

Report to the International Labour Organization on Forced Labor in Burma from Dec. 2000-Apr. 2001 - Introduction

June 4, 2001

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CH-1211 Geneva 22,
Switzerland

Janek Kuczkiewicz
Dept of Trade Union Rights
International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
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Dear Mr. Kern and Mr. Kuczkiewicz:

We are writing on behalf of EarthRights International (ERI) to send information about the forced labor situation in Burma. Despite efforts by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to encourage Burma's military leaders to implement recommendations of the ILO's Report of the Commission of Inquiry, the enclosed 17 interviews show that troops of the State Peace and Development Council still use forced labor and are collecting labor and portering fees. The interviews were conducted with villagers from Shan State and Tenasserim Division between December 2000 and spring 2001, and concern the ongoing use of forced labor during those months. ERI's information shows that forced labor is occurring in these locations:

- Ye Pyu Township, Tenasserim Division: Interviews [#1](#), [#2](#), [#3](#), [#8](#), [#9](#)
- Tavoy Township, Tenasserim Division: Interviews [#4](#), [#6](#), [#7](#)
- Ke See Township, Shan State: Interview [#32](#)
- Loilem Township, Shan State: Interview [#11](#)
- Murng Kerng Township, Shan State: Interviews [#32](#), [#37](#)
- Murng Nai Township, Shan State: Interview [#38](#), [#39](#)
- Murng Pan Township, Shan State: Interview [#28](#)
- Murng Ton Township, Shan State: Interview [#33](#)
- Nam Zarng Township, Shan State: Interviews [#25](#), [#36](#)

Far from indicating a shift away from utilizing forced labor, much less a cessation of this practice, ERI's interviews demonstrate that the authorities' use of forced labor continues through the present. The following statements are all drawn from these interviews: "Just three days before I came to Thailand, I had to fence their [the military's] camp" ([Interview #11](#)); "We had to go to fence the military base once a month" ([Interview #32](#)); "Every month we have to go and work for the soldiers more than ten days, and sometimes it was almost the whole month"

[\(Interview #2\)](#); "Every five days, two villagers in our village tract had to go by rotation [to accompany soldiers]" [\(Interview #38\)](#).

Several interviews suggest, however, that the authorities are attempting to alter in name what they refuse to reform in practice: "Starting in November 2000... the District Peace Development Council has ordered the villagers to call porters 'helpers' and if people still call 'helpers' porters, they will punish them" [\(Interview #6\)](#); "According to the villagers, there is no 'porter[ing]' now, but [the military] calls it by another name. This time they ask for 'A-Ku-A-Nyi,' which means 'helper.' That means a villager has to go with them for give days as a guide, and they ask for it all the time" [\(Interview #28\)](#).

The enclosed interviews were conducted by ERI or by people from Burma who received prior training from ERI on how to conduct interviews. Due to security concerns and our own confidentiality policies, identifying information in the interviews has been redacted. We have given the township names to provide the location of incidences of forced labor and other human rights abuses. We have excluded people's names, but if this information is needed please contact us.

In sum, it is clear that use of forced labor, including portering, has not stopped in areas where we have been able to collect information. ERI will continue to monitor the situation and send information as it is received.

Sincerely,

Tyler Giannini, Director
Jed Greer, Associate Director
EarthRights International

cc: David Arnott, Burma Peace Foundation

Interview #1

Karen Farmer
Ye Pyu Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

. . . Now for the labor that we have to do free for the soldiers is cut the firewood, carry the water, and "stand by" porter for one person for each day. [The interviewee was interviewed in January 2001.] I myself I did not go to work, but my husband had to go very often. If we did not go we had to pay at least 150 kyat a day. We did not have money, so every time we ourselves just had to go do the labor.

Interview #2

Karen Farmer
Ye Pyu Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

. . . Now, mostly what we have to do for the soldiers is we have to cut bamboo and build a fence around the outpost because they make the fence two layers. [The interviewee was interviewed in January 2001.] The order came from the soldier to the village headmen, and the village headmen ordered to the village.

