

**Any Progress  
for the Lives of Women in Burma  
since Beijing ?**

The Women's League of Burma

February 2005

# Women's League of Burma

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) is an umbrella organisation comprising 12 women's organisations of different ethnic backgrounds from Burma. WLB was founded on 9th December, 1999. Its mission is to work for women's empowerment and advancement of the status of women, and to work for the increased participation of women in all spheres of society in the democracy movement, and in peace and national reconciliation processes through capacity building, advocacy, research and documentation.

## **Aims**

- To work for the empowerment and development of women.
- To encourage women's participation in decision-making in all spheres of life.
- To enable women to participate effectively in the movement for peace, democracy and national reconciliation.

By working together, and encouraging cooperation between the different groups, the Women's League of Burma hopes to build trust, solidarity and mutual understanding among women of all nationalities in Burma. The 12 member organisations are listed on the inside back cover of this report.

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### **WLB Member Organizations**

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## **Introduction**

Ten years have passed since the Beijing Conference. Some sisters around the world have acknowledged that there has been some progress related to commitment towards the BPFA on the part of governments. But for women from Burma, nothing has changed.

### **SPDC and the Beijing Process:**

Burma's ruling military regime, now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has been participating at women's forums at the UN since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. SPDC sent a delegation led by a male military officer to the Beijing Conference. In 1996, it established the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA), whose patrons were all men. Working committees were formed at different levels: state, division, district, township and ward/village. Almost all were led by wives of SPDC personnel.

Other government organized women's organizations [GONGOs] were formed, namely: the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA); the Myanmar Women Sports Federation (MWSF), and the Myanmar Women Entrepreneur Association (MWEA). In December 2004, the MNCWA was renamed the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWDF).

In 1997, the SPDC signed the CEDAW, and submitted their first report to the CEDAW committee in 2000. Their delegation to the committee was led by a man.

As for implementation of the BPFA, the SPDC identified six areas as the first phase for a national plan for action. They were: Education and Training, Health, Economy, Violence against Women, the Girl Child, and "Culture," an area not outlined in the BPFA.

SPDC sent a delegation, again led by a man, to the Beijing Plus + 5 Conference in June 2000, and submitted a report. In September 2004, they submitted a similar report to the UNESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to review the regional implementation of

the Beijing Platform for Action. They added two more areas: Environment and Media. The SPDC claimed that the areas they had identified were more relevant for the "Myanmar" context.

The SPDC's reports on the implementation of the BPFA completely ignored the extreme poverty in Burma resulting from their ongoing military expansion, excessive army expenditure and gross mismanagement of the economy, which has had a grave impact on women and children. Moreover, there was no mention of the half-a-century long civil war between the military regime and the ethnic groups. Instead they state: "The area of Women in Armed conflict is not relevant to present day-Myanmar, since the country has been in peace for decades." Regarding Critical Area of Concern D - Violence Against Women, they responded that "very few cases exist regarding violence against women" in Burma, and "it is not a major issue".

It is not surprising to see such reports from the SPDC, which boasted at the Beijing conference that "Since the inception of Myanmar civilization 2000 years ago, there has been historical evidence that Myanmar women and men did enjoy equal rights."

### **WLB and the Beijing Process:**

The Women's League of Burma (WLB), since its formation in December 1999, has been exposing systematic human rights abuses including various forms of sexual violence against women, particularly in rural and ethnic areas, by the military regime. It has also been pointing out the gaps in the SPDC's reports, and highlighting persistent and emerging issues for the women of Burma.

The WLB revealed the problems faced by women and girls in the rural and ethnic areas due to armed conflict in its shadow report on CEDAW, and also in its alternative review of the Beijing Plus Five. The WLB has repeatedly lobbied governments to address the root causes of problems faced by women and girls in Burma.

This WLB Little Purple Book was compiled using data shared during a WLB Beijing Plus Ten lobbying workshop by participants from women's organisations, and stories compiled by the WLB Violence Against Women Team. It is deliberately concise, in order to be used as a lobbying document at the Beijing Plus Ten: CSW 49th Session in New York, February 28-March 11, 2005.

The WLB strongly believes that only genuine political change and the restoration of the rule of law in Burma can guarantee the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls in Burma.

