like that they were punished . . . We didn't get leave, not even once a year. Sometimes soldiers' families came to visit them, so before the visit the officer gives the soldier a new uniform and good food for a few days, but after the visit they take the clothes back and the food is deducted from the soldier's salary at the end of the month."
(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint': August 1994)
- "We weren't allowed to listen to the radio or read papers. I never received a letter from my family. Once I had a chance to write a letter to them so I wrote a very simple letter. It didn't say anything about my situation in the army, but after I finished it the non-commissioned officer found it, crumpled it, and tore it up. I wasn't happy. I was so far from home and I couldn't contact my family. We were forced to do heavy labour, there wasn't enough medicine and they punished us all the time. At most I only got 300 kyat of salary each month. I don't know why they cut the rest. They do this to every soldier."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "When I remembered how I had agreed to join, I felt very sad and sorrowful. I had no chance to write to my family because I was very busy doing labour every day. Also, I thought if I wrote a letter they would destroy it and not send it. On the way to the front-line when we were at Thaton camp, I wrote a letter, but I never got a reply."
(KHRG: 'Thein Mya': August 1994).
- "I was wounded in the leg at the front-line, I got severe malaria and then I heard my mother was dying, so asked permission to go home, but I was refused. So I ran away."
(KHRG: 'Zaw Myint': August 1994)

Soldiers who were allowed leave, or who did have contact with their families, reported that their parents begged them to defect. Generally in Asian cultures, there is a responsibility placed on the children, especially on male children, to support their parents in old age. For many young men, the inability to fulfil this filial duty causes distress.

- "The last time I saw my family was on my ten-day leave, after I completed four months of infantry training. They allowed us to go back home for the first time, so I returned... and saw all my relatives. Everyone cried and hugged me -- they had no idea of my whereabouts or what had happened to me since my disappearance.

They were never told by the army that we students had been taken, and my family certainly never received any benefits from my service. My mother cried and begged me to stay with my family, but I told her I had to leave, or I would be arrested, and there would be trouble for them. I could never send them any money." (IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)

- "When I joined the army, not only did my parents not benefit in any way from my service, I had no permission to contact them. I tried to send letters through the army post, but they were never delivered. The military post was just a sham; everybody knew that at best it didn't work, and at worst it was probably used for intelligence. All the letters that I received from my mother were opened by my officers before they were given to me. Many times I had malaria, and several times I was jailed as a punishment. I got a few letters from my mother hand delivered by messengers, not through the army post. She begged me to defect and run back home, but I was too afraid of being arrested trying to escape." (IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

All the conditions cited above regarding the treatment of child soldiers in the *Tatmadaw* point to a serious reappraisal of the SLORC's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

POST-SERVICE SITUATION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

"... *States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.* "

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 38/4

The researchers have never encountered evidence of an official demobilization procedure for child soldiers working with the *Tatmadaw* in Burma. This may be due to the fact that the Burmese military and SLORC deny using child soldiers, and as they have acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are bound by international law not to use children under the age of 16 in their armed forces. It seems unlikely that there would be official demobilization procedures also because of the massive expansion of Burma's military over the last eight years (see Background chapter).

Since 1995, all defectors have increasingly complained that in practice soldiers must serve 10 years before they can expect to leave the *Tatmadaw*. As the bulk of testimony in this report comes from child soldiers who defected, it is evident that many child soldiers do not complete their term of service after having entered the army, and that many do not attempt to secure legal discharge.

One young soldier who joined with his childhood friend, then defected when neither were able to stand the abuse, describes his escape.