Now in the village the battalion was based there with about six or seven soldiers and the commander stayed there. Every month we had to go and work for the soldiers from LIB 282 more than ten days, and sometimes it was almost the whole month. Last year, in August [2000], we had to cut the bamboo and build the fence and repair the road almost the whole month. We had to go by rotation. . . . Every day we have to clean the outpost, cut the firewood, carry the water, and cut the bamboo. One person from each house has to go. In my house, I did not go because we are old, and my son went for us. We cannot send him to school any more because we do not have time to earn money for him, and moreover he just had to go for labor every time when it was our house's turn.

Before I came here we had to go and build the bridge . . . and we had send one person from each household. In the village there were about 100 households, so it took about five days to finish it. .

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Interview #3

Karen Villager
Ye Pyu Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

There are 200 households in the village, and most of the villagers are farmers. The village has to work on the railway road from 1995 through 1999. Villagers have to work on the railway road by rotation during this period. Other work [includes] building the military camp, repairing the railway road after the rainy season, and following the military for portering when the military needs. When we had to build the railway road, we had to give 50 people to work, and we could

rotate as four groups between the 200 households. . . . We didn't get paid for any of this. Compared with the time when we worked on the railway road, we now do not give labor very often. Now, they sometimes ask for people to be porters to travel with them, carrying their food and supplies for three days. [The interviewee was interviewed in March 2001.] There is no payment for being a porter for the soldiers.

Interview #4

Karen Farmer

Tavoy Township, Tennaserim Division, Burma

[Note: The last two paragraphs refer to events during 2001, while the other discussions refer to forced labor during the previous five years.]

I left my village in January 2001. . . . [and during the previous] five years [that I lived in my village], we had to work for the military as:

- messengers (two messengers per day)

These two messengers not only sent messages, but they had to cut 50 pieces of bamboo per person. This bamboo, the military sell for themselves, for the battalion funds.

- clearing jungle (villagers had to clear the place)

One man in each household had to go for this order. They asked the villagers doing this up to 1999, twice a week for clearing the jungle.

- "lo-ah-pae" porter [common term for forced labor]

The military asked for 5000 kyat from each family for portering. If the villagers could not provide porters, they have to give money as the Burmese soldiers asked. If you could not give money, villagers had to go porter. The military gave difficulties to the village head, and the village head told the villagers that if anybody cannot pay the money, he will send them to the military because he could not face the punishment from the military. As the military ordered me, I also had to follow. These are the military's rules.

- build up military camp

Villagers had to build two battalions' military camps. . . . Soldiers came and lived in our village, about 50 soldiers each time. When the soldiers came and lived there, villagers could not have time to work for their family. We had to build the place for the soldiers to live. We had to build mostly every year.

In 2000 up to now, villagers had to pay 250-500 kyat for building the bridge. [The interviewee was interviewed in April 2001.] The military asked many villages for building the bridge. The bridge was built in 1999. We had to build every year because the bridge is made of wood and

during the rainy season it was destroyed by water. They asked money for the bridge once a year. If the money is not enough, they ask again for more. . . .

In January 2001, the military asked each household for portering fees of 500 kyat. They will ask for the money for portering every month. My friend told me that the Burmese soldiers said that they would ask villagers to feed them rice . . . and any food they need.

Interview #6

Tavoyan Villager
Tavoy Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

Starting in November 2000 in Tavoy Township . . . the District Peace Development Council ordered the village to call porters "helpers" and if people still called "helpers" porters, they will punish them.

In February 2001, Burma army's Coastal Military Command (CMC), Military Strategic Command (MSC) No.1, asked for helpers (porters) from four townships. In each township, MSC 1 asked for 400 helpers (porters), so the total number of porters was 1600. Among these porters, 25 porters from my village were included. The people from my village were hired to be helpers (porters) for the military. Each porter was hired for 30,000 kyat, but the money came from the villagers. [Individuals could volunteer to work for payment, which distinguishes this from times when it is someone's obligatory turn to work or a fee is imposed. The money the military pays to the volunteers comes from funds the military has collected from villagers.] Each household had to pay 3,000 kyat as a porter fee. For people who could not pay the porter fee, they had to go porter as punishment and also had to pay 10,000 kyat to the military.