**Therefore, the WLB reiterates the following recommendations:**

**To the State Peace and Development Council:**

- To immediately implement a nationwide ceasefire, and withdraw all Burma Army troops stationed in the ethnic states;
- To immediately begin tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and genuine representatives of the ethnic nationalities, to begin a meaningful process of political reform.

**To Burma's regional neighbours, including members of ASEAN:**

On the basis of the signed Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region, to publicly raise their concerns with the SPDC military regime about their systematic violation of human rights, particularly rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls nationwide;

- To review their policies of constructive engagement with the regime;
- To cease providing the regime with arms and military equipment;
- To suspend all trade and investment with Burma, and stop any form of loans to the regime, until there is genuine democratic reform;
- To pressure the regime to immediately begin tripartite dialogue;

- To actively support the efforts of the UN and other key stakeholders to achieve peace, human rights and democracy in Burma.

**To Burma's immediate neighbours, particularly Thailand, Bangladesh and India:**

As well as the recommendations above,

- To give protection to people from Burma seeking refuge, particularly from sexual violence, by allowing them access to refugee camps and the UNHCR;
- To allow these refugees access to humanitarian aid agencies, and to ensure all refugee camps provide adequate health care and counselling for survivors of sexual and gender based violence;
- Not to forcibly repatriate these refugees back to Burma.

**To the international community:**

- To call for the UN Security Council to place Burma on their agenda;
- To call for UN bodies to authorize comprehensive sanctions against the regime, including an arms embargo, until genuine democratic reform takes place in Burma;
- To demand that the SPDC military regime immediately implements a nationwide ceasefire and withdraws its troops stationed in the ethnic states;
- To urge all UN agencies and international NGOs operating in Burma to bear witness publicly to the atrocities committed by the SPDC and demand immediate democratic reform in Burma.

## **BACKGROUND:**

SPDC has controlled the country since 1962. One of the SPDC's stated objectives since it seized power has been to maintain "national unity and solidarity", which it has attempted to accomplish through force. In the absence of a popular mandate the SPDC has had to sink disproportionate amounts of scarce cash into its swelling military in order to maintain control. The regime has expanded the size of its army more than twofold to over 450,000 soldiers since 1988, with most troops stationed in the ethnic states.

The SPDC boasts that "Myanmar is today enjoying unprecedented peace and stability" yet is continuing military offensives and anti-insurgency campaigns particularly in the eastern ethnic states of Burma. Ethnic civilians are targeted under these campaigns and have suffered forced relocation, looting, and destruction of homes and property, torture, systematic rape and extra-judicial killing. This has led to a constant influx of refugees to neighbouring Thailand, where over 140,000 are currently housed in refugee camps, and many hundreds of thousands more survive as migrant workers. Over 600,000 villagers are also estimated to be internally displaced (IDPs) in eastern Burma alone.



# PERSISTENT ISSUES FOR WOMEN IN BURMA

## A - WOMEN AND POVERTY

### Factors:

- Primary root cause: regime's military expansion and excessive expenditure on its army; current size over 450,000 troops, most troops stationed in indigenous lands; regime spends an estimated 40% of budgetary allocations on military expenditure (1998 UNDP report)
- Regime's economic mismanagement and rampant corruption
- Ongoing civil war & human rights abuses by state military, including
  - - Forced relocation
  - - Land confiscation
  - - Extortion (food, crops, and cash)
  - - Forced labour

### Numerous impacts on women and girls, including

- Food scarcity; malnutrition
- Displacement as IDPs, refugees or migrant workers
- Vulnerability to being trafficked

### Problems faced after displacement to neighbouring countries e.g. in Thailand:

- Difficulty to gain legal recognition as refugees or as registered migrant workers
- Refugees in camp not legally permitted to work outside camps
- Migrant workers vulnerable to labour abuse
  - lack of protection of labour rights, e.g. no maternity leave, deportation if pregnant
  - do not receive Thai minimum wage
  - poor working conditions
  - constant fear of threats to be deported back to Burma

**Name:** xxx  
**Age:** 20  
**Ethnicity:** Kachin  
**Location:** Myitkyina  
**Date of interview:** 2 August 2004  
**Source:** Kachin Women's Association - Thailand  
(KWAT)