- "They followed us and shot at us. We hid in a ditch. My backpack was broken because so many bullets were hitting it. But we had been lucky so far and so we continued on our way. We climbed about ten mountains on the way. I asked him if he wanted to go on. He said it made no difference. I said, 'If you go first, I will not follow, but if you want to follow me, you can.' He did not go the way I went. He rushed ahead like a panicked cow. Boom! I turned and he was down. Aaah! We were in trouble. I had only one shirt, like this one. I tore it into two parts and tied his leg with it. He was screaming and crying. I told him, 'Hey, be a man, be brave. If you are a man, don't scream and cry.' But he was so afraid. 'Hey friend,' he asked, 'can you carry me?' 'How can I carry you?' I said. 'Put me on your shoulders,' he said. 'I can't put you there and carry you,' I said. . . . Finally I left him to get help. At last I ran into a patrol of (ethnic) soldiers. We went back to get my friend, but by the time we arrived he was dead."
(IA: Soe Hla Baw, December 1995)

It is not known how many child soldiers have been killed attempting to escape. As mentioned previously, punishment meted out against those who are caught is severe. For those who manage to avoid their own patrols, a dangerous journey awaits, to ethnic areas free from government control or to over international borders. In either case, escapees have no way of knowing what they can expect from their futures. One child-soldier defector related what he knew of the post-service conditions for *Tatmadaw* soldiers as follows:

- "Technically, a soldier can resign when he wants, but they don't get demobilized. The officers simply refuse to let them leave. A soldier can only resign if he has friends among the officers. I think that most recruits only stay for about two years. After service most of them return to poor occupations, such as trishaw drivers, professional porters, or farmers. In order to get a pension you have to serve for fifteen to twenty years. Soldiers only get compensation for serious injuries. If a soldier loses a leg, he gets approx. 10,000 kyats, if he loses an eye, 15,000 kyats, and so on. They do not receive life-long treatment, but only immediate treatment of the injury."
(NGO: 'Thein Soe Naing': December 1995)

Another former child combatant stated:

- "I received no formal education that would be useful in civilian life and the army didn't make any provision for me after my demobilization."
(NGO: 'Aung Soe': November 1995)

The *Tatmadaw* offered the child soldiers that were interviewed for this report no promises of post-service support, neither material, such as a pension or insurance in case of injury, or non-material, such as psychiatric or psychological counselling. According to former military doctors, there are medical rehabilitation centres run for injured soldiers in Burma, and psychiatric hospitals with wards for those mentally affected by combat, but little is known about their rehabilitation techniques. Pensions have also been received from the military by former high-ranking *Tatmadaw* officers known to the researchers. Without speaking to Burmese military personnel inside the country, it is impossible to ascertain the post-service support programs available at present inside Burma for rank-and-file or young *Tatmadaw* combatants.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

One fact clear to the researchers is that reintegrating these former child soldiers into their communities presents problems of great magnitude. As the ILO stated in its report on Child Labour,

*"Emotionally or physically damaged children have little chance of productive adults."*⁶¹

Most of the children interviewed for this report had suffered horrific experiences. Many have been forcibly dislocated from their families, survived in conditions of adverse poverty, and have seen civilians threatened, abused or killed. Most were treated extremely badly and even tortured by their senior officers, and had seen other child soldiers executed and killed in battle. Most had been forced, or in some

⁶¹ILO Press document ILO/CLK/2, p. 3., summarizing *Child Labour: What is to be done? Document for discussion at the Informal Tripartite Meeting at the Ministerial Level, Geneva, 12 June 1996*. International Labour Office, Geneva, 1996.

cases decided to, loot, abuse, kidnap, kill, destroy homes and villages, and to take part in other atrocities. These children have been indoctrinated to obey orders without question. They have been programmed to solve problems using a gun. The psychological residues of such experiences are difficult to imagine and even harder to eradicate.

These child soldiers' physical health is also at great risk. Many of them have lived for months in front-line areas in difficult conditions, where basic necessities are often lacking. Many are reported to have died from malaria, which has the highest mortality rate of any disease in Burma.⁶² Few of them have experienced any semblance of a 'normal' life, or a chance for an education; most have had no childhood at all.