In my village, the villagers had give five porters every month. Whenever they asked for "operation" porters ["operation" porters refers to those working for troops actually involved in battle or fighting], they asked money each household to pay a porter fee of 1500 kyat. . . . For people who cannot pay the operation porter fee, they have to go as an operation porter.

Interview #7

Karen Farmer
Tavoy Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

I came from my village three days ago. [The interviewee was interviewed in April 2001.] . . . I did not go for porter in year 2001, but I had to go in year 2000.

My uncle had to go porter in March 2001, and he had to go for one week. They called this portering to show the way for the soldiers. Three to four people in the village had to go with them each time they needed people. They also had to go by rotation each time, and they had to go for one week. They do not get payment because they call this porter lo-ah-pae porter [common term for forced labor]. Lo-ah-pae porters had to show the way and also carry supplies as the soldiers asked them to carry. The military that asked for lo-ah-pae porters were LIB 374,

IB 25, LIB 104, and LIB 280. The military asked for porters from the village head, and the village head told the villagers.

Interview #8

Tavoyan Villager
Ye Pyu Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

I left the village a week ago in May 2001 because I could not face to go portering and pay the porter fees in the village. [The interviewee was interviewed in May 2001.] I came to Thailand to find a job because I did not have time to work in my village. In 2001, I had to go porter about ten times. Most of the portering we did for LIB 282 and LIB 273. They are patrolling for pipeline security, and we had to carry their food and supplies whenever they need. The village arranges this kind of portering by rotation.

In January 2001, I had to go porter for LIB 273 for three days. I had to carry my own food and carry their food. We had to go for three days, and that time there were 15 porters with them. We had to walk at night, and we could not use a torch light. Many people could not carry their loads, so we had to help each other. . . . We had to follow them in the jungle. When the soldiers patrolled in the area for pipeline security, there were sometimes about 20 soldiers and sometimes up to 50 soldiers. I also was hit by the soldiers when I portered for them. They said I did not walk fast. Before I left I saw a villager, age 22, who died when he was portering and stopped close to our village. . . .

The foreigners who work on the gas pipeline came to my village very often, and they also know that we had to porter for LIB 273 and LIB 282 who took security for them. They did not say anything about the portering for soldiers providing security. We did not get payment for being porters for these soldiers. We had to bring our own food when we portered for the soldiers. Other villages . . . also have to give porters to LIB 282 and LIB 273 as we did. If we did not want to go porter in our rotation, we had to pay 2500 kyat. If we did not have money, we could not refuse. Before I came here, I had to hire others to go in my place four times.

Interview #9

Karen Villager
Ye Pyu Township, Tenasserim Division, Burma

I came to the border a week ago. [The interviewee was interviewed in May 2001.] I was a porter for LIB 104. . . . I had to be a porter in April 2001. I do not remember the date. I had to go for six days. There were about 70 soldiers patrolling in the area after one of their soldiers was killed on the car road. There are two companies from LIB 104. . . . The soldiers collected 18 porters from three villages. . . . As the soldiers divided into two groups, we porters also separated into two groups. The group that I had to follow [had] eight porters, and we had to carry food and cooking supplies for the soldiers. We also had to bring our food when we carry their food while they were patrolling.

Before I had to go porter [for six days in April], soldiers came and arrested about 20 villagers to carry for them from my village to another village. They left in the morning and came back in the evening. They had to carry food for the soldiers when they were patrolling. The next day they asked for ten porters, but they were given five porters, and I was among the five. The time when the village called me to go for porter, I was walking in the village. At first I planned to run away, but my mother told me not to do this. She did not want the village head getting in trouble because I did not go to porter. I had to go because at that time my father was not home.

The first day we walked a half day from the village and slept in the jungle. The second and third day we traveled the whole day and slept in the jungle too. The fourth day we patrolled until 3pm, and we arrived at another village. The next day we walked from that village to another one. On the sixth day we were released to go back home in the evening. In that morning, one of the porters ran away because the soldiers said that he had to go for more days. He escaped in the morning, and we were allow to come back in the evening.

