OUR STORIES, OUR CHALLENGES:
The Search for JustPeace in Asia Today

Center for JustPeace in Asia
Interfaith Cooperation Forum

Our Stories, Our Challenges:

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Center for JustPeace in Asia and
Interfaith Cooperation Forum

Our Stories, Our Challenges:
The Search for JustPeace in Asia Today.

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This book is dedicated to the participants of 2008 CJPA/ICF workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal: Our Stories, Our Challenges

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Forward

One might say this book finds its beginnings at the joint Center for JustPeace in Asia (CJPA) and Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal in October 2008. It was there that many of the people featured in these pages came together to challenge, encourage and support one another in the work of grassroots interfaith peacebuilding in Asia today. It is true; that workshop provides the inspiration for this book.

Or one might say, No, this book did not begin at a workshop. The challenges articulated there existed long before anyone spoke them out loud in a conference room. This book finds its roots in the raw challenges of injustice and war that peacemakers confront in the modern world. This is also true; it is those challenges that provide the central structure for this book.

But if one digs to the root of the challenges, to the root of the CJPA/ICF workshop and to the real root of this book, one will find: stories. Pure, personal stories. More than anything else, the sharing of individual experiences—telling stories—has the power to move us to tears, to laughter and to transformative action.

It is with this conviction that the stories of this book have been gathered together. These stories take a variety of form: narrative, essay, poem, song, personal reflection, visual art. They come mostly from CJPA and ICF friends, but the book is also enriched by the work of new friends made along the way.

This book has evolved slowly since October 2008, and at each step, generous contributions of stories, feedback, advice and encouragement from its authors have kept it alive. The makeup of the book reflects what was offered up when a call for stories was sent, and it belongs to all those who answered this call. The editors have tried, to the best of their ability, to maintain the

language and style of the writings of the contributors rather than strive for perfection in English which is a second or third language for most.

The 64 stories collected here are organized into three chapters: *In Conflict*, *After Conflict* and *A Vision for JustPeace*. *In Conflict* names challenges faced by our friends from nations currently in the midst of war and is filled with their stories. *After Conflict* names the challenges that come up after the war officially ends and includes stories from countries that have concluded major conflicts in the past half century or so. Finally, *A Vision for JustPeace* brings together stories about the transformations brought about when justice and peace can flow through individuals and communities, within national borders and beyond.

As an intern this year with Max Ediger, the CJPA/ICF coordinator, I would like to personally thank all the contributors to this book, not just for agreeing to share their stories with a wider audience—this has obvious benefits for all—but for first of all sharing their stories with me. I am honored and humbled to be entrusted with the work of compiling and editing such a wealth of wisdom. I also thank Max for putting much trust in me and for being such a supportive and inspirational mentor over the past year. The process of creating this book has been a truly enlightening and transformative experience for me, the spirit of which I hope at least in part to pass on to you, the reader of this book in its final form.

Rosabeth Birky Koehn
Summer 2009

Introduction

In 2001, Documentation for Action Groups in Asia (DAGA) started a new initiative called the Center for JustPeace in Asia (CJPA) to respond to growing violence in the Asian region. DAGA itself was established in 1973 as the documentation unit of the Christian Conference of Asia. The CJPA project is ecumenical in nature, bringing together people from different religious faiths to study the roots of violence and seek creative nonviolent alternatives in order to build communities of JustPeace. The main focus of the CJPA initiative is on identifying the peace and justice traditions, culture, experiences and wisdom of marginalized communities caught in the middle of larger conflicts.

In April 2003, the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) was launched as a movement jointly sponsored by the Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). It was established as an on-going effort to build religious unity in the Asian region in order to facilitate the examination of different religious perspectives on the root causes of some of the threats and conflicts we experience in community today such as poverty, consumptive lifestyles, and unjust distribution of land.

As the world moves deeper into the 21st century and the era of globalization, peace based on social and structural justice (JustPeace) seems distant and untouchable for a vast number of the world's inhabitants. A large number of these conflicts are orchestrated by economic and/or political forces, often of an international nature, bent on claiming control over natural and human resources. Rather than helping solve these conflicts, the globalization process seems to be fueling them.

Growing awareness of these conflicts has also sparked an increased interest in the fields of conflict transformation and peacemaking, especially in Western countries. Many Western universities are now offering both undergraduate and graduate courses in conflict transformation and peacemaking. Skilled

practitioners from North America and Europe travel globally to help people in conflict areas learn the skills necessary to bring about peaceful solutions.

While all of these activities are built on good intentions, there is a growing feeling among some community workers in Asia that the models of conflict transformation and peacemaking imported from the West are not suitable to, and sometimes even harmful to, their home communities. Western models often do not help identify the history and culture of conflicts and thus, do not create movement toward a true and lasting JustPeace.

These Asian activists believe that many, if not most, of the conflicts in Asia grow out of structural injustices. Many of these structures are imposed on Asian communities by the forces of local power elites, national governments that hold global political advantage and multinational corporations that wield global economic advantage, all of whom benefit from maintaining the status quo. Any model of conflict transformation and peacemaking that helps protect the status quo cannot usher in a peace based on true justice, as JustPeace requires the transformation of the structures that create and fuel conflicts at all levels.

Asia has a long and rich history of living in community, solving conflicts and building peace. Traditional models of conflict transformation and peacemaking have been effectively practiced at the village and community levels throughout Asia for countless generations, and even though little has been written about these models, they have proven their worth through their own histories. Great harm will be done if these traditional models are ignored and replaced with models from the West that may not only be culturally inappropriate, but which may also completely ignore the root causes of the conflicts, allowing them to continue and even grow.

The aim of CJPA and ICF is to connect grassroots peace activists from around Asia so that they can begin a process of discussing, documenting and building on the experiences of indigenous people and other disadvantaged communities from

all over the continent. We wish to seek ways to make use of this accumulated wisdom and experience to develop more effective and appropriate models for building JustPeace at the local, national and global levels. We also wish to explore the roots of our different faith experiences to find the insights our diverse faiths offer to ending conflicts and building interfaith JustPeace communities.

In 2006 and 2008 the ICF and CJPA jointly sponsored two workshops to explore indigenous spirituality and the wisdom that spirituality can bring to our on-going interfaith dialogues. Through these workshops and other similar workshops help in previous years, many stories were collected that document the struggle of indigenous and marginalized communities to overcome injustice through nonviolent means. This book is a compilation of some of these stories that are shared with readers to help build understanding of what justpeace means from the perspective of marginalized and indigenous communities and to encourage all of us to no longer see marginalized and indigenous people as victims of injustice, but rather as courageous people who struggle against these injustices using their own culture, traditions and spiritualities. This book is a call to all of us to stand with these struggling communities, not as leaders and teachers, but as partners working together in mutual respect.

CJPA and ICF would like to give special thanks to Rosabeth Birky Koehn of the Mennonite Central Committee for committing much time, energy and thought in collecting, editing and collating all of the stories, poems and artwork contained in this book. Without her interest and energy, the dream to create this book would not have become a reality. We also offer our thanks to Alicia Temple for doing copy editing on the book as well as doing the final touches on layout. Finally, we wish to thank all of those who contributed artwork, photos, articles, poems and other items for this book. We wish them the best in their very important work.

Max Ediger
2009

Chapter One:

IN CONFLICT

The challenges and stories featured in Chapter One come from places currently in the midst of violent conflict: Burma, Bhutan, Southern Thailand, Mindanao (Philippines) and Sri Lanka. The chapter is divided by challenge, each challenge illustrated by stories, and stories grouped together by country. A brief introduction to the conflict in each country precedes the first story from that country. The authors offer their stories to you: some of unrelenting suffering, some or triumph, some of the compromise found in between, all with something to teach us.

WAITING FOR PEACE

This picture is by Saw Mia Oo, originally from Burma, now living in the Umphie Refugee Camp in Thailand. It was created in a workshop led by Saw Moo Rah of the Karen Student Network Group in March 2008. Artwork by the workshop's participants depicts the plight of internally displaced peoples and refugees from Burma.

BURMA

In 1824, Britain entered the region now known as Burma and by 1886 had conquered all of the territory. They held control over Burma until 1948 when it received its independence. A democratic form of government was established and lasted until 1962 when General Ne Win led a military coup and established the Burmese Way to Socialism which was supposed to be a form of socialism made up of a blend of Buddhist thought, Burmese culture and Marxist ideology.

Ne Win held power over all aspects of the society, and the freedom of the many indigenous groups throughout the country began to erode. Almost immediately following independence, ethnic opposition to the Burmese government erupted because the indigenous groups believed they would not be able to maintain their ethnic identities or participate freely under the Burman-dominated government. Ne Win's harsh rule strengthened this fear.

Virtually every indigenous group in the country was soon engaged in armed struggle against the dictatorial rule of Ne Win's military regime. Uprisings occasionally also broke out in the major urban centers, led by students and workers demanding democratic change. Ne Win closed the country off to the world, making it easier to suppress and repress the people.

In 1988 urban unrest against dictatorship escalated resulting in a massive crackdown by the military which left thousands dead. Many people fled the urban areas to seek refuge with the ethnic groups in the border areas that had been fighting for autonomy since independence. In an attempt to suppress this urban unrest and put an end to the indigenous rebellions, the military launched strong incursions into the border areas where the indigenous groups held territory. The conflict escalated, driving hundreds of thousands of villagers out of their homes and deep into the jungles for safety. More than 100,000 found refuge in camps in neighboring Thailand.

During British rule, the present boundaries of the country had been drawn, incorporating the many different indigenous groups into one territory the British referred to as Burma. In 1989 the military junta changed the name of the country to Myanmar. Their stated rationale was that the name Burma suggested that the country belonged to the dominant Burmese population. By changing the name to Myanmar, they alleged, all ethnicities would be more clearly included in the Union.

Many opposition groups, including most of the indigenous population, have refused to accept this new name and continue to refer to the country as Burma. Their reasoning is that the military junta has received no mandate from the people to rule the country or

to make such significant name changes. Agreeing to call the country Myanmar, they argue, would be granting power to the junta that has taken power illegally. Any name change will be acceptable only when a new government elected by the people is in power.

Furthermore, opposition groups say that even if the name is changed to Myanmar, the reality is that indigenous groups remain marginalized without the opportunity or right to participate freely in the political system of the country. The name change is, therefore, only whitewash to cover over the racism that remains a central theme of the military junta.

In 1990 elections were held for a new government. But when the opposition National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi won 392 out of a total of 489 seats, the military refused to step down and placed Suu Kyi under house arrest.

The military now goes by the name State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and keeps trying to convince the population that they are the only ones who can keep the country together. There seems little hope that a true democracy can soon come to the country.

While much international attention has focused on events in the urban areas, the real struggle and the most severe suffering is in the war zones of the country where indigenous communities live. The Burmese military has ravaged much of the countryside, destroying crops, forcing villagers to carry heavy military supplies into battle and carrying out extrajudicial killings. It is estimated that more than a million villagers are now internally displaced, hiding in jungle areas too remote for any food or medical aid to reach them. At least 140,000 live in refugee camps just inside Thailand. Another very large number of Burmese live and work illegally in Thailand.

For the ethnic groups, the conflict in Burma will not be over until they feel confident that their ethnic identity and their equal participation in government are guaranteed. They desire a federal system under which they would have autonomy to rule much of their own lives. The military insists that the political system must be a union with power centered in the capital. For the ethnic groups, the struggle is about survival.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) and Refugees

OUR LIVES ARE LIKE WILD ANIMALS: IDPs ON THE RUN
Burma

The following account comes from Naw Has, a 30-year old Karen woman originally from Ameh Hta village, Htee Mu Gay tract, Kaw Ta Ka Area (Tenasserim River Side), Mergui-Tavoy District, but more recently residing at Hsgeh KIer Hkee IDPs site, in the jungle of Htee Mu Gay tract. It was recorded in the mid-1990s by Saw Ehna of Burma Issues.

My parents were natives of Ameh Hta village on the Tenasserim River. I grew up and got married in my village. We made our livelihood on plantation and farming. I never was away from my home village since I was a child and got four children. Now we are forced to leave our village and forced to live in fear and worries. We have to abandon our native village that we inherited from our forefathers and flee to another country. Long ago before this, we lived quite peacefully in our village and never heard of or saw the Burmese army. They never came to our village. We had our own village elder that we chose, and we had a school in our village. It was a free area and governed by our Karen elders and leaders. We were poor but we lived with happiness and peace, traveled and worked freely. All of a sudden, our lives turned to a nightmare: full of dangers, worries, and we have been terrorized since the beginning of 1997.

In February 1997, I heard the Burmese army entered Myitta village to the north of Tenasserim River. We heard that fighting broke out between the Burmese troops and the Karen soldiers. The Karen soldiers could not fight against the Burmese troops and retreated to the south. At the same time, the villagers along Tenasserim River were also forced to abandon their village and homes and flee to Thailand, as the Karen soldiers could no longer defend them. Some villagers did not flee to Thailand; instead, they fled to the jungle upstream. Some villagers from Ameh Hta fled to the border and some fled to Thailand, but 12 families of us remained in hiding by a stream

behind our village. We always moved from one place to another and did our paddy plantation secretly during the years the Burmese army invaded our land. We have since then been living in fear and with difficulties throughout the years.