*(Interview with woman's mother)*

Our family situation is from hand to mouth. I make fried snacks to earn an income to feed my five children. Two years ago my husband passed away. I had to take my two elder daughters out of school so they could earn money for the family. My eldest daughter sewed clothes and the other daughter helped her. They supported their three younger siblings to go to school. In October 2000 Ma xx, who came daily to my shop told to me that at the Chinese border there was a waitress job available at Daw xx's cold drink shop. I said to her that I didn't want my children to go far from me. And then she returned back. After two days, Ma xx and Daw xx arrived and said that they needed a worker and they would paid 30,000 Kyat per month, and that they would increase the pay by 10,000 Kyat after three month. My daughter said that she wanted to go. She said that if she did that job, she could earn enough for her siblings' school fees. So I allowed her to go with them. Daw xx also gave an advance of one month's salary.

After that I struggled as before. After three months my daughter didn't send money and Ma xx also didn't come to my shop. So I started to worry for my daughter. I went to look for Ma xx in Zilun Block but she wasn't there. I was very upset and I asked friends to trace my daughter at the border. They said that at the border there was no shop belonging to Daw xx. I reported the case to the local administrative office. But they did nothing to help me because they knew that I didn't have money. Now my daughter has been away for more than three years. I don't know how to begin looking for her. I can't take this up with the authorities because I have no money.

## Reference in BPF A

Strategic Objective A.1 Action (b) (c) (d) 58, 59, (e) (f) (g) (h) (I) (j) (k) (l) (o) (q)

Action A. 3 Actions 63, 64, 65

Strategic Objective F. 1 Action 165 (a) (d) (e) (k) (l) (n) (p) (r)

Strategic Objective F. 2

Strategic Objective I. 232 (a) (g) (I) (k) (l); 233 (I)

## B - WOMEN, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### Factors:

- SPDC excessive expenditure on military (1998 UNDP report)
- Combined expenditure on health and education under 1% of GDP in 1999, leading to:
  - -shortage of schools, trained teachers, school running costs
- Political instability and armed conflict
- Increased levels of poverty
- Religious institutions, such as Buddhist temples or Islamic mosques, traditionally provide alternative education opportunities only to boys

### Impacts on women and girls:

Fewer than one third of girls who enrol complete primary school

- Girls forced to leave school to earn income to support families
- In border areas girls face more barriers to access schooling, owing to:
  - Physical dangers which render travel to school impossible
  - Constant transience due to forced relocations
  - Burmanization policies that force the closure of non-Burman schools in ethnic areas.

## Problems faced after displacement to neighbouring countries

### *Lack of legal status means:*

- For refugees in camps, no access to higher education; and no formal educational certification
- Refugees/migrants outside camps have poor access to formal education, and are denied school certification
- Lack of education increases vulnerability of girls and women to trafficking and exploitation

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Name:</b>              | Naw Eh Eh                                 |
| <b>Age:</b>               | 13  |
| <b>Ethnicity:</b>         | Karen                                     |
| <b>Date of Interview:</b> | 14 November 2003                          |
| <b>Location:</b>          | Karen State                               |
| <b>Source:</b>            | Karen Women's Organization ( <i>KWO</i> ) |

I'm now 13 years old and I am in the Second Grade. I started to go to school in our village when I was 9 years old. After two months at school, the SPDC troops came into our village shooting all over the village. With my parents, I had to flee from our village without taking anything with us. We hid in the jungle for one week. We, like other friends of mine, continuously had to move from one place to another for the whole year. We had no school to go. All schools were closed too.

In fact this is not my first time we had to flee. I remember that I was only three years old when I first had to run. I was too young to walk, so my mother carried me in her bamboo basket. When I learnt to walk, my mom pulled my hands to walk with her whenever we ran away. Sometimes, I could follow them, but sometimes my mother pulled me to walk so fast that I cried. I felt very tired too.

I still remember that one of my teachers taught us under the tree. She taught us Maths and English, and also about rivers and maps, and about moon and stars. Sometimes she taught us how to make rice. She also taught us plants we could eat and those good for medicine.