The village also had to do free labor for cleaning the car road, 50 feet on each side of the road. After one of the soldiers was killed, they ordered the villagers to clean more, up to 100 feet on both sides. So, if you add the first time and the second time, there are 150 feet in one side of the road that the villagers had to clear. Before I came to the border they still had to clear the car road.

Interview #11

Farmer
Loilem Township, Shan State, Burma

In Burma, we have not enough food to eat. . . . [W]e have to pay porter fees of 150 kyat per month [to the government]. . . . I have a big family to take care. Besides paying them, I have to respond for my family too. We struggle because of the shortage of food, so we decided to leave.

Just three days before I came to Thailand [in December 2000], I had to fence their [the military's] camp. . . . We have never gotten any payment from the military. . . . We never got any payment for any kind of work: fencing, farming. Sometimes we had to carry bamboo of our own. I did not want to go. [But] they said, "Everyone is following the order. Only you want to refuse, just do it. Don't talk much. . . ."

At the time [three days before I left], we had 27 people [working for the military]. . . . I brought a knife to the workplace. I saw a mountain of bamboo that they got free from the villagers. We cut, chopped bamboo, and fenced the camp. There were about ten women, including 16-17 aged girls. . . . We had to put the chopped bamboo among the wire fence. . . . The soldiers ordered the headman and then the headman told the people. I did not want to go.

Interview #25

Shan Farmer
Nam Zarng Township, Shan State, Burma

I can't go to work for the Burmese soldiers because I'm very old, but my relative did it. He is the only one man in my family, so if there is an order to do work for the Burmese soldiers, he has to go. During this time, troops came to our village from the beginning of April 2000 until the end of January 2001. My family got orders to go porter four times. When we got an order, my relative had to go. Before the Burmese soldiers arrested and tortured him [in September 2000], he portered two times. Each time, he had to carry foods and weapons for the troops who were patrolling. . . .

After my relative was tortured by the Burmese soldiers, he was very afraid of them, and when he heard about Burmese soldiers, he was very alarmed. If my family got the order to porter, he did not go. So I had to hire some one to go, 3,500 kyat for each time. The last time was eight days before I went to Thailand. I came to Thailand in January 2001. [The interviewee was interviewed in February 2001.] I got the order to porter from [a village elder]. . . . Villagers had to go for four days until new people came to replace them, and they were allowed to return home. If it is [villagers'] duty to porter and [they] refuse to go, there will not be enough porters from my village. So the Burmese soldiers will come to my village and ask who did not want to porter, and the village will point the [villager who does] not go, and they might punish [that villager]. So [villagers] don't want to go, but [they] have to go because [they] can't do anything except follow their orders.

Interview #28

Villager
Mung Pan Township, Shan State, Burma

According to the villagers, there is no "porter[ing]" now, but [the military] calls it by another name. This time they ask for "A-Ku-A-Nyi," which means "helper." That means a villager has to go with them for five days as a guide, and they ask for it all the time.

Every village including the towns [had to clear the road]. Those who had money, they hired Burmese to clear for them. For us, we didn't have money. So, we had to clear by ourselves. One household had to work for seven days and would be replaced by others. . . . [M]y turn was 15-20 days ago. [The interviewee fled Burma in late January/early February 2001 and was interviewed in early February 2001.] [T]he letter of order was brought from the town. The letter stated that each person had to clear the road for seven days. It's never finished. It has to be cleared again and again. I went for one day, and then I hired others and came back. [I came to Thailand] because I didn't want to do this "Lo-Ah-Pae" [the common term for forced labor], and it was very hard to make money this year. Sometimes I didn't even have money for the cheroots.

Interview #32

Shan Farmer Mung Kerng and Ke See Townships, Shan State, Burma

In December 2000, Burmese soldiers came to arrest people in the village. Three people had to porter for them. The soldiers were a patrolling column. . . . They relocated the villages to stay together. Moreover, they arrested people to be porters. When they came to arrest the villagers for

porters, did they did not inform the headman. I was just rising from bed. The whole village was awakened by their arrival. They said "Come! come!", and they had all the male villagers get together. They said they needed "guides." We said we had no people, and they took three people for porters. They did not take me, but they did take my son.