In February 2000, the Burmese troops started searching in the "destroy and kill" operation targeting villagers who were already displaced and hiding in the jungle. They patrolled closer to our hiding site, so we had to move to another place. This time we were going to cross to Thailand, but the Burmese troops were at the Thai border blocking our way, and also the Thai Army was stationed at the border so we could not cross the border. We had to turn back to the Tenasserim River, cross to the west bank and hide nearby another stream called Hsgeh Kler Hkee. We started preparing paddy plantation for the coming year to survive. We hid in this site for a few months. On the morning of August 11, my husband was gone to the paddy field and I reaped paddy in the farm. About mid-day, I returned to my hut and dried some paddy. I was carrying my baby sucking my breast while my other three children were in the huts.

Suddenly, I heard two gunshots. Then I heard a storm of gunfire and also heard the shouting and I knew that this was the Burmese army. They shot at my hut. I ran and picked up my children in the hut through the bullets and saw that my daughter was crying. I did not know she was hurt. I shout at her and she calmed down. I picked her up, carried her on my back with my little baby and another of my child, and I ran from the hut and my elder son ran after me. Several gunshots came in my direction but without hitting me. We ran to the stream and then ran upstream. I carried my three children, let the elder walk in front of me and followed up the stream. After a while we took a rest, and when I put down my daughter from my back, I realized she was wounded. She was thirsty and asked for water, but I did not give her any. I'd heard people say not to give water to a person wounded by a gun. I thought that my daughter would stay alive. Then I heard the burning, and I knew that the Burmese troops were burning down my hut.

I sat and listened for a while, and I was aware that I had to look for my husband and other people. I carried my children and followed down the stream. By evening, I still had not found anybody. My

children were hungry. They asked from food and water, but I could not feed them. I walked and tried to find other people for the whole evening. At about 5 o' clock in the evening, my wounded daughter who I carried on my back was still hanging on my back. When I put her down, I found that she was not alive. I laid her down beside the stream on the sand. I left her there.

I picked up my two younger children, let the elder one walk and we started going again. My children were crying, for they were hungry and exhausted and asked me to rest and sleep in the forest. But fearing that it would be dark soon without finding anybody, I did not rest. I kept walking. When it got dark, I finally found a group of villagers. They had some food. I got some rice from them and fed my children. I could not take any rice for me, because I was hurried and also worrying. That night we slept with those villagers. I could not sleep for the whole night as I worried about my husband, and I was very sad for my daughter.

Next morning, I decided to look for my husband. But the Burmese troops arrived at our place, found us again and we had to move further. After we moved and at about mid-day, I found my husband with a few other villages. The Burmese troops discovered us suddenly and attacked us, so we could not carry any of our belongings, including food. My family had only the clothes that we were wearing. We only got some food when we met with other villagers who managed to take along their little food and shared with us. I did not know where we would get food from for the coming time. We do not know yet.

Now our friends here share their little food with us, so we survive. Our lives are like wild animals because of the Burmese troops. They hunt out our places and shoot us. They killed my daughter Naw Say Lay. She was innocent and had nothing against them. Even though I do not want revenge, I cannot forget the whole thing that happened to my life. I do not want to experience this in my life again. I miss my daughter, and I always remember that I had to leave her body without a chance to bury her. My mother and mother's mother faced the same fate as me. Many people from other places in this country also many face hardships. I only hope that other mothers do not experience and face what I have.

LEAVING THE HOMELAND

This picture is by Saw Ku Paw from Noh Po Refugee Camp. It was created in a workshop led by Saw Moo Rah of the Karen Student Network Group in March 2008. Artwork by the workshop participants depicts the plight of internally displaced peoples and refugees from Burma. Below is Saw Moo Rah's description about what the people in this picture are doing.

“They are running in to forest to escape their life. because SPDC attacked and force their to move their village for place to place and burning their village. SPDC also discriminate against who live in Karen state Now they do not enough food, they do not have their home land, so they went to go home. They are very poorly some of them they are separated their family.”

SILENT NIGHT

Burma

This story took place in the 1970s and was told by a Burma Issues field worker to Max Ediger who recorded it in 1996. It was published in December 2007 by PeaceSigns*, the online publication of the Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA, and is reprinted here with their permission (*www.mennolink.org/peace*).*

In the mid-1970s, the Burma Army's "Four Cuts" strategy against ethnic insurgencies was driving an ever increasing number of rural people away from their village homes into the thick surrounding jungle in search of safety. This strategy—designed by the military to destroy ethnic armed insurgencies by preventing village peasants from providing the insurgencies with food, information, new recruits and funds—focused on harming innocent villagers rather than those involved in the armed struggle. To do this, the military would enter villages, destroy all food stocks and force the villagers to move to relocation sites under complete control of the military. In these relocation sites, life was not much better than slavery, so many villagers instead opted to flee deep into the jungle in order to avoid the military completely. With only a few household items packed in baskets carried on their backs, these internally displaced persons (IDPs) moved constantly from jungle clearing to jungle clearing in hopes of the chance for at least one night's sound and secure sleep.

It was on a Christmas Day during this time that some Christian Karen (one of the many indigenous groups in Burma) youth heard that a small group of IDPs had set up makeshift houses in a valley not far from their own village. They decided to make a visit to the villagers on this special day to bring them some cheer.

After several hours trekking through the thick jungle, the young Christians found the villagers sitting around a small fire preparing a meager meal of roots and leaves scavenged from the surrounding hills. Their houses consisted of simple bamboo frames covered with leaves. These improvised huts and the villagers' ragged clothes did little to keep out the cold, damp winter winds blowing down from the surrounding mountains.

The youth first shared some food rations with the villagers and then began singing "Silent Night." Immediately, a look of fear appeared on the faces of the villagers. "Please don't sing," they requested. "If the soldiers hear you, they will come and find us. It's best to remain silent. We don't want to suffer any more." And so the night became a truly silent night once again—a silence not to commemorate a religious event, but a silence symbolizing the realities of life for hundreds of thousands of IDPs throughout Burma.

It is now, some twenty years later and nothing has improved for the IDPs. Their numbers have continued to increase and they still seek protection in distant jungle havens and require silent nights and silent days so as to avoid attracting soldiers to their hiding places. Fear remains etched on their weathered faces, but so does determination—the determination to survive and to remain free.

Perhaps these desperate village people understand the meaning of "Silent Night, Holy Night" more deeply than much of the world's Christian community. Like the Jewish people on that first Christmas eve, these villagers live under an occupying force. They live in fear and hunger, hoping for a liberator to finally reach them. Like the cattle stall in which the Christ child was born, they live in cold and inhospitable surroundings with no safe home to take refuge in.

FROM IDP TO REFUGEE TO RESETTLEE

Burma

This is a selection from a creative nonfiction piece entitled Epiphanies on the Road to Someplace Else: Journeys Along the Thai-Burmese Border *written by Charina Sanz following a fact-finding trip to the border refugee camps from December 12-24, 2007. The trip was sponsored by the Center for JustPeace in Asia and organized by Burma Issues to allow the team of four, including Sanz, to learn from the ethnic peoples of Burma who are taking refuge in the camps and work at understanding the causes of their conflicts and suffering.* Epiphanies on the Road to Someplace Else *was published in* www.mindanews.com *on March 10, 2008. For a full report of the trip, see* Report from Thai-Burma Fact Finding Trip *on page 153.*

“My life had always been one of fear and running.” Plar Wah speaks with a soft, gentle voice that bears no trace to the tragedies that he had faced. Plar is the school headmaster at the Than Min Refugee Camp in Suan Phung district, Ratchaburi province where we first came soon after we arrived at the Thai-Burma border.

Here, inside the school’s main office at the camp, Plar searches his memory and remembers that day when he was three and there was fighting, burning and killing in his village. “We were running and my mother took hold of my hand. She was carrying my little brother on her back.” For a moment, he fell into silence and only the voices of schoolchildren reciting Karen words could be heard outside. “Then I stumbled and I could not run anymore,” he says, almost in a whisper. “There were only three of us left that day because the soldiers all killed my father, uncle and two brothers.” He heaved a deep sigh at this and I could sense him grappling still with the memory of this loss more than fifty years later.

“But I don’t hate them anymore, they who have killed my family,” he says breaking into a smile when we asked him how he seemed to be so at peace now. There is kindness in his angular face that he tilts to one side whenever he smiles, and which he does every so often even at the recollection of tragedy. “I am now safe here in the camp. I have found peace here and the emotional pains can no longer disturb me.” It is his faith and his love for his wife and children, he says, that are his constant sources of strength.

Soon, Plar will be leaving and is now merely counting the days when he will finally bade the camp goodbye as with many others who had lost all hope of ever going back home to Burma or that things would one day change. Inside the camp’s headquarters, I remembered seeing a news article tacked on the wall about Daniel Zu, a respected camp leader, who is now successfully resettled in Australia. He serves as an inspiration to others, I was told, a reminder that one day they too would be living their dream in another country. About four thousand refugees from the camp had already been resettled mostly to the US, Canada and Australia.

"What is there to go back home to? "Plar says, as he breathed deeply. "They will only put me back to jail." Then he told us in snapshot details how he served once as a Karen revolutionary soldier, then fleeing Burma in 1997, adjusting to life in the camp, and of that day he was summoned by a camp official so he could be trained as a teacher, then teaching Karen history to refugee students all these years until last year when he was made in charge as the camp school headmaster, and finally, how the day came when he learned that he was accepted in a resettlement program to Australia.

We stepped outside to the heat of the noonday sun. Plar led us through a walk around the school area. Inside makeshift classrooms, children recite words and numbers aloud. Young teenage teachers, also refugees who have been hurriedly trained to replace those who have left, point at words on the board using wooden sticks or scribble big, bold letters for the children to read. Turnovers are fast, Plar says, and soon, they too will leave like others before them and they will have to train new teachers again.

"My desire now is for my children to go to school, with food and medicine," he says. "Here it is not enough because we could not go outside the camp and we do not have equal rights like the Thai people. They call us the wild people." He laughs at this but his face turned somber. "I just want to start a new life away from here," he says.

PROTRACTED REFUGEE

Burma

This is a selection from Epiphanies on the Road to Someplace Else: Journeys Along the Thai-Burmese Border *written by Charina Sanz following a fact-finding trip to the border refugee camps from December 12-24, 2007. For a full report of the trip, see* Report from Thai-Burma Border Fact Finding Trip *on page 153.*

It was late afternoon when we headed back to town. Hitching a ride with us were Ana who works in the camp and her friend, a lawyer from Mexico. I learned that Ana is a veteran doctor of an international

aid agency and has been sent on assignment to many conflict areas since 1988 – from Africa to Kosovo to Congo. “So how is it working here?” I asked, raising my voice a bit louder to make myself be heard above the din of the motor engine. “It is different here,” she replied in her lilting Spanish accent, “maybe even worse.”

Burma may have no massive killings, she said, statistically, on a scale like Rwanda or Kosovo. “But there is deeper trauma on people when they have been away for too long, far from their homes, without any hope of ever going back. And it has been fifteen or twenty years that they have been here.” She rested her back on a railing of the truck and folded her arms. Then she went on to say in hushed tones, “And there is little change over the years. In other places, the war stops, people go home, they move on with their lives. But not here where there seems to be no movement at all.”

We all became silent and for sometime only the humdrum of the engine could be heard as we descended the slopes. In the distance is a silhouette of yet another misty mountain. In my mind, I could almost see K.T.L., still barely sixteen, staggering in the forest, delirious with malaria fever, and fearfully guarding himself against stepping on a landmine. How he must have wailed to the mountains that, by now at the mere passage of time, must have kept a cavern of tears from refuge seekers who passed the same way, and how it must have been for him when he finally made it to the border camp.

I gazed down at the lush valley below. It is no longer cold now yet I am beguiled still by the paradox of beauty and shadows, and the epiphanies that come when one is elsewhere in someplace else, in an altitude of wide open spaces and clear skies, or in the radiance of a hymn and a shaft of light in a refugee camp, or upon encountering pilgrim souls who have nothing else but hope and the language of the soul – where then all of a sudden in a moment of stillness, one is bequeathed with a gift of luminosity that makes the befuddled heart clear, the paths known.

In the morning we are leaving and off to another border town, Mae Sot, which will be our last stop. Soon after in a week, I will be home on a midnight flight back to Manila, then afterwards, perhaps, to find myself once again on the road to some other wandering.

Then I glanced at Ana who had spent most of her life in war zones and refugee camps, and I wondered how she must have listened endlessly at the stories of refugees while tending to the broken and the wounded, or rescuing the dying who just came in from the other side of the border – and what would that be? Why a choice of life so embracing of human pathos? I never got to ask her this as she got off at a crossroad somewhere in the middle of the village and the town just before reaching the Doi Kong Mu temple.

“Fifteen years is just far too long,” I remembered her saying, her voice trailing off in the wind, so soft that I could barely hear her. Dusk had fallen by the time we got into town. We promised to meet for coffee that night but I never saw her again.

I DREAM OF HOME

Burma

These poems and artwork were shared by Saw Mort at the 2008 CJPA workshop in Nepal.

The poetry of
Life, Hope and Dream

IDP girl in Karen state.