No known extensive investigation has been undertaken into the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) on children who have completed military service, in either the *Tatmadaw* or the opposition groups, and therefore its consequences for their post-service condition are virtually unknown. However, most of the child combatants involved in this report experienced symptoms correlating with the disorder, including nightmares, depression, anxiety, insomnia, apathy, difficulty in relating to others, and aggressive or withdrawn behaviour. Both Burmese and western doctors working in the border area, confirm these phenomena. According to the soldiers themselves:

- "The reasons why I left the SLORC army are the unjust relationship between privates and officers in our battalion, the use and torture of porters, the lack of medical treatment when we faced either suffering from malaria and other diseases, or injuries in military operations, and my colleagues were forced to die unreasonably. I had to face this situation and it made me depressed to serve in the military, that's why I joined the [an ethnic] revolutionary forces."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)
- "I don't think anything.... If I have to die, I will die, I don't care."
(IA: 'Maung Hlaing': April 1995)
- "I have problems getting to sleep and many times I have nightmares. We didn't really talk about that kind of thing much, but I know that the others had dreams because I heard them crying and screaming at night."
(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "I was so depressed... I used to think about killing myself everyday. Three of my friends, who were forced to join with me, committed suicide."
(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)

Some of the child defectors lived in constant anxiety about their future situations, and in fear of the repercussions of their actions for their families:

⁶²UNICEF, 1992, p. 4.

- "Now I want to find work as a day labourer. I don't want to be a soldier ever again. I don't know if the SLORC will do anything to my family because of what I have done [killing his senior officer]."
(KHRG: 'Maung Hla Tint': August 1994)
- "Now I just want to get odd jobs. I can't do my duty for the revolution because I am afraid to ever join the army again. I'd like to go back to school, but none of my friends are there so I am lonely and sad. I have no idea how my family is doing, but now that I've escaped from SLORC with a gun so I am worried about what they might do to my family because of this. Maybe they'll make trouble for my family. They might arrest my family as hostages and then call me to come back."
(KHRG: 'Thein Mya': August 1994)
- "I think my family will get trouble because of my escape. In my home area things are getting worse, people are getting poorer and life is getting more difficult."
(KHRG: 'Ye Kyaw': August 1994)

Proper demobilization, rehabilitation, reintegration of child soldiers into communities, and reunion of children with their families seems a mammoth and nearly insurmountable task, with conflict is still ongoing and NGO efforts severely restricted. Even those child soldiers who escape to illegal jobs and refugee camps on neighbouring borders risk of repatriation and deportation. Without true sanctuaries for these children, the psychological security necessary to devising coping methods for dealing with PTSD does not exist. As counsellor, Wendy Lobwein of the Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (Australia) says of the trauma-affected Burmese people who are her clients:

" We would like to assist people here, in encouraging existing culturally different ways of dealing with trauma, and to discuss alternative methods. However our work with refugees in our western countries involves assisting people to understand the nature of their trauma, and to make it a part of their life that they can cope with. These people are mostly 'safe' in countries of asylum, so we work with them until they realise that they are now secure from many of the problems they faced at home. The trauma cases on the border concern people who are not yet in a safe and secure environment. An approach to assisting these people deal with trauma requires a whole different methodology."

(IA: Wendy Lobwein: November 1993)

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Many of the children who had served with the *Tatmadaw* indicated that they were either tired of fighting or wanted to fight alongside the ethnic or opposition armies that they had joined. For most, to return to Burma would mean execution, or severe punishment for their defection or desertion. It must be noted here that the researchers only had access to child soldiers from the Burmese military who had defected to an opposition group, or had deserted. If surveys with child soldiers in current service with the *Tatmadaw* were able to be conducted, variations of views concerning the children's future aspirations are probable.

When questioned, the children themselves described very little of their hopes and dreams, speaking only of the conditions that led them to desert or to fight, their present situations, and what they could expect from them.