My turn to porter happened later. I was staying in the village at that time. Then the soldiers from IB 99 came into the village and arrested me. I was with five to seven other people. I had to carry the soldiers' clothes for one day. I had just woken up when they arrived. They told us to follow them. I said, "Please don't take us, we have no people to work." They said, "No! You all must come. We have to talk." They asked us whether we saw rebels or not. We said we saw no rebels. I did not want to go with them. But they said I must go. They told me that it was only for a while, but it turned out the whole day. They never paid.

We had to fence their base and clear the canal for farming. We had to go fence the military base once a month. My last turn to go do the fencing, before I came to Thailand, was in December [2000] or January [2001]. The headman informed us. He said that our turn to work in the military base was due. We had to work from 7 or 8AM until we finished. The soldiers did not feed us or provide water. They just came and looked and asked how much work we had done. Then they noted it down in their books. They said that if we didn't finish the defined amount of work, we would get punished. One household had to work on two lines of fence. We had to buy the bamboo ourselves, about 150 kyats for a pole. For two lines we used two or three poles. We also had to use about seven poles of another kind of bamboo that cost about 50 kyats for a pole. So for two lines of fence the bamboo cost about 700 or 800 kyats. Every household had to go. We had to finish that two lines of fence within three days. Otherwise, we would get punished. No one could resist. Nobody wanted to go. Many people had to work for them. The whole village together with bull-carts. There were so many, both young and old. I couldn't remember.

Around December [2000] or January [2001] soldiers arrested me for one night. They interrogated me as well. Then on the next day I was taken as a guide to a village. They released me there. I was taken [again] as a guide for one night and two days [to a different place]. I had to go with them. On the way, the Burmese soldiers arrested people and accused them of being rebels. I was afraid while I was with them. When they released me, they said "go back and stay in your home." I stayed at home about one month after that before I came to Thailand. [The interviewee fled Burma in early 2001.

Interview #33

Shan Villager
Murng Ton Township, Shan State, Burma

. . . Villagers must clean the bushes beside the road from rainy season through the summer. This means the whole year. [They have to] clean near the river for five miles and also clean between the valley and on both sides of the road. On the western side of the river, villagers cleaned the bushes from the river side to the waterfall. They spent two nights and three days there. On the eastern side, they had to work for only one day. Villagers told me that on December 7 and 8,

2000 they had to clean the road. Burmese troops from LIB 294 gave the order to clean both sides of the river. . . .

Interview #36

Shan Farmer

Nam Zarng Township, Shan State, Burma

I came to Thailand in February 2001 because in Shan State the Burmese military soldiers disturbed us all the time. We cannot do our jobs well on our farms. They shoot our cows and other animals. They shoot people sometimes too. I didn't have enough food. . . .

There were soldiers frequently in my village, and the troops changed every three days. The soldiers asked villagers to work in their camp and to work on the road. I had to go to work for the soldiers many times. I was beaten many time by soldiers, and I have seen many other villagers beaten. I was beaten when I went too slow from the heavy load. The last time I worked for them was in January 2001. During that month, I had to go to work three different times. Most people in the village were doing that much work.

Soldiers at the battalion camp called me to work on a road. They sent a letter to the headman, and the headman called us to do the work. One person from every household was ordered to go. The length of the road was not very long, over 300 yards, but we had to clear on one side of the road a width of about 100 yards. I had to trim and cut down the trees, bushes, and grass so that there was nothing obstructing the view. The soldiers would come on bicycles and check our work occasionally and then go back to their battalion camp. I did not want to go to do this work, but I could not stand up to the soldiers. If I refused, they could check the headman's list of who went to do the work. [But] if the headman lies, he will be beaten by the soldiers, and they will also find out who did not go to do the forced labor and beat them also.

A woman did not follow the order to clear the road because she was at her relative's house to get an oxcart. When she returned to her home, everyone was already at the work site. She had to pay 5,000 kyats and was beaten by the soldiers. I saw her beaten. The headman had told villagers that if anyone refused to go, he or she would be punished. The woman did not go, so the soldiers and headman went to her house, which was close to my house. I heard her crying, so I went to the house and saw the soldiers beat the woman. Later we had a meeting in the village, and the headman explained that she was an example of what would happen if anyone refused to go for forced labor.