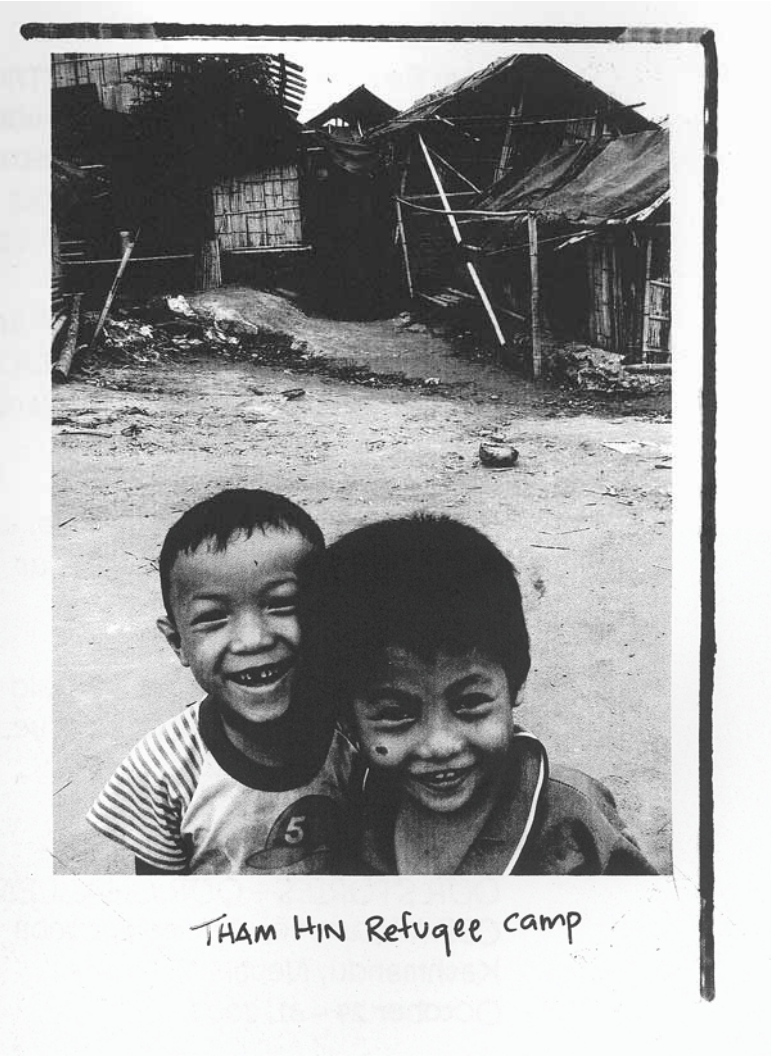
I am Saw Mort and from Kaw Thoo Lei, Burma. I was born in war zone and left my home land when I was 5 year olds. I became refugee in Thailand for 20 years and lost my rights and human dignity. Struggle for my rights and my people to free from oppression and exploitation not easy task, but I have to.

To share our stories not to give up, to feel sad, to feel sympathy to us. We have to encourage each other to get new energy for our movement and to join our hand to bring truth justice called Justpeace.

In this world, we are not a lone, we have friends and I believe that we have power to change our life in darkness, in poverty, in suffering.

Only my hope give a life and said never give up, never give up and one day you dream will come true.

For:
OUR STORIES – OUR CHALLENGES
CJPA Workshop Theme for 2008
Kathmandu, Nepal
October 24 – 31, 2008


THAM HIN Refugee camp

"I Dream of Home"

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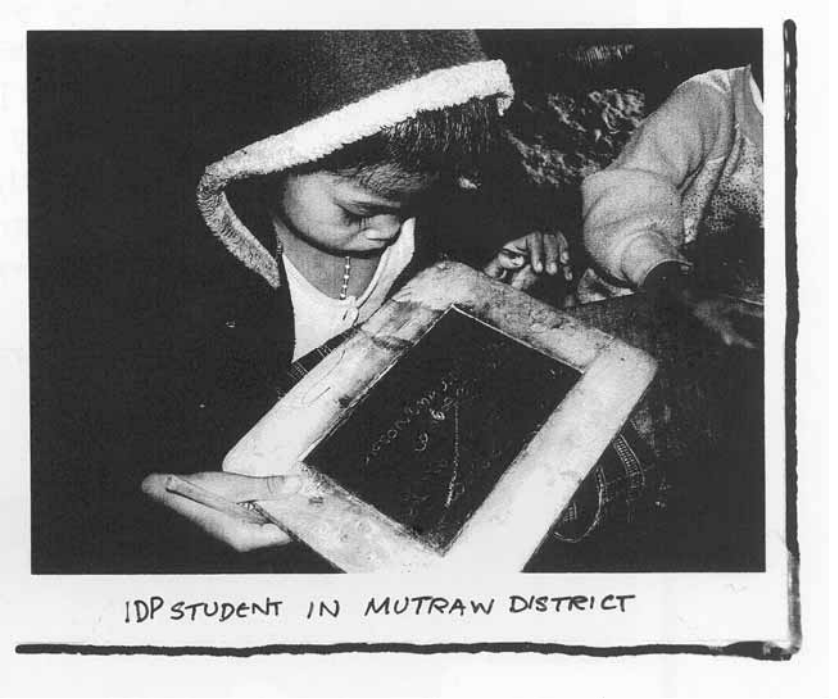
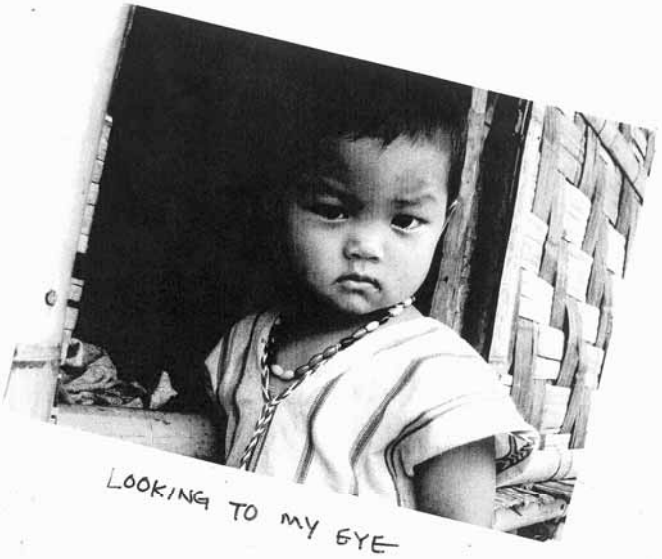
I Dream of Home

I want to go Home
I have dreamed of it for so long
Home will be filled with love
Freedom and equality
Home will provide me with protection, security and love
At my home I won't worry about hunger
and my crying and suffering will face away
I will see the smile of the bright sun
and the sun's rays will bring me peace
Everybody will be happy
At my home
We will celebrate Peace with true justice.

KAREN CHILDREN ON THAI-BURMA BORDER


IDP STUDENT IN MUTRAW DISTRICT



Internally Displaced Person

I was born in the jungle
People say that I am homeless
But I have hope to have a home
Where I won't flee like a wild animal
Where my meal is not Klee Ti*
Where the killings, rape and destruction of my paddy field
I no longer see with my eyes
Where apprehension and tragedy
Fear and tears are all gone
This is my home

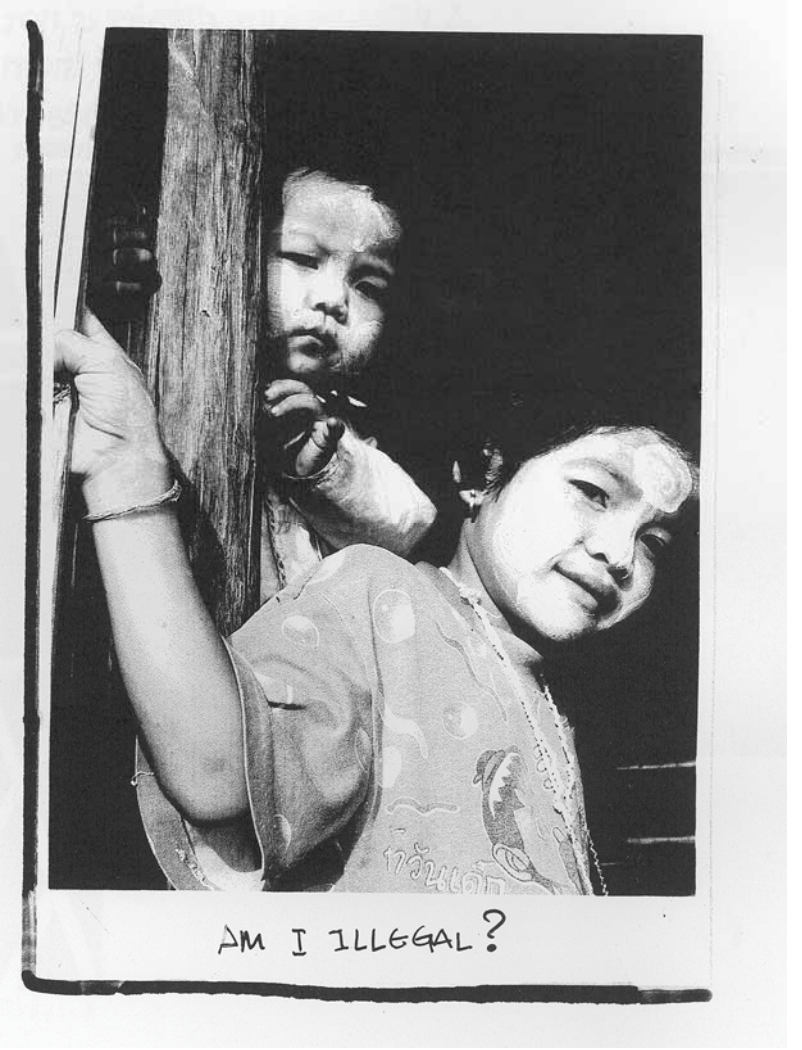
*Klee Ti: one of the underground vegetable, when the Burmese military attacked our village and burned down our village, we had to flee in the deep jungle and when we have no rice, we have to dig the Klee Ti and we ate as rice. We also called it "Big Rice" (May Doh).


SMILING IN BARBED WIRE

Refugee

I was born in a refugee camp - a foreign land
I was told that a small bamboo house is my home
A life confined by barbed wire is not my home
A living fed by others is not my home
A life without dignity is not my home
Freedom and equality is what I want
To uphold my beautiful home

MY BAMBOO HOUSE


AM I ILLEGAL?

MY SISTER AND MY DOG

Migrant Worker

I wasn't born in my parents' homeland
I am told that my home is everywhere
But I am not recognized as a legal person with the legal document
Always afraid of Thai police and moving my cloth-tent
I want to return to my native land
My home is not here where exploitation and corruption occur
Not where deception and human trafficking happen
There is neither slave nor master at my home, but everything is equal


HAPPY

We are a human being

We are three people from different places, but we have one dream
We are three people with different lives, but we have one suffering
We are three people who don't want -
Hate, oppression, domination, discrimination, segregation
Envy, corruption, killing, war, rape and torture

We need a HOME
Our home will be filled with love
freedom and equality
Our home will provide us with protection, security and love
We will see the smile of the bright sun
and the sun's rays will bring us peace
Everybody will be happy
At our home
We will celebrate Peace with true justice.

We want to go home....
We want to go home....
We want to go home....

DREAM

HOPE

LIFE

MY BROKEN TOY

Rape as a Tool of War

THIS IS MY VICTORY!
Burma

In Burma where an intense civil conflict has been raging since 1947, the Burmese military conscripts both men and women from the villages to carry their loads of food, weapons and other supplies into potential battle zones. In addition to heavy labor during the day, at night the women are often forced to serve as "comfort women" for Burmese soldiers. The soldiers' comfort means rape and brutalization for these women. This story comes from the refugee camps at the Thai-Burma border and was recorded by Max Ediger in 1997.

I am a Karen farmer and used to live with my husband, children and other family members in a small village in the Dawna mountain range in Burma. One day the Burmese soldiers came into our village and forced many of us to serve them as porters. We had to carry heavy loads for them as they moved through the jungle looking for the Karen freedom fighters. I had to carry a very heavy box of ammunition on my back. Because I am a farmer, I am used to hard work so carrying the ammunition was not so very difficult for me. What was very difficult for me was carrying ammunition that the Burmese soldiers would use to kill other Karen people. I wanted to throw the box of ammunition down and run away, but we were very closely guarded.

One night, after the soldiers had established a small temporary camp, some of them took me out into the jungle to a small hut they had found. There they raped me many times that night. In the morning they tied me securely to a post and left me there all day. In the evening they came back and raped me again. This went on for about three days. On the third night I heard them say that the temporary camp would be abandoned so they needed to kill me to prevent me from telling anyone what they had done. They stripped all my clothes off and then dripped burning sap all over my body. The pain was terrible and I screamed as loud as I could, begging for mercy. But I knew that no one could hear me so far out in the jungle. After awhile the soldiers left, believing that I would now die from all the burns.

But I was determined that I would not let them discard me like that. I rested the next day and then walked and crawled through the jungle. Luckily I met some other Karen villagers who took care of me. They gave me food and water and then they treated my burns with traditional medicines.

Now my body is very ugly because it is covered with these terrible burn scars. But I did not die! They were unable to kill me and now I can tell others what the soldiers did to me. That is my victory!