- "I deserted from the army with another young friend, and two assault rifles... I then joined the [an ethnic] army on the border. I now serve as a front-line soldier, a sentry for base-camp, and an aide for training new recruits."
(NGO: 'Aung Soe': November 1995)
- "I will never go back there [to SLORC controlled areas of Burma]. I'm working here [in a neighbouring country] now and I am content to be here. Because of the SLORC's treatment of the people, I don't want to go back, and I want to stay and improve my life here."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)
- "Because of the SLORC's ill and repressive treatment towards the public, I ran here [an ethnic army controlled area]."
(IA: 'Aung Hay': April 1995)
- "As I experienced these situations [abuse from the senior officers] in my soldier life, I thought that there was nothing in a life with the army, and that my future in the military would be useless for me, and my people. Therefore... when I was at the ...military outpost, I fled together with two friends... to the [ethnic] forces....

(IA: 'Aye Myint': December 1995)
- "I'm not sure [what my plans are for the future] but I think I will join the [opposition]... if we get democracy, we can go back, but if there is no democracy, we can't go back."
(IA: 'Aung Tay': December 1995)
- "Before I was taken by the army, I had... marched in the pro-democracy demonstrations. When we came here, we were allowed to choose which groups we wanted to stay with. I... decided to join [an opposition group] and three others joined [another group]. Now I am a medic with [an opposition group]."
(IA: 'Zaw Gyi': December 1995)
- "There is a slogan in the *Tatmadaw*, 'Those who divide the army are the enemy.' None of us soldiers cared at all about that slogan or believed in it. We all wanted to join the revolutionary forces. We were told we could leave at any time, but in fact we had to find ten new recruits to take our place, before one of us could go. None of us could wish that life on our younger brothers. We had no choice but to stay and serve our time, and hope that those younger than us wouldn't have to go through the same thing. Now I am joining [an ethnic army] I went to work for the revolution. I only hope that if I don't get killed, someday I can see my mother and father again."
(IA: 'Sein Myint': December 1995)

Many soldiers including child combatants have deserted or left service in the *Tatmadaw* in order to find work in other countries. Some have sought asylum, occasionally along with their families, in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Still others have received refugee status or have chosen exile in third countries. Unfortunately, these options are open to a very few of the total number of child soldiers engaged in conflict.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thousands of children are being used as combatants in Burma's civil war. From the researchers' experience, these children survive in extremely adverse physical conditions, involving insufficient food, clothing, shelter and medical treatment. In addition young combatants are regularly subjected not only to life-threatening combat situations, but also physical and mental abuse in the form of beatings, torture, forced labour, and the witnessing of atrocities and human rights abuses against other soldiers and innocent civilians, not excluding members of their own families.

The information available about the situations for child soldiers in Burma, both concerning the *Tatmadaw* and the opposition forces, is scarce. More research is needed and recommended to determine the exact numbers of children involved, their roles and varieties of treatment in the conflict, and the effect that their experiences have had on them individually, and on the country as a whole.

We urge that the SLORC:

- desist from recruiting children into the *Tatmadaw*, as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As recommended by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child:

"42. ... the army of the State party should fully refrain from recruiting under-aged children, in light of existing international human rights and humanitarian standards. Forced recruitment of children should also be in all cases abolished as well as their involvement in forced labour."

and also,

"41. Furthermore, the Committee strongly recommends that all reported cases of abuse, rape, and/or violence against children committed by members of the armed forces be rapidly, thoroughly and systematically investigated. Appropriate judicial sanctions should be applied to perpetrators, and wide publicity should be given to such sanctions."

- disarm, and demobilize, those troops currently serving who are below the age of 18, and to refrain from conscripting additional underage recruits.
- amend its Child Law to include specific articles preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.
- work in good faith to halt the use of child soldiers in all combat zones within Burma, in its current program to promote cease-fire agreements. The SLORC should give priority to children in their preparations for peace negotiations and in the demobilization process. This process should be co-ordinated and managed by the SLORC, the opposition groups, NGOs and communities.