## **Reference in BPFA**

Strategic Objective B.1 Action 80 (a) (b) (c) (d)(e) (f) (h)  
Strategic Objective B.2 Action 81 (a) (b) (c)  
Strategic Objective B.3 Action 82 (e) (g) (h) (j) (k)  
Strategic Objective B.4 Action 83 (a) (g) (h) (n)  
Strategic Objective B.5. Action 84 (a) (b) (d) (f)  
Strategic Objective B.5. Action 86 (a)  
Strategic Objective B.5 Action 87 (a) (b)  
Strategic Objective B.6. Action 88 (a)  
Strategic Objective L.4 Action 278 (a) (b)  
Strategic Objective L.4. Action 279 (a) (d)  
Strategic Objective L. 5. Action 279 (f)

## **C - WOMEN AND HEALTH**

### **Factors:**

- WHO report in 2000 rated Burma 190th in the overall health system performance out of 191 countries.
- Priority on military spending, and insufficient expenditure on health, resulting in:
  - No resources for primary health care services
  - Too few trained health professionals,
  - Insufficient public health facilities and services
  - Cosmetic basic healthcare and HIV/AIDS education programs
  - No comprehensive family planning program
- Ongoing civil war and human rights abuses by state military
- Increasing levels of poverty

### **Impact on women and girls:**

- Lack of access to health information, including reproductive health education
- High morbidity rates for women and girls
- High number of unwanted pregnancies

- Extremely high maternal mortality rate, estimated at 230/100,000 by UNICEF; in IDP areas, lowest maternal mortality rate was 1,125/100,000 according to Backpack Health Worker Survey in 2003

## **Health problems faced after displacement to neighbouring countries**

### **e.g. In Thailand:**

#### *Lack of legal status or marginal legal status as refugees/migrants means:*

- Poor access to health services & lack of health information
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Unsafe abortion conducted by unqualified abortionists
- No opportunity to obtain health insurance

#### *Even with legal status, refugee/migrant women face the following obstacles:*

- Language and cultural barriers, preventing access to reproductive health information and services including contraception
- Inability to afford health care services, inability to access to subsidized health care schemes for people with HIV/AIDS

### **Naw Hsa's Story**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Name:</b>             | Naw Hsa                                   |
| <b>Age:</b>              | 19  |
| <b>Ethnicity:</b>        | Karen                                     |
| <b>Date of Incident:</b> | 22nd March, 2002                          |
| <b>Perpetrator:</b>      | SPDC LIB 48                               |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Taungoo District, Karen state             |
| <b>Source:</b>           | Karen Women's Organization ( <i>KWO</i> ) |

On 22nd March 2002, Burmese troops from LIB 48, Second in Command Khin Maung Aye, forced 58 villagers to carry rice from Kaw Thay Der to Nor Soe and Bu Hsa Kee. I was one of them. I am now 19 years old. At that time I also had to carry rice. One big bag contains three tins of rice so two or three of us carried one big bag between us.

I have been forced to carry things many times since the beginning of the road construction from Kaw Thay Der and Bu Hsa Kee. Every time I was forced to carry things I also had to carry my own food with me. I had to travel through areas full of landmines and I was never paid for this work. I was afraid but Burmese troops just forced us to go in front of them while they followed behind us. In the past when I was being a porter I saw some of my friends step on landmines and die.

During this time my mother was sick and lived with my six siblings and my grandparents, my father having already died. My brother used to be a porter but when he was carrying things for the troops he stepped on a landmine and lost one of his legs. I have to take care of every one of them. I have been a porter for the Burmese since I was 13 years old because nobody else in my family was able to do this work.

When I was a porter I learnt that the SPDC soldiers do not care if you are a child and cannot carry very much. Everybody had to carry something of at least 10 viss. They said that as my family members did not come I had to carry the same heavy weight as an adult even though I was a child. Sometimes we had to go in the darkness of night, which was difficult for us. The porters included pregnant women, children and the aged. The youngest was about 12-13 years old and the oldest was about 56-65 years old.

It usually takes one day to walk from Nor Soe to Kaw Thay Der and it is two days walk from Bu Hsa Kee to Kaw Thay Der, but my friends and I often took 8 or 9 days, or sometimes even one month. We slept in the forest on the way, in the rain.

When the SPDC soldiers first asked for porters they said it would only be for a little while so people did not take extra clothing with them. They became very cold and were often sick when they returned home.

When I was thirteen years old, I used to carry supplies that weighed about 10 viss so I told the SPDC that I could not carry that weight but they did not care. I also had to carry their food and even their portable latrine.

I have to look after my six siblings including my brother who lost his leg, my grand-parents and my sick mother. This is really hard for me. I have had to be a porter for the SPDC often. Since I was 13 I cannot count how many times I have been a porter. Some times two or three times a week and three or four times within one month.