[Also in January 2001], I had to porter for 12 days. I was helping some other villagers build their house when the soldiers came to get porters. The soldiers chased and arrested us to force us be porters. I did not want to go, but I could not refuse, or they would beat me. We had to carry the load all day, with a break for lunch, sometimes less than one hour. If the moon was bright, we would walk at night and keep going until we find a village where we could spend the night. Usually the porters had only that one meal, but the soldiers would eat three meals. The soldiers gave us the food. Sometimes we ate rice with no curry, sometimes the banana stalk, sometimes the soldiers would give us meat. The rice was military rice and not very good.

I had to carry boxes of bullets and the soldiers' clothes. The load was heavier than 20 viss (about 32 kilograms). In our group, there were three or four porters and around 100 soldiers. I don't know the battalion number. My feet became swollen from the long day's walk and the heavy weight, and I did not have any shoes. Other porters had their skin rubbed off of their shoulders from the weight of the load. Once we arrived, I escaped from the battalion. The soldiers guarding the door were sleeping, so three of us sneaked past them and ran away, back to our village. We moved quietly, sometimes crawling to avoid soldiers and get out of the village. Then we walked back to our village which took three days. We did not eat during the trip back because we were afraid to enter any villages.

About ten days after I returned, the soldiers came into the village and talked to the headman. The headman then told one person from each household, 700-800 people, to go to build the battalion camp. There were elderly people up to 50 years old, boys and girls ages 11 and 12, fewer women than men. The battalion wanted us to build their new camp. I had to cut bamboo in the village for roof beams and carry it to the camp. I also had to build a fence. I had to bring my own knife, and the work was difficult, and I did not get paid. I also had to bring my own food. We ended the work at about 6PM, but we did not complete the camp on that day. But we did not get another order to go back, up to the time I left to come to Thailand about 15 days later. . . .

If there was peace in Shan State, I would go back to the village if my wife also wants to go back. I want the soldiers to go back where they came from. If they leave, there will be no more oppression against the Shan people as they did in the past.

Interview #37

Shan Farmer
Murng Kerng Township, Shan State, Burma

I came to Thailand in February 2001 because where I lived in Shan State there were many Burmese soldiers. They asked us for food and to work for them. We never got paid, and if we grew something on our farms, the SPDC soldiers would just take it. They forced us to move to other places, and if we went back to the old village, we would be killed by SPDC soldiers. The fences around our farms were destroyed by the soldiers, and the livestock (buffaloes and cows) would come and eat our crops. . . .

There was a Burmese military battalion about five minutes away. Soldiers would force villagers to work for them, cutting bamboo and fencing the battalion camps. We had to go to where the battalions were based, 200-500 soldiers. I had to work for the battalion about three times, usually for one day at a time along with 100 or 200 other people. I never received any payment for that work. I was beaten by a soldier while doing forced labor a year ago. I was clearing the grass in the battalion camp, and the soldier thought I was not doing a good job, so he beat me three times on my back. I could not understand what the soldier said to me, but I understood that he was not satisfied with my work. Other villagers were also beaten, including women.

Two months ago, in January 2001, was the last time I did forced labor. I worked for two days. I was in the village, and the SPDC soldiers gave a letter to the village tract headman who passed it

on to the village headman. I saw the letter at the headman's house. It was in Burmese, so I could not understand it, but the headman translated it for me. It said every household had to go work at the battalion camp the next day and had to bring their own food and tools to build a fence at the battalion camp.

We were ordered to gather at 11AM. The headman ordered the villagers to go, and there were about 200 people doing the work. The oldest person was 80 years old, and the youngest was 10 years old. There were about 70-80 children working and about 30 elderly people. About half of the workers were women, including about ten women who were noticeably pregnant. I did not want to go do the work, but I could not refuse. According to the headman, the soldiers would choose any of a variety of ways to punish anyone who refused-beating, taking money, taking animals or rice. I heard about villagers who refused to go for forced labor and each person was fined 10,000 kyat as a result.