- make every attempt to end the existing conflict and to foster peace within the country, in order to create an atmosphere conducive to the reintegration of demobilized child soldiers. Without the existence of safe havens for ex-combatants, there is little possibility of establishing conditions necessary for physical and psychological treatment of service-induced or related disorders.
- address the economic, social and political causes of the ethnic conflict in Burma today.
- recognise that currently military expenditures are disproportionate as compared with social services, and adopt the suggestion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, known as the "20-20" system, in which a minimum of 20% of international aid is allocated to social programmes, and the same proportion is allocated by the Government.
- register child soldiers existing within the *Tatmadaw* ranks.
- encourage proof of age, which requires strengthening the existing system of registering births within the areas under their control.
- clarify the Child Law to reflect the age of majority.
- disseminate United Nations human rights and humanitarian standards to military forces.
- encourage education generally as a means of providing alternatives to armed service.
- take all possible measures to reunite children and their parents separated by conflict.
- neither consider children to be nor punish children as 'deserters', especially those illegally recruited.
- as suggested by one international study on child soldiers, "implement programmes that incorporate the participation of the children, their families and communities, and enable them to normalise their daily lives and prevent further recruitment of under-age combatants. . . . In this regard, projects directed at implementing sustainable initiatives that provide support to the family and community and improve the economic and social conditions that influenced the initial recruitment of the children should be considered a priority."⁶³
- and other signatories to the current Convention on the Rights of the Child, sign and ratify an Optional Protocol, should the international law be amended to preclude the involvement to persons under 18 years of age in active military service in the form of the SLORC

We urge that the SLORC co-operate with UNICEF to:

- take specific steps to include provision of services for former child soldiers within the plan of action that UNICEF has implemented to deal with 'severely disadvantaged' children throughout the country. This may prove a delicate and difficult task considering the SLORC's sensitivity regarding its human rights record, and as the SLORC do not officially acknowledge the existence of child soldiers within the *Tatmadaw's* ranks.

⁶³ Rachel Brett & Margaret McCallin, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers*, Swedish Save the Children, 1996, p. 215.

- utilise UNICEF's 'Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances Project' for Burma, as a vehicle to assist potential and former child-soldiers affected by the civil war. The project will focus on drafting a training program and guidelines on such children; completing studies on street children, working children and working women; and initiating studies of child abuse, juvenile delinquency and rehabilitation, and the care of children affected by insurgencies and disabilities. National workshops will be organised on children in especially difficult circumstances, and key partners will be trained.
- educate the armed forces and give strict instructions on the treatment of civilians, especially children, during military campaigns. In particular, the use of civilians, particularly children, as forced porters for the military must cease immediately. Those members of the armed forces who violate provisions of the Geneva Conventions must be prosecuted and punished.
- work more closely through the Intersectoral Committee on the Rights of the Child, set up by the SLORC to assist in the promulgation of the Convention at a national level. Since the Committee on the Rights of the Child have lodged its report on Burma, it has become clear that the SLORC have failed to use the convention on the rights of the child as a tool to implement international, to enhance national law, or to prevent the use of child soldiers. In its concluding observations,

28. The Committee recommends that the State party undertake a comprehensive review of the national legislation to bring it into conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention, especially in the areas of non-discrimination, citizenship, freedom of association, corporal punishment, child labour, adoption and administration of juvenile justice....

The Intersectoral Committee could exercise a unique role in monitoring, responding to, and, reporting on violations of the rights of children who are soldiers. Although the SLORC deny the existence of child soldiers, and there is an extreme paucity of existing resources for social welfare projects within the country, the Committee must be encouraged to address the issue.

- enlarge and employ existing mechanisms as much as possible to address the problems facing former child combatants.
- broadly educate the public, educators, health practitioners, social services workers, government and military personnel on human rights instruments generally, and on the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically. A rigorous nation-wide program should be undertaken to make the public-at-large and those in key positions with regard to recruitment and treatment of child soldiers fully aware of the terms and ideals of the Convention, to which the country is already bound as a signatory.
- initiate further projects to enable research, documentation and recommendations for appropriate demobilization, rehabilitation and future reintegration of child soldiers into their communities, using *The Cape Town Draft* as a guideline.