Forced Portering

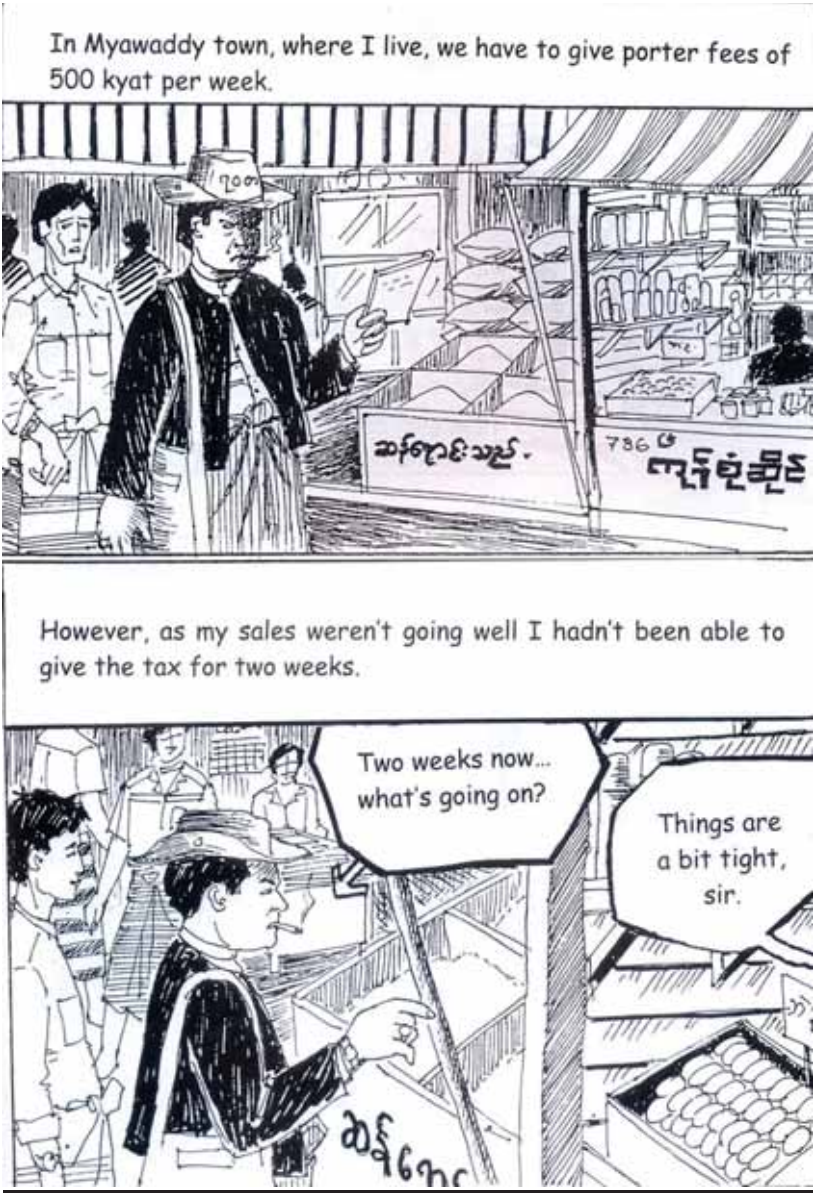
STICK CLOSE TOGETHER IN A TIGHT SPOT
Burma

This comic appeared in the 1998-1999 edition of The New Eye*, a periodical comic book published by Burma Issues to document the struggle of the common people in war-time Burma. The comic form is intended to make stories accessible to readers of varying ethnicity, education and language. By disseminating these true accounts of often ingenious (though not always successful) resistance,* The New Eye's *creators hope to encourage others to find practical and cooperative ways to resolve similar adversities complicating their lives.*

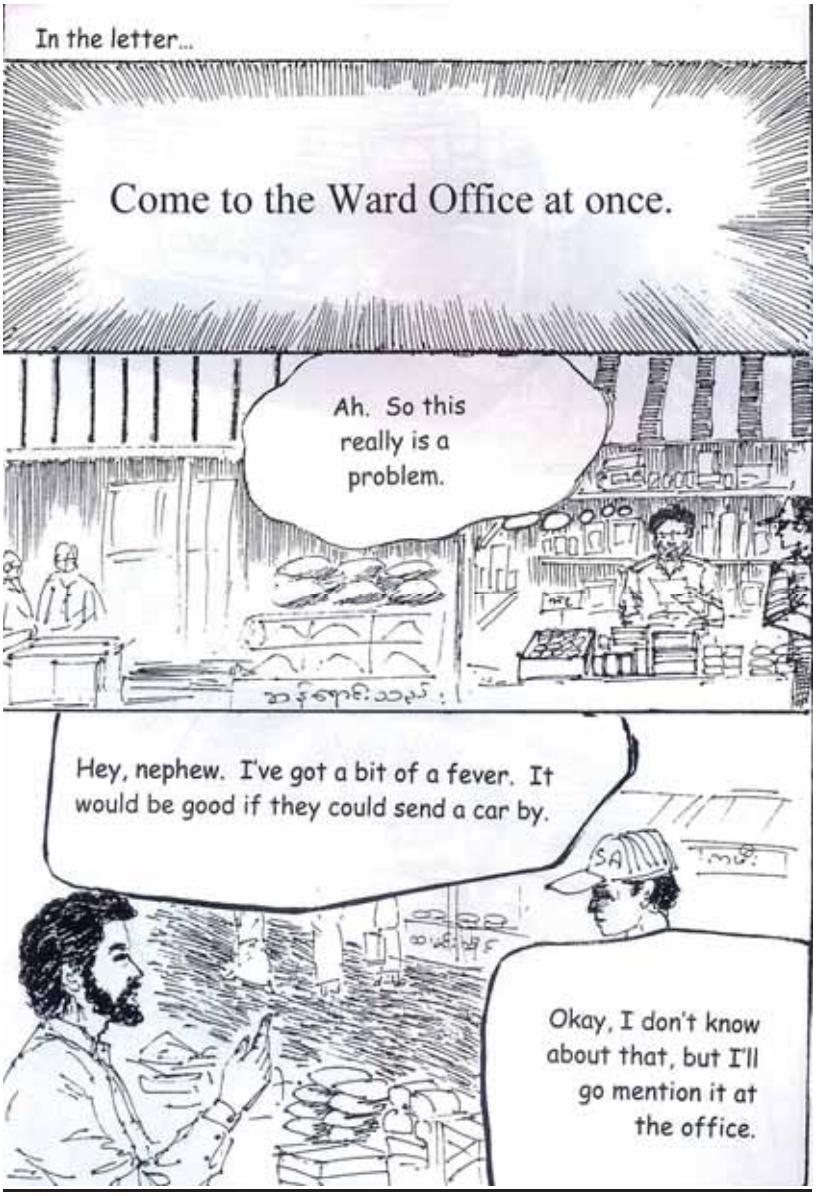
STICK CLOSE TOGETHER IN A TIGHT SPOT

Artist: Tawthoophoe

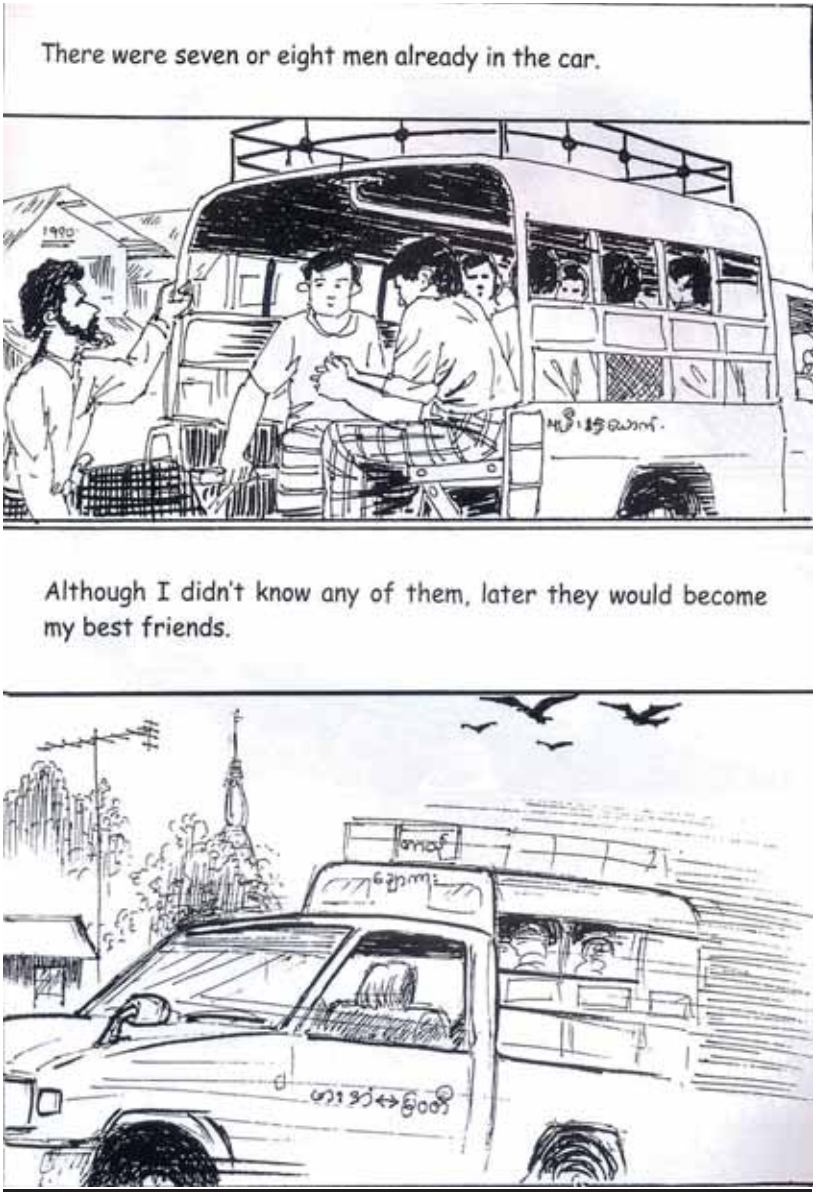
This story comes from Myawaddy Township, Karen State, during June 1996.


In Myawaddy town, where I live, we have to give porter fees of 500 kyat per week.
However, as my sales weren't going well I hadn't been able to give the tax for two weeks.
Two weeks now... what's going on?
Things are a bit tight, sir.

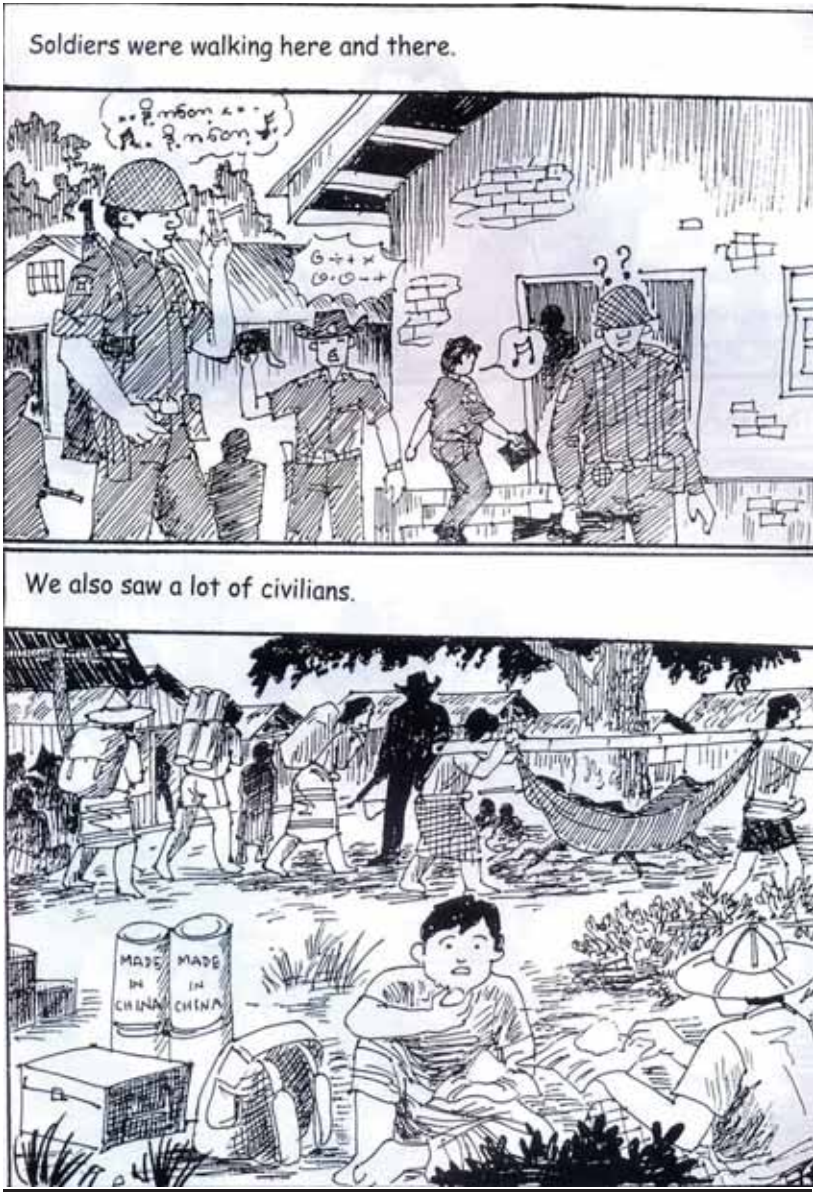

One day...
Hey, uncle, uncle!
Here's a letter from the ward chairman.
USA
Oh, thanks nephew.
I opened the letter...
Hmm... this won't be good news.


In the letter...
Come to the Ward Office at once.
Ah. So this really is a problem.
Hey, nephew. I've got a bit of a fever. It would be good if they could send a car by.
Okay, I don't know about that, but I'll go mention it at the office.


Shortly after a car arrived.
SCREECH!
Okay, come along for a few minutes.
No need to bring anything with you.
Be gone a short while.