## **Reference in BPPA**

Strategic Objective C.1 106 (b) (c) (e) (f) (g) (i) (j) (k) (l) (n) (p) (q) (s) (t) (w)

Strategic Objective C.2 107 (a) (d) (f) (l) (m) (p)

Strategic Objective C.3 108

Strategic Objective C.4 109 (a) (b) (d) (f) (g) (h)

Strategic Objective C.5 110 (a) (d)

## **D - WOMEN AND VIOLENCE**

### **Factors:**

- Absolute power of the military
- No rule of law
- Increased militarization particularly in ethnic states:
- Anti-insurgency policies condoning use of torture, murder, and rape as means of intimidation and control
- Civil war and poverty driving increasing number of women to migrate
- Domestic violence

### **Impacts on women:**

- Women and children suffering from systematic human rights violations, including various forms of sexual violence
- Ongoing use of rape as a strategy of war
- Psychological trauma from living in constant fear
- Women are trafficked into exploitative work including the sex industry, where they are vulnerable to violence from employers and clients

## Ma De Baw La's Story

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Name:</b>             | Ma De Baw La                               |
| <b>Age:</b>              | 15   |
| <b>Ethnicity:</b>        | Lahu                                       |
| <b>Date of Incident:</b> | 5th February 2003                          |
| <b>Perpetrator:</b>      | SPDC troops based in Mong Pyark Township   |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Lahu area, Mong Pyark Township, Shan State |
| <b>Source:</b>           | Lahu Women's Organisation (LWO)            |

On 5th February, 2003, Ma De Baw, 15 years old, was alone in her house because she needed to wait to take the paddies from the paddy fields while her parents and brother were working in the farm fields. That day, approximately 20 soldiers from the SPDC troops were patrolling outside the area of Mong Pyark. The troops arrived in the village and started checking everyone and everything. They forcibly took all kinds of food from around the village. After eating, the troops left the village.

When Ma De Baw's parents and brother came home from the farm that evening they noticed that she hadn't taken the paddies. Her parents thought that she was visiting her friend's house in the village. When she was not home by dark, her parents got worried and they began checking around the house. At that time, they saw many drops of blood, they saw a lot of blood along the road to the granary. They then found the dead body of their daughter in the granary. The village headman told them that the SPDC troops had proceeded to gang rape her; and that when they had finished raping her, they had killed her.

Though her parents reported this to the authority of that area, no action was taken. Her parents wanted to see justice done, but they knew of others who had complained about rape and they were punished with fines or imprisonment for complaining to the authorities. Although they wanted justice, there was nothing they could do.

## **Reference in BPFA**

Paragraph 116; Strategic Objective D.1

Paragraph 113; Strategic Objective D.3, Action 130 b, e.

Strategic Objective D.1, Action 124 (b) (r) (s), Action 127

Strategic Objective D.3, Action 130 (b) (e)

*See* Section IV Strategic Objectives and Actions: I. The Human Rights of Women

## **Reference in Beijing Plus 5**

Paragraphs: 68 (j); 69 (a) (b) (c) (d) (f) (g); 70 (a); 78 (d); 87 (a); 96 (c)

## **E - WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

### **Factors:**

- Decades of military rule and civil war
- High state spending on defence, and little on health and education
- Continuing military build-up by SPDC in ethnic areas, to control ethnic people and exploit their natural resources
- Ongoing human rights abuses by SPDC military against civilian populations, including extrajudicial killing, torture and rape, forced relocation, land confiscation, forced labour, extortion
- High numbers of internally displaced persons, as well as refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries

### **Impact on women and girls:**

- Targets of military's systematic use of murder, torture, rape
- Increasing numbers of orphans and widows
- Disability as a result of landmines
- Women face increasing burden to support family because spouses/relatives injured or killed in conflict

- Displacement means little or no access to health and education services
- Constant fear: psychological effects

**Problems faced after displacement to neighbouring countries e.g. in Thailand:**

*Statelessness & lack of legal status for many refugees means:*

- Lack of protection
- Poor access to assistance from international aid agencies
- Forced to find work (often illegally) as migrant workers
- Work exploitation
- Live under threat of arrest and deportation

