Partners Relief & Development (USA)

Visit to the Karen People
on the Thailand-Burma Border

March 3, 2007

DRAFT REPORT

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1. Executive Summary

Burma’s ruling military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), is continuing to perpetrate gross violations of human rights in all parts of the country. In addition to the suppression of democracy, the continued detention of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the imprisonment of more than 1,100 prisoners of conscience, and the forcible conscription of child soldiers, the Burma Army is continuing to terrorise the ethnic nationality groups. In Karen State, in the past year more than 25,000 civilians have been displaced in the worst offensive by the regime in almost a decade.

Partners Relief & Development (PRAD)\(^1\) makes regular fact-finding visits to different parts of Burma and its border areas. On March 3 PRAD conducted another visit to the Thailand-Burma border. PRAD arranged for the UK’s Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell MP, to visit Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs) at Ei Htu Ta, Karen State, Burma, on the banks of the Salween River, with the Free Burma Rangers, Partners Relief and Development and the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP).

In interviews with PRAD, Karen IDPs provided fresh evidence of the gross violations perpetrated by the SPDC. One woman told how her son was beheaded. Another described how her husband was tortured, tied to a tree, his eyes gouged out and then drowned. A third recalled how her husband was killed – his eyes torn out, his ears and lips cut off.

PRAD urges the United States to strengthen its Position on Burma, calls for humanitarian support for the IDPs, and urges the United Nations Security Council to take action to bring an end to the humanitarian crisis in Burma and put pressure on the SPDC to enter

\(^{1}\) PRAD is a Christian Aid organization that is registered as a charity in the UK, USA, Australia, Norway, and Canada. PRAD has been working with refugees and IDP’s along the Thai-Burmese border since 1994.
triptite dialogue with the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ethnic nationalities.

2. Purposes

   a) To obtain up-to-date evidence of human rights violations in Burma;
   b) To obtain information about the plight of Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs);

3. Visit to Karen Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

PRAD helped arrange a visit to Karen IDPs at Ei Htu Ta, on the banks of the Salween River, for the UK’s Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell MP, Lord Ashcroft, and their staff. PRAD would like to thank the Free Burma Rangers, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) and the Camp Leader for facilitating this visit.

The camp was established in April 2006. PRAD previously visited the camp in February 2006 and has helped develop many of the support services in the camp such as medical and educational facilities, shelter during the initial influx of IDP’s, and subsidies for teachers. The camp has a clinic with 22 health workers. The major diseases are malaria, dysentery and respiratory tract infection. There is also a school, with 17 teachers and 383 children up to Grade 7. There are 750 children in the camp aged between 5-12. There are currently 2,913 IDPs at Ei Htu Ta, all of whom have fled their homes within the past year.

The delegation interviewed several IDPs. The following are summaries of their stories. Their names and the names of their villages have been omitted from this report for security reasons:

Interview 1: Naw SP, aged 60, from X village in Tongoo District
In 2006, the Burma Army attacked and occupied her village, and looted property. They burned down the houses, and the villagers fled. Naw SP fled with two of her five children, aged 40, 30, 29, 28 and 20. She walked over a month to reach the border. Three of her children are still inside. Seven villagers were shot dead.

Three years ago, Naw SP’s husband was killed when he went to the nearby town to buy food. The Burma Army tied his hands, dragged him through the jungle, tied him to a tree upside down, gouged out his eyes and then drowned him.

Interview 2: Naw PT, aged 60, from X village in Tongoo District
Naw PT came from the same village as Naw SP. “We were not able to survive in our area, so we came here,” she said. She fled to the border in April 2006 with six of her children, aged 40, 35, 25, 20, 19 and 17, and they walked more than one month. She had
seven children, but one son was killed aged 15. He was arrested by the Burma Army, tied to a tree and tortured. They cut off his head.

Interview 3: Naw WS, from X village, Mon Township, Nauglybien District
Naw WS fled to the camp with her three children: a 9 year-old girl, a 6 year-old boy and a 3 year-old girl. Her husband had been killed in 2006 by the Burma Army. He was on his way home from his farm, when soldiers caught him. They carried him through the village, and then tore out his eyes, cut off his lips and cut off both ears. Then they let him go, and he died alone in the forest.

Interview 4: Naw HH, from Y village, Tongoo District
Naw HH fled to the camp in November 2006 because the Burma Army burned down her village and rice barns, and shot her husband. Ten families fled the village, and the Burma Army shot her husband as he was running. She has three children – a son aged 16, a daughter aged 15 and a son aged 10.

Political situation

The Burma Army's offensive in the Northern three districts of the Karen State has killed over 76 men, women and children, and displaced over 25,000 people- most of whom are now in hiding. Over 33 new Burma Army camps have been built in this area of Papun, Nyaunghlebyin and Toungoo Districts. The slow but unrelenting attacks and building of new camps seem to driven by a plan to dominate, chase out or crush any Karen people in these areas. This is the largest offensive against the Karen people since 1997.

Of the more than 25,000 displaced, over 5,000 people have already left their homes for the Thai border. The disruption of their food production, burning of their homes and the shoot-on-sight orders of the Burma Army have made staying in their homeland untenable for these people. The people here need immediate protection and the freedom to return to their homes. Because of these attacks they also need food, medicine, shelter and help to rebuild their homes, schools and lives.

This offensive began in earnest in February 2006, with troops from over 50 battalions attacking right through the rainy season, the construction of 7 new main camps and 26 smaller support camps. The Burma Army is now planning the construction two new roads that when complete will cut the northern Karen State into quarters.

Human Rights Violations

This report, along with an overwhelming body of first hand testimony proves that the SPDC continues to be one of the worst human rights violators in the world today.

Humanitarian Situation
Internally Displaced People, (IDPs), are the single most vulnerable group of people in the world. IDPs are those who face persecution or oppression but who did not or could not flee their country.

IDPs have few options for help. They have no adequate shelter and are continually plagued by disease and hunger. The international community does not recognize the status of IDPs and thus provide little protection or assistance to them. They are not protected under international refugee law. Unlike the funding for refugees, no overall funding exists for IDPs.

From hidden settlements in the Burma’s jungle, internally displaced people (IDPs) face a huge challenge to survive. Disease is rife, education nearly impossible and food desperately short.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the continuing military offensive against civilians in Karen State, which has resulted in the displacement of over 25,000 people, the widespread, systematic use of rape, torture, bodily mutilation and killings in Karen State and in other areas, as well as the continuing use of forced labour and other abuses in Mon State, human rights violations taking place throughout Burma, and the continuing detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and over 1,100 political prisoners, PRAD makes the following recommendations to the international community:

- To the United States of America –to strengthen its Position on Burma, calls for humanitarian support for the IDPs To the United Nations – for the Security Council to continue to monitor the situation and to take action to bring an end to the gross violations of human rights, and for the Secretary-General to increase his engagement through the use of his “good offices” in putting pressure on the SPDC to enter into tripartite dialogue with the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities;
- To citizens everywhere –to act on behalf of the people of Burma and give generously towards the overwhelming humanitarian needs inside areas of forced relocation and displacement.
- To the Body of Christ –That prayers be offered and that the church act decisively to minister to the vulnerable and victimized people of Burma.