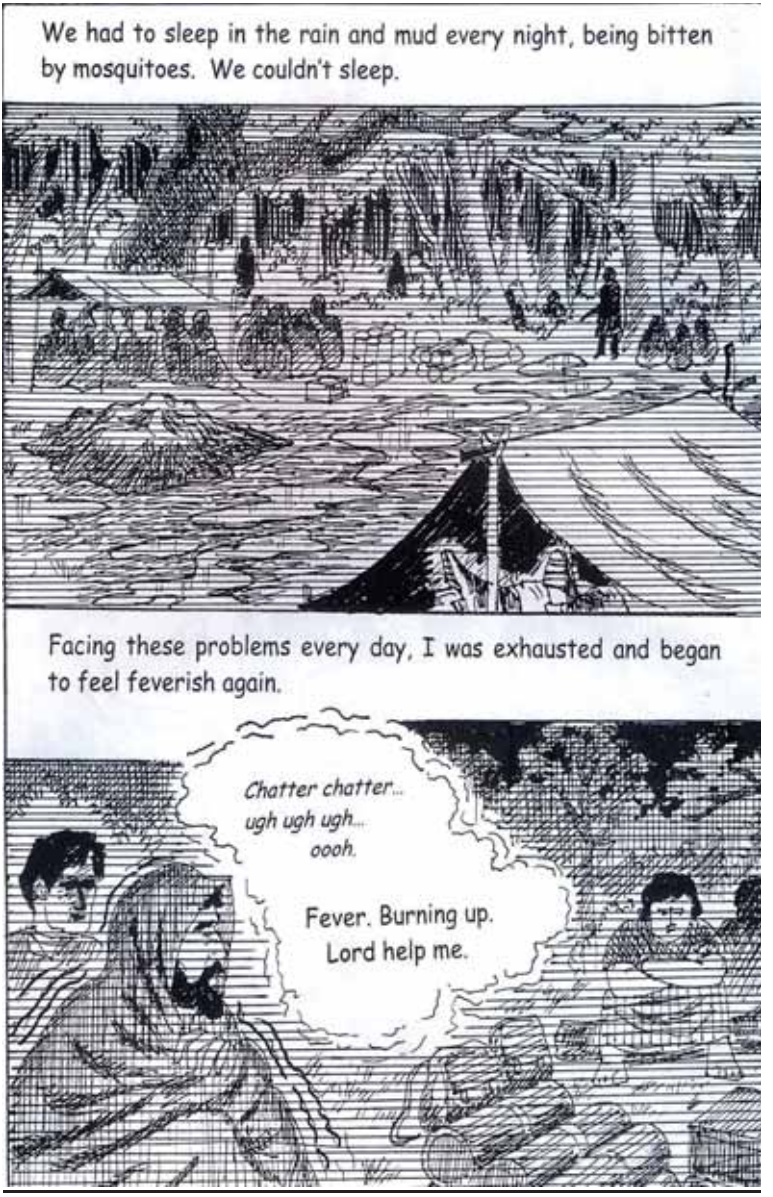

There were seven or eight men already in the car.
Although I didn't know any of them, later they would become my best friends.


The car didn't go to the office.
Trouble.
Hey! Where are we going?
Who knows- they were lying to us.
We've been tricked!
The car left town.
By 2 p.m. we arrived at an army camp.
Okay, everyone out!


Soldiers were walking here and there.
We also saw a lot of civilians.
MADE IN CHINA
MADE IN CHINA

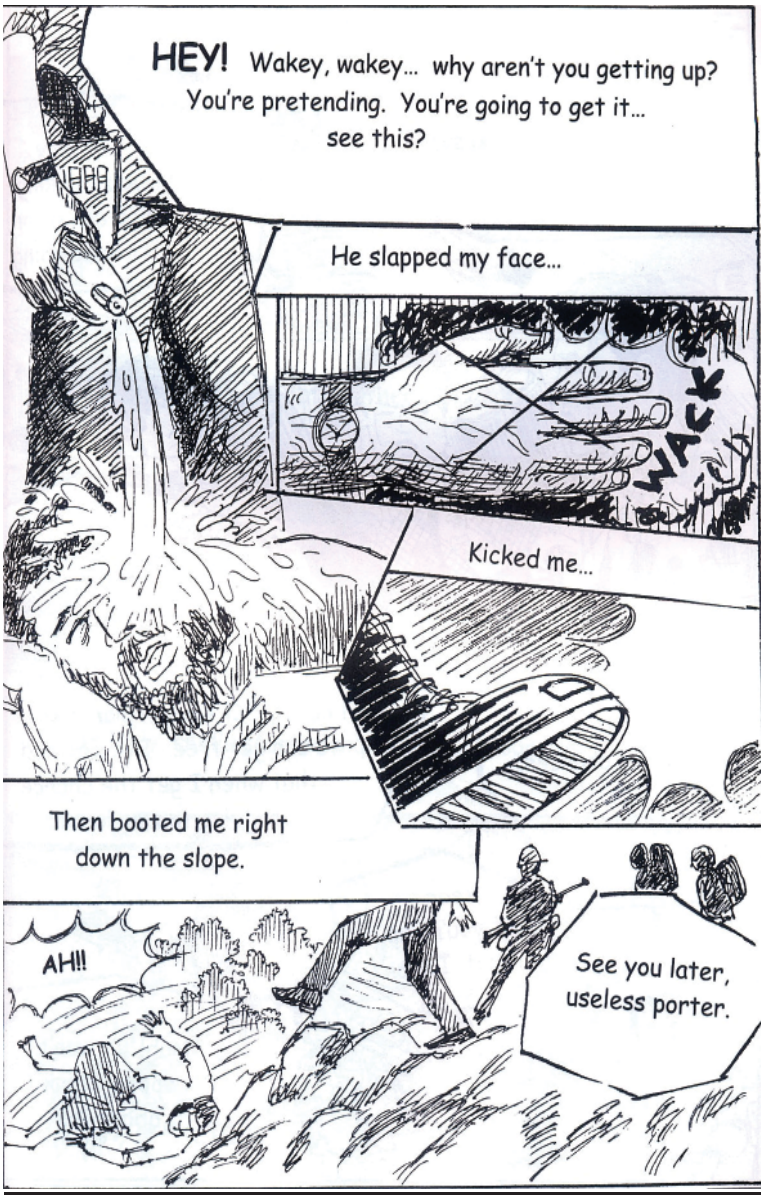

It's trouble... we're going to have to be porters.
Our bad luck.
Then one officer shouted:
HEY! Shut your mouths! Follow me!
Okay, you have to carry six shells each.
MADE IN CHINA
MADE IN CHINA
MADE IN CHINA
Lord! We're dead men!

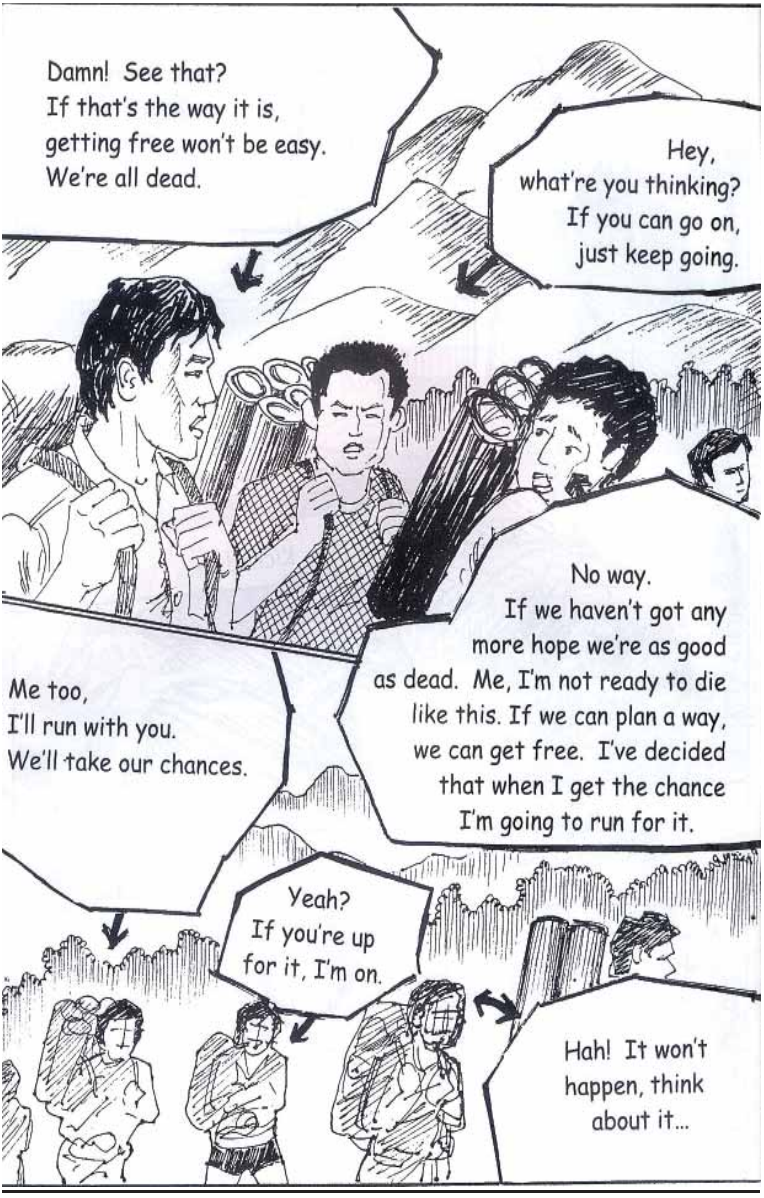

We had to carry the shells and follow the soldiers immediately.
Ow ow... heavy!
Walk quickly!
We had to carry shells back and forth for 17 days running.
So thirsty!
So tired!
So hot!
Such sore feet!
They fed us little.
There isn't enough here to feed a cat. How can we get by?
Yeah, so little.

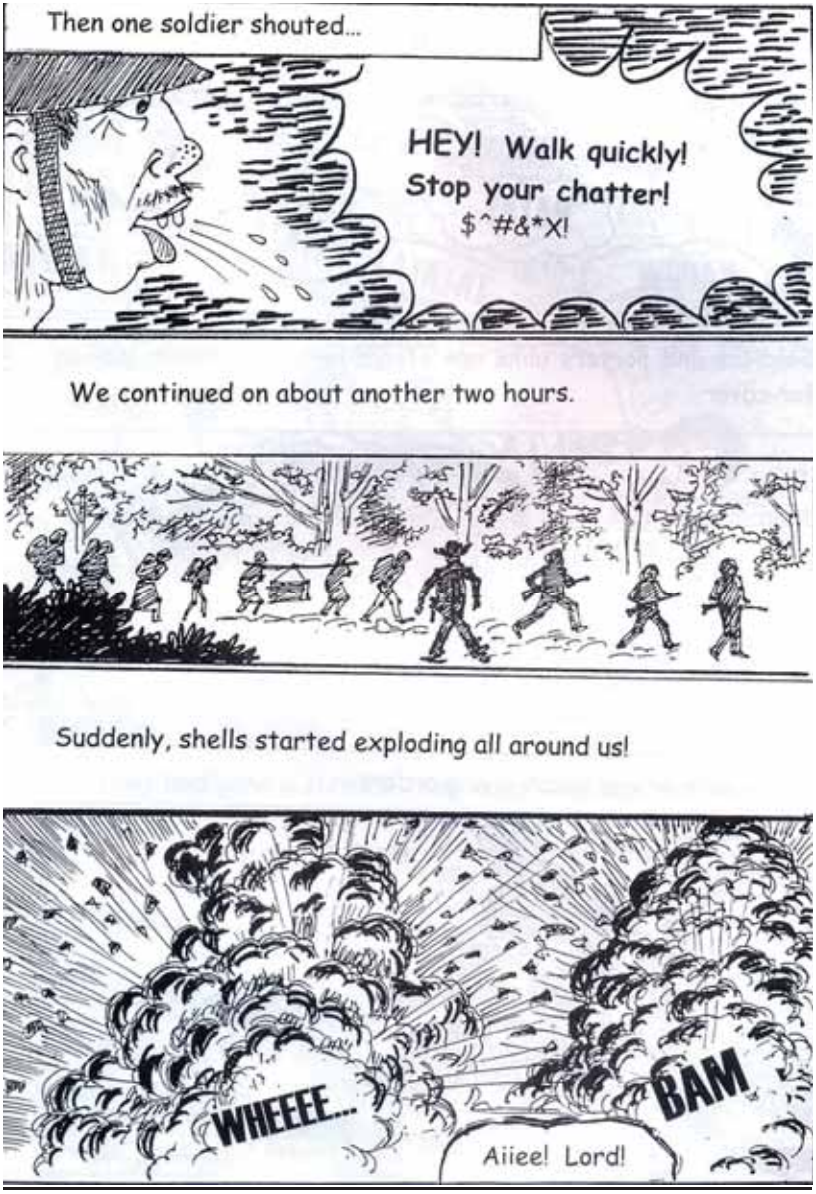

We had to sleep in the rain and mud every night, being bitten by mosquitoes. We couldn't sleep.
Facing these problems every day, I was exhausted and began to feel feverish again.
Chatter chatter... ugh ugh ugh... oooh.
Fever. Burning up. Lord help me.