*Particular impacts on women and children:*

- Vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation
- Vulnerable to sexual violence/assault by employers and some authorities
- Forced prostitution
- Lack of legal status acts as a barrier to legal protection
- No effective protection under Thai law
- Lack of information on Thai law
- Lack of access to Thai legal assistance
- Extreme difficulty to charge rapists

**Mi Htay's Story**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Name:</b>             | Mi Htay   |
| <b>Age:</b>              | 24  |
| <b>Ethnicity:</b>        | Mon   |
| <b>Date of Incident:</b> | 25th December, 2003   |
| <b>Perpetrator:</b>      | SPDC troops LIB 586   |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Khaw Za Chaung Wa village   |
| <b>Source:</b>           | The Mon Forum (Issue No. 1/2004, January 31,2004), The Publication of Human Rights Foundation of Monland (Burma), P. 10, Case 3 |

On December 25, 2003, before the soldiers from LIB 586 set fire to a fishing village, Khaw Za Chaung Wa village which has about 50 houses, the soldiers arrested a woman, Mi Htay, 24 years old. They accused her of being a rebel-supporter because her husband was a Mon soldier. Then they shot her and her one-year old baby and threw them into the river. According to the villagers, they were not killed instantly by the shots but, still surviving, they were thrown into the water.

This happened to her because her husband was a Mon soldier in the Nai Bin led command of the Mon splinter group. As they knew she was the wife of a Mon soldier, and her baby the child of a Mon soldier, they killed both her and her child.

Then, after confiscating anything valuable, they set fire to the village. First, they burnt down the house that belonged to the woman, Mi Htay, and then other houses. As the fire did not spread quickly, only a small number of houses were burnt down. Almost the villagers fled without taking any of their belongings.

### **Reference to BPFA**

Strategic Objective E. 1 Action 142

Strategic Objective E. 3 Action 144

Strategic Objective E. 3 Action 145 (a) (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g)

Strategic Objective E. 5 Actions 147 and 148

### **Reference to Beijing Plus 5**

Paragraphs: 68 (c) (d) (e) (j) (i); 69 (a) (b) (c); 86 (a) (b) (c) (d); 88; 89; 90; 96 (b) (c); 99 (b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h) (i) (j) (k) (l) (m)

## F - WOMEN AND ECONOMY

### **Factors:**

- Over 4 decades of military control and mismanagement of the economy have caused Burma to become to one of the UN's Least Developed Countries
- Disproportionate spending on defence
- Military selling off Burma's natural resources to foreign countries for quick profits, without developing local industries
- Destructive agricultural policies have driven farmers, the majority of the population, into poverty
- Negligible spending on human resource development (education and health sectors)
- Widespread corruption
- Growing militarization in ethnic areas has meant increased land confiscation and forced labour for military income-generation projects
- Widespread use of forced labour and extortion by local authorities
- Poverty and lack of employment opportunities is causing increased forced migration

### **Impacts on women and children:**

- Less access to education and health services
- Migration leads to vulnerability to trafficking and sexual exploitation

### **Problems faced after displacement to neighbouring countries e.g. in Thailand:**

#### ***For women migrant workers:***

- Limited forms of employment, usually employed in Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous jobs
- Economic exploitation: low wages (and less than men for the same work)
- Lack of access to health care
- Vulnerability to trafficking, sexual abuse, violence in the workplace
- Fear of arrest & deportation, leading to health problems.

## **Pa La Noan's Story**

**Name:** Pa La Noan  
**Age:** 42  
**Ethnicity:** Shan  
**Date of Incident:** July 2002  
**Perpetrator:** SPDC troop, LIB 554  
**Source:** Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)

In July 2002, the Burmese military troop, LIB 554 forced the people of Wan Nong Kong Mue village to work as porters, twice in one week. Even widows were forced to carry heavy things.

In July 2002, there were six women forced to go as porters. Every week one or two women had to porter for them. If someone couldn't go they had to give money for a replacement. We had to give 600 kyat each time someone replaced us. In times of fighting it was 1,200 kyat. Most of the villagers didn't have money to give, so they had to go themselves.

We went so many times. We couldn't count how many. Sometimes we had to carry milk, 30 tins each person, from Murng Sart to Murng Ton. In the farming season we had to transplant and reap for them until the rice arrived for their troops. The men also had to farm for them.

On the night of the full moon, January 2002, troop, LIB 554 also killed my buffalo and took all of my property. We fled to Thailand.