Each villager had to bring an ox cart full of bamboo that we had to gather or buy ourselves. I borrowed 500 kyat from another villager and bought the bamboo then carried it in my own oxcart. We had to prepare the bamboo before arriving, cutting it into sticks and sharpening the ends. We worked from 11AM until 5PM. The work was difficult. We had to cut small and large trees and dig out the tree roots. Then we had to completely clear the area and build a fence around it. On that day, I had to build 20 yards of fence, but I could not finish, so I had to do continue for a second day. The villagers who are able to speak Burmese from learning in school could speak to the soldiers, including the headman. The headman supervised the work at the camp. The soldiers were holding sticks and supervising. If they did not approve of the work being done by a villager, they would beat them. I saw three villagers beaten by the soldiers because the fencing was not good enough. They also ordered them to re-do the work.

If the situation improves in my village and there is no more fighting, I want go back. I want to be sure I have enough food and general well-being and income to give donations at the temple.

Interview #38

Shan Farmer
Murng Nai Township, Shan State, Burma

I left my village in April 2001 and arrived in Thailand shortly after that. I came to Thailand because of the shortage of food and also because I had to do a lot of work for the Burmese military. In February 2001, I had to guide the Burmese soldiers to where they were guarding road construction. It is a one-day walk from our village. The headman ordered us to go according to the letter order of LIB 246. I saw the letter, asking for two guides, time to meet and place to meet, with the battalion's seal. I had to go with five other villagers. Every five days, two villagers in our village tract had to go by rotation.

I brought my own food, rice, cooking oil, salt, bean-cake including pots and plates. In the construction place, I was ordered to carry water and firewood for the soldiers. I could not take a rest without their permission. There were about 100 soldiers guarding the road construction. I

saw one tractor constructing the road and five trucks carrying teak passed the road every three to four days. . . .

In March 2001, I had to cut ten pieces of bamboo for the military during one day of work. The headman ordered us to go according to the written order of the military. Our village tract was ordered to give 50 pieces of bamboo, ten each from five villages. We sent them by two ox carts to the battalion, which is based in our village. We had to bring our own food and tools. I heard that a new battalion would be built in our village.

I do not want to work for the military. No one dares to refuse. The military warns that the one who refuses to work will be punished by digging the road, imprisonment, etc. It is written in a letter that is given to the headman. We have to hire [other villagers for] 150-200 kyat per day if we cannot go. I heard last year that someone was imprisoned in an underground hole because he refused to do the military's order. . . .

Interview #39

Shan Farmer
Murng Nai Township, Shan State, Burma

I came to Thailand because there was a lot of work to do for the [Burmese] military. They ordered us to do such things as building the camp, weeding the camp compound and airport, and fencing the camp, etc. We had to hire other people to do the work for us if we're not free. It costs a lot of money.

In February 2001, I had to clean an area for a new battalion, located at an old village near our village. The military gave an order by letter to the headman, and the headman ordered us to go. I did not know the battalion number. We had six women among 10 villagers from our village. All are middle aged, 30-40 years old. About 30 people in our village tract were ordered to go by rotation. It was one day of work, 10AM-3PM. I had to bring food and tools. About 20-30 soldiers were guarding us with guns. The headman has to order the villagers to do it again if the soldiers think it is not good enough. It was very hard to do because it is a wild land. Our village had to work on ten square yards of land. The soldiers fed us water. The soldiers made shelters and sleep there.

We cannot refuse to go. The Burmese soldiers announced that anyone who refuses to go must be fined 1000 kyat or 1.6kg of cooking oil. Sometimes the villagers argued with the headman about not going even though they might get killed. Finally, they had to go anyway when he said he would inform the Burmese soldiers. I did not want to work for the military, but I was afraid of having to spend money because I do not have any money. It costs 200 kyats per day to hire a person. If Burmese battalions exchange, every household has to pay 200-500 kyats for supporting the battalion's welfare ceremony.

We have to clean the camp one to two times per month and fence once a year. I had to go to fence the camp last year. The Burmese soldiers order villagers to guide their way. The villagers also have to carry the loads. People say that some guides were killed because they could not

move from carrying heavy loads. No one wants to go to be a guide. The hired price is 10,000 kyats for five days. Last year, our household paid someone 10,000 kyats to be a guide because my husband was sick.