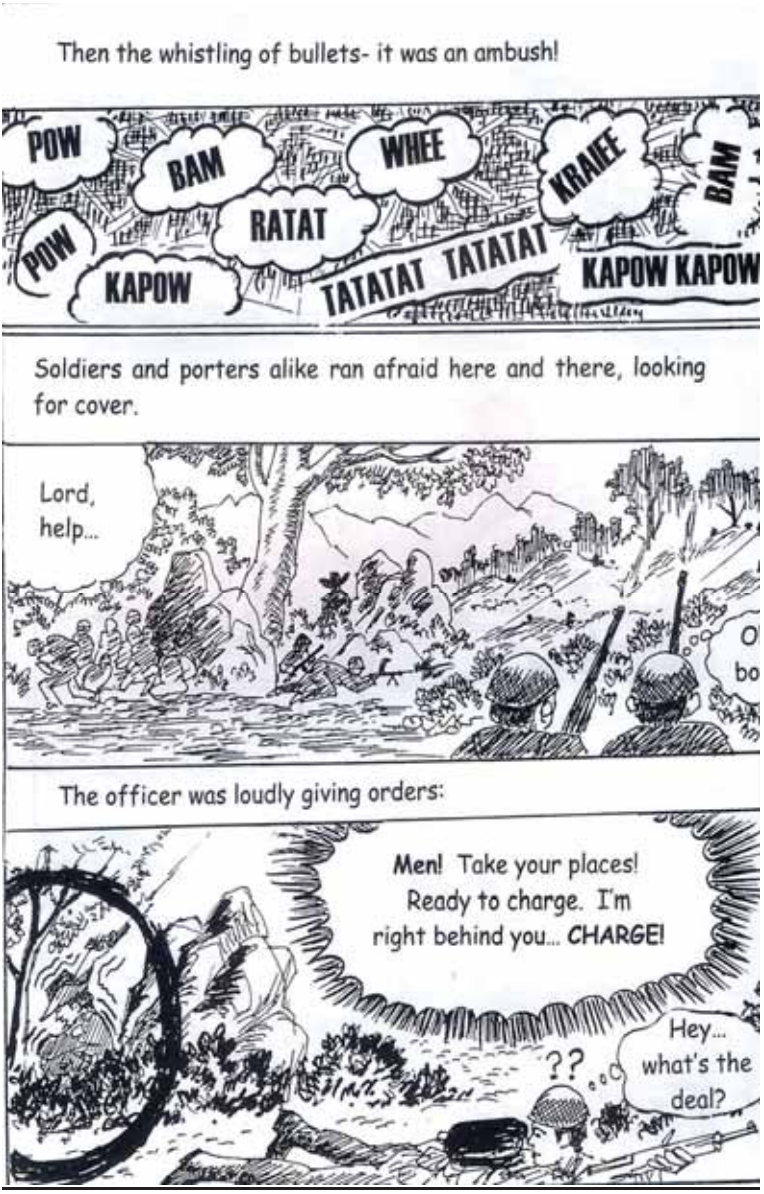

One day we came close to a battle zone. We heard artillery explosions.
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM
Oh, I can't go on... I'm dizzy...
Forget it. Keep walking.
I have no more strength. I can't do it...
Be quiet. I don't want to know.


Shortly after, I fell.
SIR! A porter's down!
Ah! This useless guy!
HEY! Bring me a cup of water!


HEY! Wakey, wakey... why aren't you getting up? You're pretending. You're going to get it... see this?
He slapped my face...
WACK
Kicked me...
Then booted me right down the slope.
AH!!
See you later, useless porter.

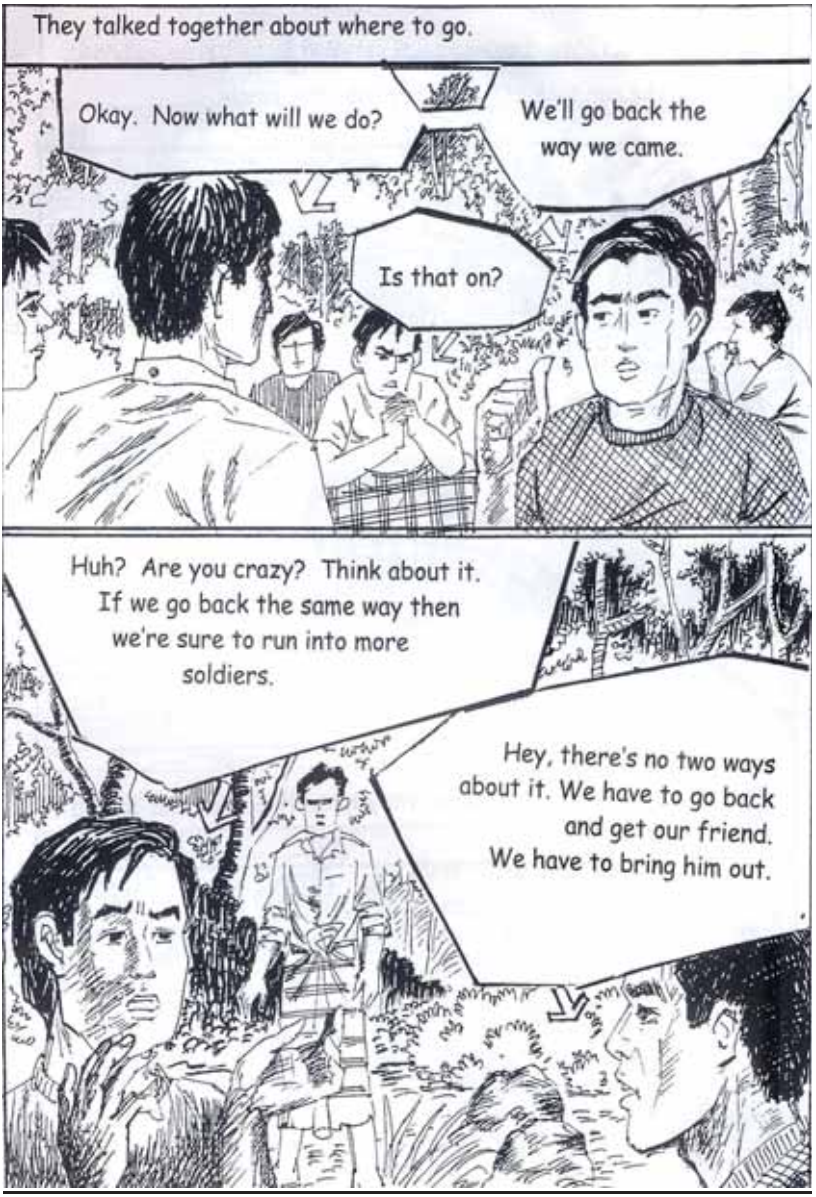

Damn! See that?
If that's the way it is,
getting free won't be easy.
We're all dead.
Hey,
what're you thinking?
If you can go on,
just keep going.
No way.
If we haven't got any
more hope we're as good
as dead. Me, I'm not ready to die
like this. If we can plan a way,
we can get free. I've decided
that when I get the chance
I'm going to run for it.
Me too,
I'll run with you.
We'll take our chances.
Yeah?
If you're up
for it, I'm on.
Hah! It won't
happen, think
about it...

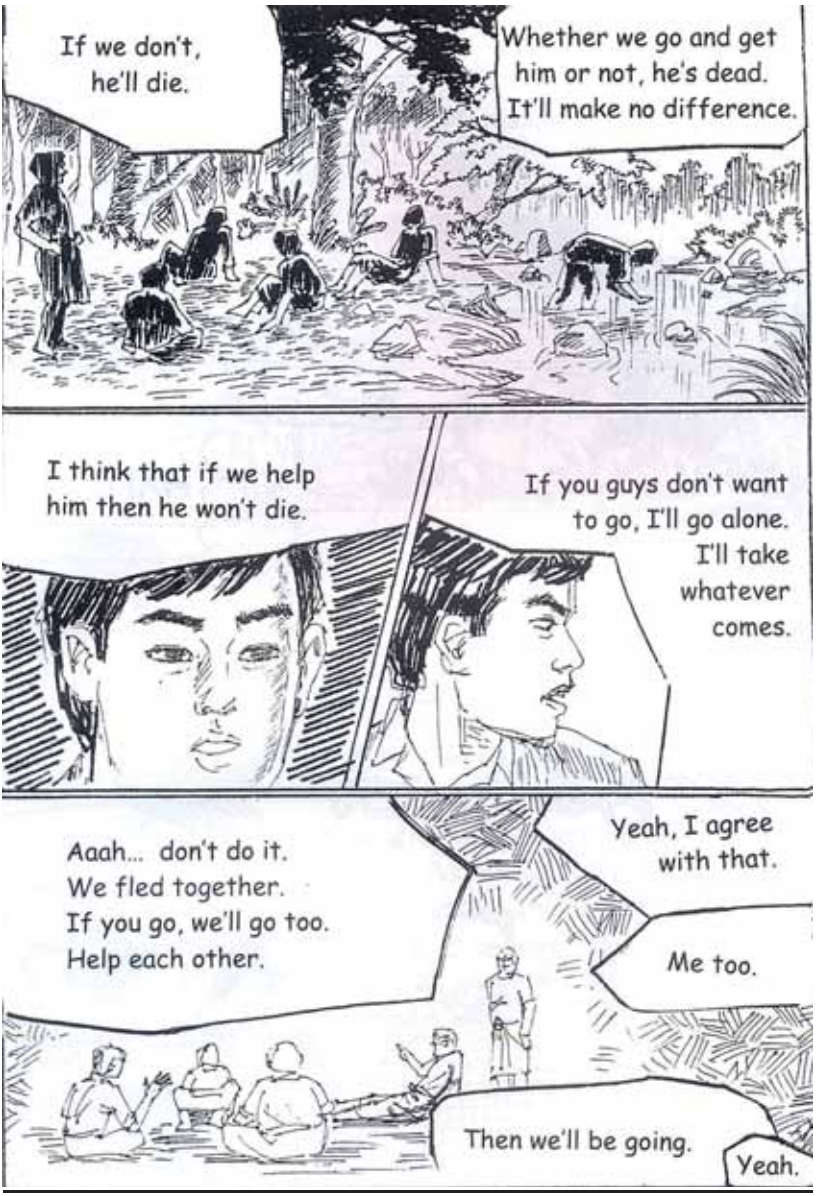

Then one soldier shouted...
HEY! Walk quickly!
Stop your chatter!
$^#&*X!
We continued on about another two hours.
Suddenly, shells started exploding all around us!
WHEEEE...
BAM
Aiiee! Lord!


Then the whistling of bullets- it was an ambush!
POW
BAM
WHEE
KRAIEE
BAM
POW
RATAT
KAPOW
TATATAT TATATAT
KAPOW KAPOW
Soldiers and porters alike ran afraid here and there, looking for cover.
Lord, help...
The officer was loudly giving orders:
Men! Take your places! Ready to charge. I'm right behind you... CHARGE!
??
Hey... what's the deal?

While the soldiers were in combat, the group of porters who came in the car took off together into the jungle.

After they had gone a stretch they were tired out and took a short rest.


They talked together about where to go.
Okay. Now what will we do?
We'll go back the way we came.
Is that on?
Huh? Are you crazy? Think about it. If we go back the same way then we're sure to run into more soldiers.
Hey, there's no two ways about it. We have to go back and get our friend. We have to bring him out.


If we don't, he'll die.
Whether we go and get him or not, he's dead. It'll make no difference.
I think that if we help him then he won't die.
If you guys don't want to go, I'll go alone. I'll take whatever comes.
Aaah... don't do it. We fled together. If you go, we'll go too. Help each other.
Yeah, I agree with that.
Me too.
Then we'll be going.
Yeah.


They came back to look for me.
That useless officer kicked him down the slope somewhere around here...
Not here either.
HA! Over here!
They saw me...
Uncle, uncle... can you hear us?
Water... water... want to drink...
We'll help you. Can you still walk? Can you?

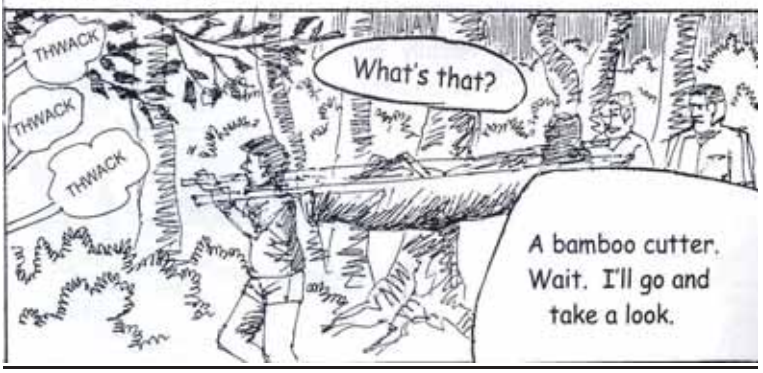

Oh... he can't walk.
So then... we'll carry him.
Ah! That'll be too hard.
Are you kidding? For over two weeks we had to work as porters. This is nothing!

They found two lengths of bamboo and slipped them through the *lengyis*, then lifted me up between them. I was in and out of consciousness...

At night we had to sleep in the forest. We were bitten heavily by mosquitoes, but at least it didn't rain...

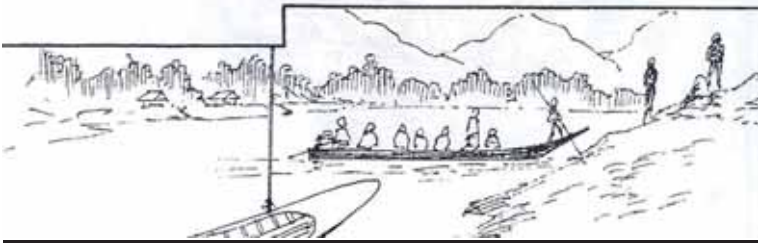
The next day, although they didn't know which way to go they just kept moving away from the fighting. They suffered a lot for me.