## **Reference to BPFA**

Strategic Objective F 1 Action 165 (r)  
Strategic Objective F 2 166 (c) (j) (l)  
Strategic Objective F 2 168 (b)  
Strategic Objective F 3 173  
Strategic Objective F 4 175; 177 (c)  
Strategic Objective F 5 178 (m)  
Strategic Objective F 6 179; 180

**Reference to CEDAW:** *Article 11*

## H - INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

### Ma Nang Kon's Story

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Name:</b>             | Ma Nang Kon  |
| <b>Age:</b>              | 8  |
| <b>Ethnicity:</b>        | Pa-O   |
| <b>Date of Incident:</b> | 9th November 2002  |
| <b>Perpetrator:</b>      | Private Soe Win: Identification No.Ta:<br>225821, LIB 510 Company Four   |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Naung Thaung, Kalalan Village, Hsi Hseng<br>Township, Central Shan State |
| <b>Source:</b>           | Pa-O Women's Union (PWU)   |

“...When she found that blood and semen came out of the girl's sex organ, she wiped out it with her green sarong. The girl was still crying because of the pain...”

On 19th November, 2002, at 9:50 in the morning, Private Soe Win from LIB 510, Company Four raped a local girl, Ma Nang Kon, in Naung Thaung, Kalalan Village, Hsi Hseng Township.

On 24th November, 2002, an SPDC officer, Myo Min Han and his soldiers came to the girl's house and gave 50,000 Kyats (about US\$50), three sets of clothes, two pounds of dried cake and a big teddy bear. He claimed that as Private Soe Win had deserted and was no longer in the army that the military could not be held responsible for the rape. The villagers were very upset to learn about the atrocity.

## I - HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

### Factors:

- Military rule with absolute power
- Lack of rule of law
- Ongoing systematic human rights abuses by SPDC military against civilian populations, including extrajudicial killing, torture and rape, forced relocation, land confiscation, forced labour, extortion
- Culture of impunity for military perpetrators of crimes, including rape

### Impacts:

- Women suffer from multiple human rights abuses, including rape as a strategy of war
- Denial of the right to legal redress
- Denial of rights to food, water and shelter

### Daw Nawns' Story

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Name:</b>             | Daw Nawns  |
| <b>Age:</b>              | Elderly  |
| <b>Ethnicity:</b>        | Chin   |
| <b>Date of Incident:</b> | 18th January, 2002                                     |
| <b>Perpetrator:</b>      | Burma Army   |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Thantlang, Chin State                                  |
| <b>Source:</b>           | Chin Human Rights Organisation<br>(30th January, 2002) |

A seriously ill, elderly woman was arrested in Thantlang, Chin State on January 18, 2002 after the Burmese army accused her of having had contact with her son who is a member of the Chin National Front (CNF). Taken into custody with the woman were three local men who were present at the woman's house when the Burmese army raided it.

The incident took place when the Burmese army surrounded the woman's house on a tip-off that an active member of the Chin National Front was visiting his dying mother. The man they were looking for was not found in the raid but the army took into custody all the people present in the house.

The elderly woman was seriously ill and was dying but the army made no exception and arrested her. Mr Bawi Hmung, Mr Lal Nuai, and Mr Ni Thang were arrested along with the woman.

Due to the seriousness of her illness the elderly woman was later allowed to be replaced by her daughter, Ms Sung Nawn who volunteered to be taken into custody in place of her mother.

All of the arrested were later sent to the 266 Light Infantry Battalion army base in Haka, where they are being detained and interrogated.

## **Reference in BPFA**

See Section IV *Strategic Objectives and Actions: I. The Human Rights of Women*

Especially paragraphs: 232 (a) (g) (i) (k) (l); 233 (i)

## **K - WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Factors:**

- State promotion of widespread rapid natural resource exploitation in order to subsidize military expenditure
- No enforcement of environmental protection laws
- Increased military presence to protect sites of natural resource exploitation
- Widespread logging leading to deforestation
- Widespread mining causing deforestation and pollution
- Large dams flooding farmland and forests, causing displacement, increased military abuses
- Building of natural gas pipelines causing displacement and increased military abuses