Only if such initiatives can indeed be implemented, with a focus on the impact of armed conflict on children, especially child soldiers themselves, is there a prospect that the opportunities for these young people can be improved.

We urge that ethnic and other armed opposition groups:

- register child soldiers.
- encourage proof of age, which requires strengthening the existing system of registering births within the areas under their control.
- clarify local child law to reflect the age of majority.
- disseminate United Nations human rights and humanitarian standards to military forces.
- encourage education generally as a means of providing alternatives to armed service.
- take all possible measures to reunite children and their parents separated by conflict.
- not consider children as 'deserters', especially those illegally recruited.
- disarm, and demobilize, those troops currently serving who are below the age of 18, and to refrain from conscripting additional underage recruits.
- desist from recruiting children into their forces. Although the ethnic nationality organisations cannot be signatories to the Convention, as they are not recognised as sovereign states, ethnic and pro-democracy forces should also be assisted and encouraged to observe the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- give priority to children in their preparations for peace negotiations with the SLORC and in the demobilization process. This process should be co-ordinated and managed by the opposition groups involved, the SLORC, NGOs and the community
- permit and encourage the formation of independent non-governmental organisations that wish to work with children and their parents. Such organisations should also be able to receive training for international NGOs either in Burma or abroad.

We urge that other states parties, UN bodies and NGOs:

- amend the international law to preclude the involvement of persons under 18 years of age in active military service. A Swedish UN resolution was tabled concerning implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994. It requested that ESCAP be allowed to set up a working body to formulate an optional protocol prohibiting military service of persons under 18, to be added to the Convention. The drafting of such an optional protocol was also recommended in the UNICEF and NGO-sponsored *Draft Cape Town Plan of Action*, produced at the Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Re-integration of Child Soldiers in April 1997, in Africa. States parties should support the drafting of an optional protocol in the United Nations and should sign and ratify a proposal once it has been accepted.
- establish a permanent international court whose jurisdiction would cover the recruitment of children, or to consider the need for a specific UN mechanism such as a Special Rapporteur devoted to addressing the issue of child soldiers (while at the same time, every effort should be made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, thematic and country-specific rapporteurs to monitor and report on violations of the rights of child soldiers).

- especially ASEAN nations, work regionally to develop a plan of action on the use of child soldiers, similar to the *Draft Cape Town Plan of Action* (drawn up at the Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment into the Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, Cape Town, April 1997, organised by UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

We urge that the UNHCR and receiving countries:

- allow child soldiers to use their forced recruitment as good reason for applying for asylum or for refugee status.
- not consider child soldiers seeking asylum in third countries as 'deserters', especially those illegally recruited, and treat them with special care and attention.
- not forcibly repatriate them, and provide protection to them under existing mechanisms, unless return to the country of origin is desired by the minor and their safety can be guaranteed.
- engage in provision of education and vocational training to refugees and internally displaced young people and children, to reduce volunteering.
- make every attempt to reunite child soldiers with their families, in co-operation with NGOs and the governments involved.
- devise appropriate alternative systems of care, with attention to cultural and situational circumstances, for children who, for whatever reason, cannot be reunited with their families.

OUTCOMES OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD MEETING ON BURMA

All States parties to the United Nations are automatically signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and therefore legally bound to uphold its principles. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the only other United Nations human rights convention which Burma has signed and ratified. As such, Burma's reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child marks the first time the country has ever been examined by a human rights treaty body in a public forum. However, as the Committee on the Rights of the Child remarked in its observations, the Convention is "not an island unto itself." In the absence of concession to other international human rights instruments, it is difficult to ensure that the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child can be properly promulgated.

In March 1996, in accordance with the reporting requirements of all CRC signatories, a SLORC delegation presented its initial 2-year report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on its progress to date in implementing the Convention. The material presented in *No Childhood At All* was also submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, along with information from other NGOs and United Nations organisations. The Committee reviewed the report presented by the SLORC, and after receiving testimony from invited NGOs and United Nations organisations, the Committee directed questions to the Myanmar delegation, tabled considerations, and released their findings on the situation for children in Burma.

