



**Update of human right violations by the Burma Army during offensives in
Palaung areas (March and April 2013)**

Date – April 6 2013

Summary

Since January 2013, Burmese government troops have been carrying out military offensives in Palaung areas against the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N), Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). The Burmese troops have committed widespread human rights violations during these operations.

Even though the Burmese government led by Thein Sein has been praised for its reforms, these have mainly been in central Burma. There have been few changes in ethnic areas. Even though the government has been holding peace negotiations with ethnic armed groups, it is still launching offensives against the KIA, TNLA and SSA-N. There has been no political dialogue to find a solution to the conflict and to establish a genuine federal union. Moreover, the number of government troops in Palaung areas has been steadily increasing.

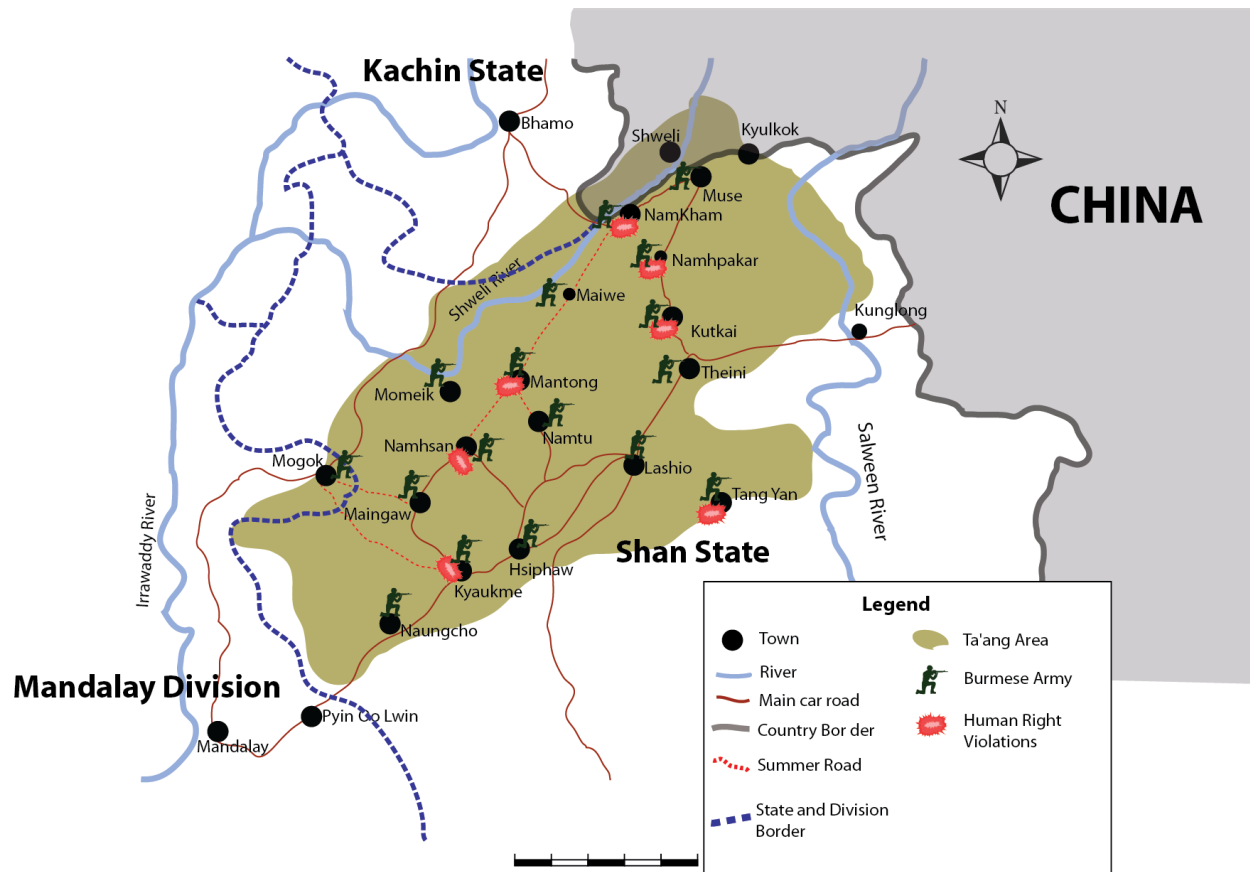
As a result of offensives and abuses by Burmese government troops during 2013, thousand of local people have been displaced from their hometown as internal displaced persons to Mantong, Namkham, Kuitkhai townships etc and there are recently increasing in Tangyan township too.