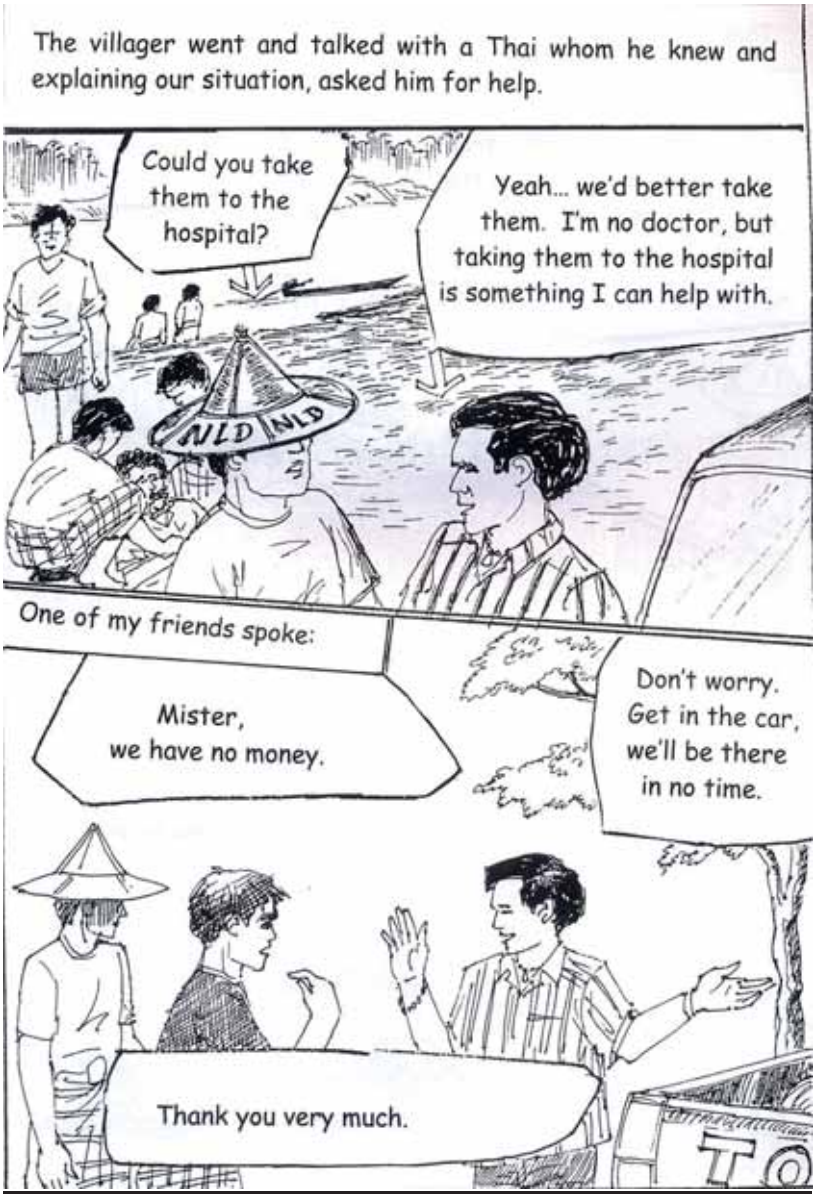
They carried me for hours until we heard the sound of someone cutting bamboo.



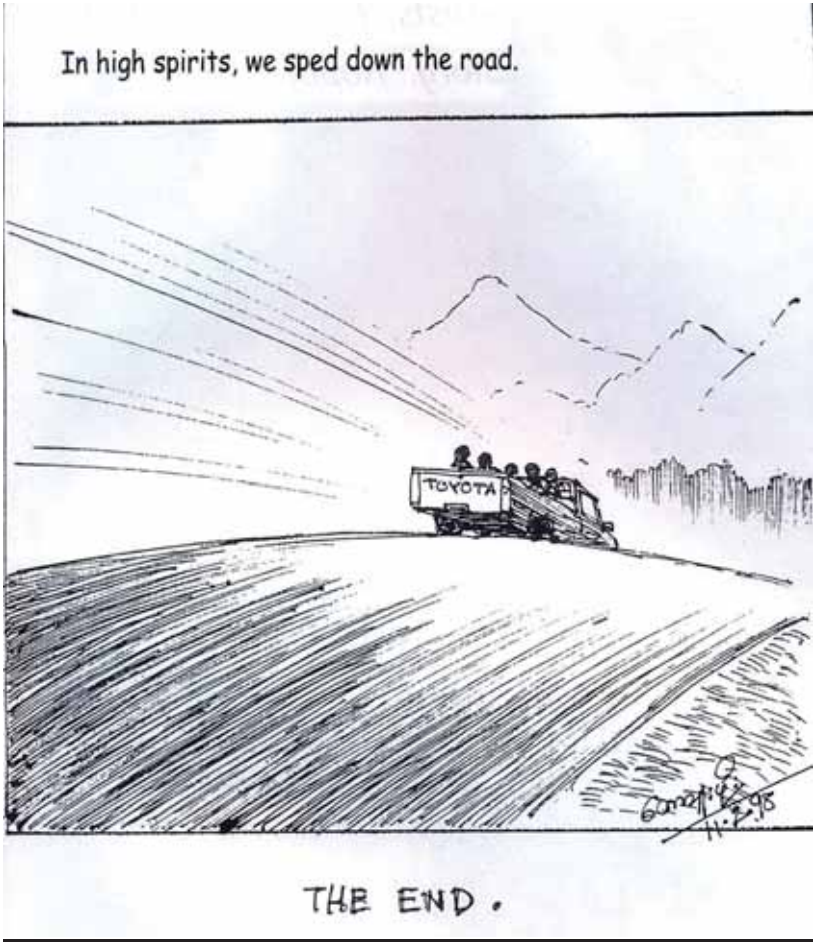
My friends explained everything. The villager was sympathetic...

My friends carried me happily and after a while we were crossing the Than Lwin River and entering a Thai village.




The villager went and talked with a Thai whom he knew and explaining our situation, asked him for help.
Could you take them to the hospital?
Yeah... we'd better take them. I'm no doctor, but taking them to the hospital is something I can help with.
NLD
NLD
One of my friends spoke:
Mister, we have no money.
Don't worry. Get in the car, we'll be there in no time.
Thank you very much.


Then we were in the car...
Okay, now we're really free from danger. We've got the freedom we hoped for.
That's right. Because we worked together we could do it, right?
We also have to thank the villagers who have helped us.
Hey... we're off!


In high spirits, we sped down the road.
TOYOTA
THE END.

Foreign (mis)Understandings

PLIGHT OF ETHNIC PEOPLES NEGLECTED BY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Burma

This is a selection from Epiphanies on the Road to Someplace Else: Journeys Along the Thai-Burmese Border *written by Charina Sanz following a fact-finding trip to the border refugee camps from December 12-24, 2007. For a full report of the trip, see* Report from Thai-Burma Border Fact Finding Trip *on page 153 of this book.*

"Shoot on Sight" is a video documentary produced by the human rights advocacy group, Burma Issues. The opening scene showed actual video clips of terrified villagers running through the forest seeking cover behind trees as bursts of gunfire could be heard in the distance. The camera then zoomed in onto a mother cradling a baby in her arms. Suddenly, in the midst of running, she stopped to breastfeed her baby while squatting on the ground, her eyes gripped in fear.

The documentary was filmed by Saw Htoo Tawny of the Burma Issues whose earliest memories, he said, are very much like the one shown on film. He remembered being carried by his father on his shoulders as they moved about in the jungle for two years. Like everybody else, they escaped fighting that broke out in their village.

The film also captured in many ways the hauntingly common images shared by almost all Karen refugees we met, running in fear, burning of villages, and relatives being killed, scenes embedded in a collective memory of terror and violence. So is it with Tawny who dreamed of becoming a film maker one day and making a hit Hollywood movie like "Blood Diamond" that would tackle the plight of ethnic peoples in Burma, "so the world would know about our feelings, our struggles, our sufferings," he said

"The real tragedy in Burma," said one Karen activist, "is actually found in the heartlands of the ethnic villages which suffer the most from the brutality of the military junta." Ethnic activists feel that the world's attention is only focused on the struggles of the democratic

rights opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi as could be gleaned in last September's (2006) monk-led protests. The "ethnic cleansing" that happens in the country sides, they say, do not even merit reportage from the international press despite the scale, magnitude and duration of nearly two decades of military atrocities.

For more than half a century now, the Karens have been waging a guerilla resistance struggle for autonomy led by the Karen National Union and its armed wing - the Karen National Liberation Army - against the Burman-led government. They are pushing for recognition of a 1947 agreement signed by the government that was supposed to grant them full autonomy at the end of a two-year transition period. In a complex chain of historical events, the successive military rule led by the Burmans had justified the quelling of the rebellion as basis for the military offensives and abusive control tactics that are aimed to terrorize and cow the people into submission. The Karen Human Rights Group reported the following range of tactics: "forced relocation, the destruction of villages, burning of crops, the rape of women and girls, planting of landmines and implementation of shoot on sight policies." But then they also claim that the motive could be far more rapacious than counter-insurgence, that is, control over resource-rich ethnic lands.

The military campaign which began sixty years ago has already forced hundreds and thousands of people to flee their villages and to seek refuge in the border areas. Some of the refugees have been living in the camps since the 1980s; many of the young Karen activists we met have in fact been either born outside Burma or had grown up in the camps. There are about a hundred and fifty thousand refugees housed in ten camps near the border inside Thailand, mostly coming from the Karen, Karenni and Shan states. Those who fled their villages but have chosen to brave it out in the jungles instead of crossing the border are called the "internally-displaced peoples," numbering to about more than half a million people. "We hope the world would also be concerned that we the ethnic peoples are being driven away from our lands, our villages burned, our men killed, our women raped," said one refugee leader.

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Burma

This reflection by Saw Mort written in spring 2009 is based on his experience working with Burma Issue, an international movement based in Thailand working to build creative grassroots action for JustPeace in Burma (www.burmaissues.org). Saw Mort has worked there for the past 10 years, most recently in the fundraising department.

Based on my experiences working with my organization, I don't want to make a clear judgment about whether funders spending money on workshops and seminars is good or bad. The real problem is that some funders provide mainly short-term support and so they want to see the quick results and impacts within one or two years. In other words, they want to see a quick benefit to the people.

It is usually hard to see the immediate impact of our efforts when working with grassroots community like those in the war zones of Burma. But when a workshop or training is conducted in Thailand, for example, photos can be taken, impacts on participants evaluated and a good report written for the funders in a very short time. This makes the funders happy because they have "proof" that their money was used effectively.

During the last workshop I attended about "Civil Society Perspective on Conflict and Peace," I met with one woman activist from Aceh Indonesia. She reflected that this workshop spent too much money for food, rent, travel and accommodations. Perhaps, she pondered, it would have been better to do the workshop in a very simple style so less money would be used up. In a workshop like this one, people talk and talk and then go back to their homes. It is possible that none of the information shared during the workshop will reach or even benefit the victims of conflict. The money, my Aceh friend said, could actually provide useful activities in a grassroots community for one year.

I have learned many lessons from the people in the marginalized communities. They have their own wisdom and way of thinking and

we need to learn from them. In many of the big workshops organized by the funders, the funding agencies do not take time to listen to the marginalized but rather just share their ideas and "wisdom." They can become a problem and even a threat to the grassroots movement for JustPeace.

I met with one of my friends who work at the UN providing help to the victims of typhoon Nargis that ravaged Burma in 2008. I asked him why the UN does not support IDPs in Burma like they support the victims of Nargis. He replied that they have to work with the government (Burmese military junta) so they can find some space to help the people. I really wonder if this is the right thing for the UN to do. Can they help only the victims of Nargis when there are several million villagers who have suffered for decades already under the military junta? Anyhow, I would like to say to my friend that when you cooperate with the military junta and you recognize them as the government of Burma, you oppress people in Burma and you support the regime to kill many more people in the IDP areas. I would like to say that if we say we are talking about justice but we try to help people by cooperating with a junta that is not elected by the people and is not accepted by the people, then the impact of our work is to further oppress the people.

So donors should be aware of this serious situation. They should also be aware that many civil society organizations now know that funders like to fund workshops and seminars because they can see easy and quick results. Some of these civil society organizations then organize workshops and seminars to compete for these funds rather than to really serve the needs of the marginalized. Workshops and seminars can be useful in the movement for a true JustPeace, but we must always try to be aware of how much of this support and money really benefits the people who suffer the most from conflict.

Loss of Ethnic identity

CONVERSATION ON CULTURE
Burma

This is a selection from Epiphanies on the Road to Someplace Else: Journeys Along the Thai-Burmese Border *written by Charina Sanz following a fact-finding trip to the border refugee camps from December 12-24, 2007. For a full report of the trip, see* Report from Thai-Burma Border Fact Finding Trip *on page 153 of this book.*

K.T.L heads an environmental advocacy group. He told us that he was once a student leader in high school but was forced to flee Burma when soldiers started looking for him. He later joined the armed guerilla movement as a combatant. 'But I had to leave because jungle life is not meant for me. I was stricken with malaria."

Discussions later drifted towards the struggles of the Karenni people in preserving their identity and culture while living as refugees inside Thailand. "In our state, we have our traditional knowledge, our traditional ways of maintaining the forest, but when we stay in refugee camps, that knowledge is gone, " says K.T.L. "We do not have land for farming; no forest to hunt for food; we are not allowed to take food outside the camp when we become hungry. Our people have now become beggars."