This official record of the Committee's findings, "The Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Myanmar" (CRC/C/15/Add. 69, January 1997) welcomed SLORC's withdrawal of its initial reservations to the Convention (Articles 15, the right to freedom from torture, and 37, the right to freedom of association). The Committee also commended the SLORC on adopting a National Plan of Action, establishing a Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1993, and enacting the National Law on the Protection of Children (1993). However, the Committee expressed serious reservations on the SLORC's understanding and interpretation of the Convention and on their reporting, commenting,

2. ... the report, although following the thematic structure for reporting set out in the general guidelines, was incomplete in its appreciation of the situation of children in the country, since it did not incorporate an assessment of the factors and difficulties impeding the enjoyment of the rights of the child...

and that,

9. The Committee is concerned that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Plan of Action have not yet been translated into concrete programmes, sectoral policies and allocation of necessary resources to ensure the implementation of the rights recognised in the Convention throughout the country. Lack of evaluation and monitoring are also a matter of concern.

The Committee expressed concern for SLORC's incomplete observance or failure to take appropriate measures to remedy the situation in most areas of the Convention. The Committee gives particular mention of the following articles: art. 2, non-discrimination; art. 3, best interests of the child; art. 4, children's economic, social, and cultural rights; art. 6, right to life, survival, and development; art. 12, respect for the views of the child; art. 13, 14, 15, 28, 29, and 30, as they apply to education and vocational skills acquisition; and art. 37, 39, and 40, concerning administration of juvenile justice. In particular, the Committee stated,

21. Reports from various sources concerning cases of abuse and violence perpetrated against children have raised grave concern within the Committee, particularly regarding numerous documented cases of rape of young girls by soldiers and systematic cases of children forced into labour, including as porters.

22. Of equal grave concern to the Committee are the numerous cases of forced and under-age recruitment of child-soldiers.

The Committee concludes its observations with the following consideration.

27. The Committee is worried by the lack of co-operation of the State party with non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations in the framework of existing international human rights mechanisms. The Committee is concerned about the impact of this situation on the daily life of every child under the jurisdiction of the State party.

Significantly, as a result of the Convention hearings, the recruitment of children into the armed forces and the use of children as combatants during conflict in Burma have been questioned for the first time by UN bodies. The issue of child soldiers as quoted above merited an individual reference in the Committee's findings and conclusions. The next country review will take place in three years. It is hoped by that time that sufficient changes will have taken place to allow further implementation of the Committee's suggestions and recommendations, and the development programmes more suited to the addressing the needs of Burma's children.

APPENDICES

WHY 18?

["Why 18?" is excerpted from Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers*, Radda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children), 1996, p. 196-197.]

The reason for seeking to establish 18 as the minimum age for recruitment and participation in hostilities is not only based on the general age of majority stated in Article I of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In relation to recruitment, Article 38(3) marks out the 15-18 year age group and exhorts states recruiting in that age bracket to give priority to the eldest. A number of other provisions in international law provide for the protection of those below 18 years, in particular in relation to the non-application of the death penalty to those who were under 18 at the time the offence was committed.⁶⁴ In addition, the ILO Convention on Minimum Age, 1973, set 18 years as "the minimum age for admission to employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out are likely to jeopardise the health, safety, or morals of young persons." Although the armed forces are considered to be outside legal scope of this Convention, the ILO itself has suggested that it "may be applied in corollary to the involvement in armed conflicts."⁶⁵

International humanitarian law provides for the protection of defined groups, such as civilians. Those who may legitimately kill and be killed are the members of the armed forces. The recruitment of under-18s makes this group of children lawful objects of attack because they are members of the armed forces.