Human rights violations committed by the Burmese government troops include the following:

- Two married Palaung women were raped by Burmese troops from IB 502 on 19th and 20th April 2013.
- Three girls under 16 were forced to act as guides and porters by Burmese troops from LIB 41 on 25th March, 2013.
- Villagers from Kaung Sai village, Tangyan township, were forced to be porters by LIB 41 on 26th March 2013. Two of these villagers died from stepping on a land mine, and three were wounded.
- Three TNLA soldiers who returned home to help their parents during tea harvest time were killed by number 504 in the second week of April.
- Villagers from Khun Khar village, Kyautme township were conscripted as forced laborers, and made to cut down community forest to extend and build the military camp of IB 501, on 12th April 2013.
- over 1,500 villagers have become internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Tangyan township, and there are also over 2,000 IDPs in Kutkhai.
- Five villagers were arrested and tortured by suspecting and accusing them for contact with TNLA on 15th April 2013.
- The Burmese soldiers are looting and destroying the properties of villagers and stayed at villagers' home without permission.
- Burmese troops have looted property of villagers in Palaung areas.

Map of Burmese troops (to put Map) (will you also show the villages where the human rights violations took place?)

Details of human rights violations in Palaung areas



Rape of two women in same village

Two women from Yay Pone village, Mantong Township, Northern Shan State, were raped by Burmese soldiers from IB 502 on April 19th and 20th, 2013.

Burmese Army troops Infantry Battalion 502 are based in Yay Pone village, Mantong Township at Northern Shan State. A soldier from LIB 502 entered Ma Ei Einn's home without permission at 9 PM on April 19th, 2013. After he entered the house, Ma Ei Einn, age 37, was tortured. Her mouth was held shut with clothing and she was raped. After she was raped, the soldier threatened her. Ma Ei Einn said, "The soldier told me, don't tell other people, if you tell anyone, I will kill you." Recently, another soldier from LIB 502 committed the same crime on the 20th of April, 2013. Ma Ei Khin, a mother, was raped by another soldier from Infantry Battalion 502 at a tea-farm in Yay Pone Village, Mantong Township.

One of the villagers from Yay Pone village said: "There are a lot of dangers and threats in our village since the Infantry Battalion 502 has been based here. These soldiers have forced us to build their camps and they disturb us every day. The rape cases have filled everyone with fear. Our livelihood is tea-farming but we daren't let our daughters go to the tea farms any more. These soldiers could rape again."

Three young girls forced at gunpoint to guide Burmese troops



Three girls who are under 16 years old from Nam Ma Nwit village, Lwae Sae tract, Tangyan township were forced to lead the way from Kaung Sai village to Hwe Puu village by 30 Burmese troops from Infantry Battalion 41 on 25th March 2013. These girls were also forced to fetch water for the soldiers in the forest on the way.

One of the girls said: “The 30 soldiers came to call us from our house and forced us to show them the way from Kaung Sai to Hwae Puu village. We were scared and we didn’t want to go but the soldiers threatened us with their guns. We were scared and cried. We had to walk for 40 minutes to Hwe Puu village. We slept one night on the way. The soldiers didn’t do anything to us on the way, but they forced us to fetch water for them in the forest. I think they didn’t dare go themselves. We

arrived back to our home on the 26th at 7 pm.”

Two villagers from Namsayee village at Namkhan township were porter with a reason for drug elimination by Light Battalion Infantry –LIB-567 leaded by Major and 20 soldiers including Phone Chit on 21st March 2013 at 12 PM. The villagers were forced to be porters to show the way and carried 5 viss of their property from Namsayee to Lwae Mawe village at Namkhan township.

One villager who was porter said “ The soldiers came to our village and told to our head village, then they called us to show the way and carried their things. The soldiers didn’t do anything to us but they don’t feed us lunch. We arrived back home at the evening. The soldiers didn’t pay us for carrying things. Actually we don’t want to go and I am not satisfied on this. They will continue their way from Lwae Mvae to Pan Khar village. Pan Khar head village conscripted the charcoal car to bring them to their village.”

Porters killed by land-mine

In addition, villagers from Kaung Sai village, Tangyan township, were forced to act as guides by Infantry Battalion 41. Along the way, the troops forced the villagers to fetch water for

them in the forest. As a result, two villagers were killed by a land-mine, and three villagers were wounded.

A son of one of the villagers who died said: “The Burmese soldiers arrested us and forced us to show the way. They tied our hands together in pairs with rope, and forced us to fetch water for them in the forest. When we went to fetch water, my father stepped on a landmine and died immediately in front of me. I saw it with my own eyes when my father and my friend’s father died. I couldn’t do anything. I was so shocked and scared that I could not even stand. My friends who were with me felt the same.”

Off-duty Ta’ang soldiers tortured and killed



The Burmese military have also killed TNLA soldiers who had taken leave to return to their villages. In the second week of April, soldiers of Light Infantry Battalion 504 arrested three TNLA soldiers who had returned back home to help their parents at tea harvest time with permission of TNLA. They were arrested at Son Hing village, Namsan township. They were tortured and killed.