## Impacts on women

- Increased household burden for rural women
  - deforestation means fewer forest food sources available
  - fewer forest products available for medicinal and domestic purposes, or for sale for income generation
  - need to travel further distances to fetch water for cooking & drinking etc
  - women travelling further for food and water face increased risk of sexual violence

## Problems faced after displacement to neighbouring countries e.g. in Thailand:

### *Not recognized as refugees, forced to work*

- Women working in agricultural plantations: large orange and lychee orchards (in the north of Thailand) facing grave health risks from chemical pesticides
- Effects of overusing chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
- exposed to chemicals by inhaling fumes and by washing in and drinking contaminated water
- reports of numerous deaths particularly from respiratory diseases

## Effects of excessive logging and resulting deforestation in Karen State

*"Before we could get firewood very easy. We didn't need to go far to collect firewood, but now because of more deforestation as well as increasing population [IDPs] in our area, firewood is difficult to find."*

(woman from Day BuNoh village, Mu Traw District)

*"Before, if we needed leaves to pack rice, we found them near our house. There were lots of La Klue Baw leaves. But now they are difficult to find so we have to walk two to three hours to get them."*

(Shay La Moe, an Aunt elder, from Mu Traw District)

*"In the past when I went fishing I caught small fish, shrimps, and crabs enough for one or two meals. Today when I go fishing, I get only decayed tree leaves."*

(a woman of Wahlohvillage in Tantibin Township, Toungoo District)

**Excerpts from *Destruction and Degradation of Burmese Frontier Forests*, Pan Kachin Development Society and Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, 2004**

## L. THE GIRL CHILD

### Impacts:

- Poverty
- Health
- Education
- Violence against girls
- Girl children in armed conflict
- Vulnerable to sexual abuse/ exploitation
- Vulnerable to be trafficked
- Forced prostitution
- Child workers - domestic workers

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Name:</b>             | Naw Htoo Ku Say   |
| <b>Age</b>               | 7 years old   |
| <b>Perpetrator:</b>      | Pyo Way Oo, IB 344  |
| <b>Date of incident:</b> | May 2002  |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Taung Soon Village ,Win Yee Township,<br>Dooplaya District, Karen State |

*Her mother tells her story...*

Our family lived in Taung Soon village near the bus station and sell some groceries. My husband went away and left only me and my youngest daughter while my two elder daughters stayed with their grandmother.

It was noon time when two SPDC soldiers, Than Htite and Pyo Way Oo from IB 344 based in our village came to my shop. Both of them were armed with pistols. There were only three of us in my shop: my youngest daughter, myself and one of the village leaders, U Mya Aye. My youngest daughter was 7 years old and still in the kindergarten class. She was playing beside me at that time.

The soldiers bought beer from my shop and drank it. Pyo Way Oo played with his pistol and aimed it here and there. When I saw it, I was so afraid. I told him to stop playing with the pistol. He replied that if he shot someone dead, he would be imprisoned and after release, he could have his own business. Then he shot my daughter on her forehead. My daughter fell to the ground and died. There was blood from her head and brain all over the ground. His friend Than Htite came in to my shop shouting at him, "Why are you doing like this?", and kicking all my plates and pots. It was 3 pm when they left me.

Later, the Battalion Commander Major Myint Thein and other soldiers came to my shop and gave me 48,000 kyats (US\$48) and said that they punished Pyo Way Oo. I heard he was sent back to the headquarters and put into jail. But I don't know what action was taken against him.

## **Reference in BPF A**

Strategic Objective L.6. 282; 283 (a), (b), (d)

## **CONCLUSION**

It is evident from the factors listed in each of the critical areas of concern, that the regime's claims that they are undertaking efforts to promote the advancement of women in Burma are completely false. Moreover, military rule is the key factor obstructing women and girls from enjoying their fundamental rights as humans.

Only genuine political change and the restoration of the rule of law in Burma can guarantee the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls in Burma.■

## Women's League of Burma (WLB) Members



**Burmese Women's Union (BWU)**



**Kachin Women's Association - Thailand (KWAT)**



**Karen Women's Organization (KWO)**



**Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO)**



**Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO)**



**Lahu Women's Organization (LWO)**



**Palaung Women's Organization (PWO)**



**Pa-O Women's Union (PWU)**



**Rakhaing Women's Union (RWU)**



**Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)**



**Tavoy Women's Union (TWU)**



**Women's Rights & Welfare Association of Burma (WRWAB)**