Goodwin-Gill and Cohn support the choice of 18 as the minimum for recruitment and participation in hostilities on the basis that participation in the political process ... is a reasonably accurate indicator of the moment at which the community as a political body recognises the intellectual maturity of the individual."⁶⁶ and shows that the vast majority of countries in all regions of the world have set 18 years as the voting age. They also cite state practices as supporting 18 years as the minimum age for recruitment. Of the 185 states they surveyed, only seven are quoted as having a lower age for compulsory recruitment and only six a lower voting age.

⁶⁴Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37(a), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 6(5), Additional Protocol I Article 77(5) and Additional Protocol II Article 6(4)..

⁶⁵Comments on the Report of the Working Group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflicts, contained in UN document E/CN.4/1996/WG.13/2 of November 1995, p. 12.

⁶⁶G. Goodwin-Gill and I. Cohn, *Child Soldiers* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994), p.7.

They argue: "Given the essentially political dimension to armed conflict, whether national or non-international, the choice of 18 as the moment of transition to adulthood does not seem unreasonable. Indeed, in principle, it would seem wrong to condemn the unenfranchised to die as a consequence of political decisions on which they can exercise no influence." Furthermore, they argue that the international human rights and humanitarian law prohibition of the death penalty on those under 18 years at the time of the commission of the offence, applicable alike in times of peace and war, "acknowledges the reduced ability of those under 18 to appreciate the nature of their action in the context of criminal responsibility. The same consideration, however, is not given to the capacity of the child or young person to evaluate the reason for death in combat."⁶⁷

... Furthermore, the evidence of this book [*Children: The Invisible Soldiers*] is that children are recruited predominantly because not enough adult recruits are forthcoming, or in order to use them as spies to commit atrocities. These are not reasons compatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, the active participation of some children exposes other children, particularly in the conflict zones, to pressure to join one or other side, and to suspicion of involvement making them vulnerable to attack, interrogation and other harassment. In addition to reducing the actual participation of under-18s, reducing the suspicion of such participation should help to protect all children in affected areas from attack, harassment and detention.

⁶⁷Ibid, p. 9.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABFSU	All	Burma Federation of Students' Unions
ABMU		All Burma Muslim Union
ABSDF		All Burma Students Democratic Front
ABSL		All Burma Students League
ABYMU		All Burma Young Monks' Union
AFPFL		Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AI		Amnesty International
ALP		Arakan Liberation Party
ASEAN		Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIA		Burma Independence Army
BSPP		Burma Socialist Programme Party
CNF		Chin National Front
CPA		Communist Party of Arakan
CPB		Communist Party of Burma
CRC		Convention on the Rights of the Child
DAB		Democratic Alliance of Burma
DPNS		Democratic Party for New Society
DSA		Defence Services Academy
DSI		Defence Services Institute
FTUB		Federated Trade Unions of Burma
GN32		Green November 32
HRWA		Human Rights Watch Asia

IA	Images Asia
IB	Infantry Battalion
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KIO/KIA	Kachin Independence Organisation/Army
KKY	Ka Kwe Ye
KMT	Kuomintang
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNLP	Karen/Kayan New Land Party
KNPLF	Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
LIB/D	Light infantry Battalion/Division
LDC	Least Developed Country
LNO	Lahu National Organisation
MIS	Military Intelligence Service (aka Defence Services Intelligence)
MLO	Muslim Liberation Organisation
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NCUB	National Council of the Union of Burma
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-Government Organisation

NHEC	National Health and Education Committee
NLD	National League for Democracy
NLD (LA)	National League for Democracy (Liberated Area)
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NUPA	National United Party of Arakan
PLF	People's Liberation Front
PPP	People's Patriotic Party
PSLO/P	Palaung State Liberation Organisation/Party
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organisation
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNLD	Shan National League for Democracy
SNPLO	Shan National People's Liberation Organisation
SSA	Shan State Army
SSNLO	Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organisation
SSPP	Shan State Progress Party
SUA	Shan United Army
SURA	Shan United Revolutionary Army
UMEH (L)	Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (Limited)
UN	United Nations
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WNA/O	Wa National Army/Organisation

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