The Deputy Battalion commander of TNLA said: “My soldiers wanted to go back home to help their parents at tea harvest time, and they asked me for permission. I allowed them to go back for a month. They went back without their uniforms. Just after they went back, I heard the news that they had been arrested by Burmese soldiers. After we heard the news, we investigated and found out they had been

brutally killed. We found the bodies of two of the soldiers near the Man Phat main road at Namsan township. There were many wounds on their bodies, and we are sure that they were tortured before they died. We have not yet found the dead body of Mai Pan Sae from Ho Nam village.”

Villagers forced to cut trees for military camp

The Burmese government has been increasing the number of their troops in Palaung areas in order to carry out offensives. As a result, villagers from Khun Khar village, Kyautme township, were forced to expand the military camp of Light Infantry Battalion 501. They were made to cut down trees in their community forest to build the camp on 12th April 2013.

One of the villagers whose car was conscripted to carry the wood said, “The Burmese soldiers based in Khun Khar village are extending their military camp. Therefore, they forced us to cut down trees for 4-inch wide poles for their camps and made us carry them. They also conscripted our cars to carry the trees too. They didn’t even pay for the petrol and they didn’t feed us any food.”

Innocent five villagers were arrested and tortured

The head villagers was arrested and tortured for suspected and accused contact to TNLA and by Infantry Battalion 123, Infantry Battalion -290 and Light Infantry Battalion 501 after the soldiers have been looting and destroying the villagers properties in Lwaesalan village, Namphatkar track, Kuitkhai township at 10 AM, on 15th April, 2013.

One villager from Lwaesalan village said, “five villagers were arrested in this morning. They were interrogated by Burmese soldiers. They were accused and tortured that they are contacting with TNLA. They bitted and tortured them the whole day. They didn’t release them yet till now at 10 PM.”

Villagers’ property looted

Burmese soldiers looted and destroyed the property of villagers from Htat Kyat village, Mantong township, on February 18, 2013. About 93 soldiers based in Hsipaw looted and destroyed villagers’ property. They also stayed in people’s houses without permission.

One of the villagers from Htat Kyat village said: “They destroyed U Aik’s house door. After that they stayed at his house without permission. They took his boots, socks, basket, and bamboo hat. Then they tried to destroy the shop downstairs opened by a teacher from the village. The house owner, U Aik Sit had to beg them not to destroy it.”

Increasing displacement



IDP Camp
Photo by PWO

There are increasing numbers of IDPs in Palaung areas. There were over 2,000 IDPs in Namkhan and Mantong townships at the end of 2012, and there are now over 1,500 IDPs at Tangyan township since March 2013 due to the attacks against the SSA-N and TNLA. There

are also over 2,000 IDPs in Kutkhai township who have been unable to return back home since the beginning of 2013.

Burmese military expansion in Palaung areas

It is estimated that there have been 33 incidents of fighting between the Burma Army and TNLA, KIA and SSA-N in Palaung areas from January to April 2013. There are many Burmese battalions deployed in Palaung areas: IB 144 based in Namkham, IB 123 based in Namphatkar, Kutkhai IB45/241/242 and 290, Theinni IB 96 and IB 323, Lashio IB 41/ 68/ LIB 507 and LIB 522, Namtu IB 324, Mantong IB 130, LIB 503 IB 304 and IB 23 based in Hsipaw, LIB 501 and 502 based in Kyautme, and LIB 114 and LIB 115 based in Naung Cho. The total number of Burma Army troops is estimated at over 4000 soldiers including IB 99. The increasing number of Burmese troops in Palaung areas is a threat to local people's security.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Even though the Burmese government led by Thein Sein has been holding peace negotiations and signed ceasefire agreements with various ethnic armed groups, their troops are still carrying out military offensives, and committing widespread human rights violations in ethnic areas. The government's peace initiatives thus appear to be just a public relations exercise in preparation for the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014, and the upcoming 2015 elections. They are not sincere about seeking a political solution to the conflict.

PWO is very concerned for the security and lives of Palaung women, who are being threatened by the ongoing violence and military build-up in their areas. PWO strongly urges the Thein Sein government to stop all kinds of violence against women, stop all military offensives, and put an end to Burma Army impunity for crimes in ethnic areas.

PWO and TYSO urges the Burmese government:

1. To stop increasing the number of Burma Army troops in ethnic areas, withdraw all troops from these areas, and stop all military offensives.
2. To immediately stop rape, torture, all kinds of violence against women and other serious human right violations by Burma Army troops.
3. To authorize the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission to investigate the human rights violations, including sexual violence, by Burma Army troops.
4. To take responsibility to ensure that Burma Army troops who have committed sexual violence and other serious crimes in ethnic areas are brought to justice.
5. To allow humanitarian agencies to freely access and assist the IDPs until it is safe for them to return home voluntarily.

Palaung Women's Organization (PWO) and Ta'ang Student and Youth Organization (TSYO)

Ta'ang (Palaung) Working Group

