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MYANMAR

Lack of Security in Counter-Insurgency Areas

17 July 2002

SUMMARY

AI INDEX: ASA 16/007/2002

DISTR: SC/CO

In February and March 2002 Amnesty International interviewed some 100 migrants from Myanmar at seven different locations in Thailand. They were from a variety of ethnic groups, including the Shan; Lahu; Palaung; Akha; Mon; Po and Sgaw Karen; Rakhine; and Tavoyan ethnic minorities, and the majority *Bamar* (Burman) group. They originally came from the Mon, Kayin, Shan, and Rakhine States, and Bago, Yangon and Tanintharyi Divisions.¹ What follows below is a summary of human rights violations in some parts of eastern Myanmar during the last 18 months which migrants reported to Amnesty International. One section of the report also examines several cases of abuses of civilians by armed opposition groups fighting against the Myanmar military. Finally, this document describes various aspects of a Burmese migrant worker's life in Thailand.

All of those interviewed said that they had left their homes because they could no longer survive, given the harsh political and economic conditions which confronted them there. Reasons given for migration to Thailand included lack of work; continuous demands for money from the local military; forced labour, forcible relocation and land confiscation by the *tatmadaw*, or Myanmar military. The vast majority of people interviewed by Amnesty International were from ethnic minorities, many of whom have suffered from human rights violations at the hands of the Myanmar army in the context of counter-insurgency activities against various ethnically-based armed opposition groups. Almost all of those interviewed by Amnesty International lived in rural areas and made their living by subsistence farming or fishing. Most lived in villages in the Kayin, Mon and Shan States, and the Tanintharyi Division in eastern Myanmar.

¹ Approximately two thirds of Myanmar's population are *Bamar*; some 135 ethnic minorities comprise the remaining one third.

Migrants interviewed by Amnesty International who had lived in areas of Myanmar which were not highly militarized suffered less at the hands of the army, but those who lived near army bases were at a higher risk of being detained by the army and used for forced labour. In addition those living in areas with a large concentration of troops were subjected to constant demands for money and goods from the army. After a reported self-sufficiency drive beginning in 1997, the army increased its demands for material support from the local rural population. Those living in areas where ethnically-based armed groups operated were most likely to be subjected to forced labour, forcible relocation, torture, and extrajudicial killings by the *tatmadaw*. Some of them also suffered from abuses committed by these armed opposition groups.

Amnesty International welcomes recent improvements made by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, Myanmar's military government) in their human rights record over the last 18 months, particularly the release of over 300 political prisoners. It also regards as a positive development the SPDC's cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its establishment of an ILO Liaison Office in Yangon. The SPDC is making progress in recognizing that change is necessary. It is Amnesty International's hope that they will feel further encouraged to accelerate the pace of change. This can occur by ensuring that forced labour is eradicated not only in law but in practice, and that extrajudicial executions and torture by the military is not permitted under any circumstances. Because members of the security forces are generally not brought to justice for human rights violations they have committed, a climate of impunity prevails in Myanmar.

This report summarizes a 43-page document (18,828 words), MYANMAR: Lack of Security in Counter-Insurgency Areas (AI Index: ASA 16/007/2002) issued by Amnesty International in 17 July 2002. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email: <http://www.web.amnesty.org/web/news.nsf/thisweek?openview>

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