There is dignified grace and passion in the way these young people spoke about their struggles for autonomous self-rule and democracy in Burma. Most of them were educated inside makeshift classrooms, and I could picture them in my mind reciting words and numbers just as the students in Than Min were. K.R., who is very articulate, is himself a refugee who was only five when he first came to the camp and like many others still remembers living in the jungle, hiding in the border, when the whole village was burned down.

"Culture has its ways of evolving, it never dies," K.R. says emphatically, a point that his colleague T.R. has elaborated further. "Yes, but our culture had been destroyed," T.R. says, "and there was disruption that was not of our own choosing." Later on, the exchanges

became more passionate but after a while K.R. had to excuse himself as he had to attend a school sports event inside the camp. When asked if he also considers resettlement," he replied, "for as long as refugees are still here, I will still be engaged in social work. If everybody goes, then I too will have to go." Finally, he got up to leave, saying, "Hope comes from what you do."

WHO AM I?

This picture is by Saw Eh Kaw Taw, one of the children who participated in the Refugee Children Drawing Workshop organized by Burma Issues and the Karen Student Network and held in the Mae La Camp on May 26-29, 2009. The workshop included 40 children between the ages of 10 and 14. The goal of the workshop was to reveal children's thoughts, experiences and feelings about happenings in the camp via drawing, and to raise awareness among outsiders to the refugee camp so that they might show recognition and empathy toward children's rights and dignity. The children's artwork was exhibited at the Fly Beyond the Barbwire Fence Festival organized by the Friends Without Borders Foundation in Chiang Mai as part of World Refugee Day on June 20.

Third-country resettlement: Brain drain

FROM RESISTANCE TO REFUGEES AND RESETTLEMENT: THE KAREN STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND SURVIVAL

Burma

This is a revised article, originally written and published by Saw Kapi on September 15, 2007 on the blog "Unconventional Thoughts and Commentaries: OPINIONS & IDEAS by and about the Karen people of Burma" *(*http://ieds.blogspot.com/2007/09/resistance-and-resettlement.html*).*

The Karens began their national struggle for self-determination in 1949 with the Karen National Union (KNU) being the spearheading organization. Throughout the 1980s and in the early 1990s, the movement was relatively economically self-sufficient, militarily strong and politically hopeful. But those good old days are long gone and the situation on the ground today is increasingly inauspicious, both politically and militarily. The number of displaced Karen villagers has consistently increased over the past decade. More and more refugees—often by the hundreds—are leaving the refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border to resettle in a third country. What does all this mean to the Karen resistance movement and the future of Karen people in general?

The resettlement of Karen refuges by the thousands has both negative and positive consequences on the Karen resistance movement. One notable and immediate impact, as a result of mass resettlement of Karen refugees, is on the refugee camps and the remaining population itself. Usually, the first ones to leave the refugee camps as part of the resettlement program are those with some type of skills and educational background, who often play critical roles in the operation of schools and medical clinics in the camps. As a result, the refugee camps are experiencing increasing shortages of teachers, medics and skilled workers. It is quite obvious that the refugee camps inside Thailand and other opportunities to resettle in a third country have

become a significant "pull factor" for the population inside the country in their decision making—whether or not to completely abandon their villages, which are often vulnerable to attacks by the Burmese troops. Forced relocation of Karen villages by the Burmese authorities has made it difficult for the mobility of Karen resistance forces in the area, but the complete abandonment of the area—by the Karen villagers in hope of getting to the refugee camps across the Thai-Burma border—makes the situation even worse. Without Karen villages and villagers, for example, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) may find it difficult to maneuver its forces in the areas.

In general, resettling refugees in developed countries is a necessary humanitarian response to Burma's decades-long political deadlock. It resolves immediate security issues the refugees have to face at the Thai-Burma border; they are able to escape from fear, especially of attacks, persecution and abuses by the Burmese, Thai, and, in some cases, Karen military splinter groups. Not only are they able to escape from the confinement of small makeshift camps, but these Karen refugees will be able to develop a sense of permanent residence in their new host-countries. And, if carefully pursued, there are greater economic and educational opportunities in these countries, such as the United States and Canada, than in current refugee camps in Thailand.

On one hand, it is undeniably true that resettling in a more developed third country gives the Karen refugees an unprecedented access to economic and educational opportunities that they would otherwise never get. But on the other hand, those who lack some foundational language skills or basic education may find themselves in a very difficult situation upon their arrival. Free social services that are available to newly arrived refugees are limited to only a few months from the date of their arrival. It may be very difficult for families, especially with elderly persons or young children in the family, to transition from government-assisted to self-supported resettlement. It is expected that the refugees may not be able to start pursuing any education during their first year. But if properly advised, those with some form of formal education background may continue to pursue their education in their new host-countries. In the United States one year after of their arrival, those Karen refugees who are older than 18-years old can start their education at a local community college. It

may be difficult to go to school full-time while supporting yourself or your family, but certainly it will be a good idea to pursue a part-time education, while working full-time.

In fact, as we continue to face an ongoing military oppression by the Burmese military regime, the right of Karen people to defend themselves must and should always be exercised. We have defended and will always defend ourselves. But those in exile should take advantage of their position and help raise the profile of our struggle. Young Karens in exile should explore law, international relations, political science, etc. so that we can read, write and present the case of the Karen people to the world. A good Karen lawyer, for example, can present a case of genocide against the Karen people before an international criminal court. Also, Karens in exile can seek formal education, professional skills, such as computer science, law, business administration, economics, accounting, etc., and help their own people in the areas in which they are skilled and knowledgeable.

At the very least, one can work hard, save money, and send a portion of what he or she earns to the needy Karen IDPs, families of Karen soldiers or refugees. Most Karens are already doing this, I believe. While each individual effort cannot be underestimated, Karens in exile can be more effective by making a collective effort to organize fundraising campaigns and develop a systematic distribution mechanism with accountability.

On the part of the Karen National Union (KNU), as a leading political entity that has been representing Karen people's interest, it can initiate some critical measures that politically prepare those who are leaving for a third country. While it is difficult, if not impossible, for the KNU to stop the refugees from leaving the camps in Thailand, it can encourage the departing refugees to continue engaging in the affairs of Karen people while living abroad. It is very easy for young Karens in exile to lose touch with the reality of their people back home if they are not continually reminded of their roots and what is going on. Perhaps the KNU can establish a Department of Refugee and Overseas Karen Affairs to communicate, reach out to and work with the Karen constituents abroad.

The struggle for the right to self-determination that started sixty years

ago is now fighting for its own survival as the exodus of refugees continues. In the early 1960s and 70s, the KNU was regarded as the main body that brought to the forefront the Karen struggle as—more than a mere question of a humanitarian issue in need of redress—a national fight for freedom and rights. And yet it must also be acknowledged, as uncomfortable as this may be to many of us, that the Karen struggle for self-determination has been reduced to an endeavor for national survival.

DIFFICULT TO MOVE FORWARD, DIFFICULT TO GO BACK, DIFFICULT TO REMAIN: RESETTLEMENT AND REMAINING POPULATIONS

Burma

This is a revised version of an article published by Susan Banki and Hazel Lang in Forced Migration Review, 30 (April 2008)*, pp. 42-43 (*http://www.fmreview.org/burma.htm*). Revisions were done by Susan Banki in April 2009. This article is based on research commissioned by the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT). However, the analysis, conclusions and recommendations are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the members of CCSDPT.*

'Chuwa ma yeh, ga ma ye' is an expression in the Karenni language, spoken by an ethnic group from inside Burma, that translates roughly as 'between a rock and a hard place' or, more accurately, 'difficult to move forward, difficult to go back.' The phrase aptly characterises the emotions of many of the 135,000 refugees on the Thai-Burmese border who, after decades of living in refugee camps with their eyes metaphorically turned towards Burma, are now being offered the possibility of resettlement to a third country. From 2006 to 2008, more than 36,000 refugees from the camps resettled to third countries and as many as 20,000 are expected to resettle in 2009.

On the one hand, it **is** difficult to move forward; refugees are understandably anxious and confused about what life in a new

country will hold if they choose to resettle. Most recognise that even the best educated among them will experience grave social, economic and cultural challenges, particularly at the outset. On the other hand, it is difficult to go back. Burma's crackdown in the wake of the Saffron Revolution in 2007 demonstrates the intransigence of the Burmese military junta, and the government's mishandling of the Cyclone Nargis crisis in 2008 – delaying visas for aid workers, preventing aid from reaching some communities – explains why not only refugees, but other irregular migrants, are impoverished enough to prefer to cross the border into Thailand, and stay there at present.

One might add a third component to the Karenni phrase: difficult to remain. Although refugees in camps in Thailand have been the beneficiaries of assistance from more than twenty humanitarian organisations, living in legal limbo has taken its toll. At present, camp residents are restricted in their movements and few are permitted to leave the camps to pursue livelihoods or continue education.

Is it really difficult to remain? To answer this question, the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT[1]), the coordinating body for NGOs who operate on the Thai-Burmese border, commissioned a report to determine the impact of resettlement on the remaining refugee population.[2] Follow-up research by the author in 2008 supported and supplemented the report's initial findings.

The research indicates that, first, while resettlement has done much to boost the hopes of those who are resettling, many of those who remain have experienced a loss of morale as their friends and colleagues depart. Resettlement has sapped the energy of those refugees who have been working for change in Burma, because the focus of the international community has shifted to moving refugees *away* from Burma, rather than on creating a change *within* Burma.

Second, resettlement has done little to improve conditions for non-refugee displaced populations, in particular undocumented migrants in Thailand and internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Burma. These populations continue to suffer as a result of the abuses of Burma's military regime. There was hope that, in the wake of resettlement, irregular migrants of all kinds might gain permission to

work. Instead, the Royal Thai government (RTG), taking advantage of its increased capacity to identify and regularise some portions of the population, is limiting the mobility and employment opportunities of those who are not documented.

At the same time, IDPs in Burma, with no thought of resettling, are indirectly affected by the recent resettlement program in two ways. First, the RTG's fear that Burmese are crossing the border expressly with the thought of trying to resettle has led to a toughening of border controls in some areas, ignoring the need of some IDPs to escape temporarily into Thailand's jungles for short-term relief. Second, resources from within Thailand – in the form of rice, teachers, and medical supplies – have been an important element of IDP survival for decades. As the resettlement program decreases the resources available in Thailand, it also decreases the resources that can flow to IDPs.

Third, although resettlement is taking place *en masse*, a higher proportion of educated, skilled and experienced refugees have resettled first, relative to the rest of the population. This is partly because some resettlement countries have tended to select refugees for resettlement based not on their status as refugees but on their 'integration potential' – which generally translates as the best educated and most highly skilled.[3]

As the skilled and educated leave, it is increasingly difficult to find replacements within the existing population, which places a strain on service delivery in the camps. Since refugee camps are not an open labour market, there is only a limited supply of skilled workers for essential jobs – including vital leadership jobs. In some camps, particularly those where the resettlement process started before the US adopted its group resettlement approach, virtually every person with higher secondary education is already employed. A loss of the most skilled and educated populations in the camps has had reverberating implications, particularly in the health and education sectors.

In the health sector, the departure of many highly trained refugee health services staff has presented multiple challenges for NGOs to sustain high quality health care. Non-refugee doctors supervise the

camp-based refugee staff and provide ongoing training, while day-to-day health-related activities rely on refugee staff. Training replacement refugee staff takes not only time – in some cases eighteen months for medics and between nine months and one year for maternal health workers – but experience. Newly trained recruits, even if they have the time to receive the full term of training, are simply too inexperienced to serve as leaders in the health sector

In the education sector, teachers are resettling in relatively higher numbers as well. Finding good teachers has always been difficult, even prior to the start of resettlement, and will continue to be so. Of greater concern, however, is the loss of supervisors, school principals, subject coordinators, teacher trainers and other long-serving education staff. Many of these individuals have been trained in key education tools such as curriculum development, classroom management and school supervision. The loss of personnel who can provide educational guidance heightens the problem of losing long-serving teachers, influencing the quality of teaching, monitoring and training.

The education sector is also affected by resettlement for two other reasons. First, as teachers receive lower remuneration than other NGO workers, losses in other sectors will compound the shortages in the education sector, as teachers will be tempted to move into empty, higher paid jobs. Second, the capacity-building approach adopted by education agencies was designed with repatriation in mind, specifically to empower refugees to conduct their own trainings, monitoring and reporting. This very approach now makes the education system more vulnerable to decline.

In terms of camp administration, the impact of resettlement on the number of staff of camp management committees and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) has been manageable to date, given the way their structures allow for the relatively smooth succession of staff in these roles, although gaps in key personnel have resulted in heavier workloads for remaining committee members. Overall, comparatively small numbers of their staff have departed or applied for resettlement. But as the overall pool of skilled, educated and experienced people in the camp decreases, NGOs search out the best available staff – and will inevitably compete for qualified camp-based people serving in CBOs. People recruited to work full-time in NGOs will have less time

to dedicate to working with CBOs, which generally do not pay stipends.

In all three sectors, the loss of leadership has posed challenges for camp residents and the NGOs and CBOs that serve them. Relationships built up over years, between Thai authorities and camp leaders in all three sectors threaten to break down, as new camp leaders do not have the automatic trust of officials from the Thai police, military, Ministry of Interior, and District Official's office, all of which are critical to a smoothly functioning camp.

It may seem logical to assume that as the number of refugees in the camps decreases, NGOs who offer assistance will require less resources to carry out their mandates. But the research indicates that in the short term, mass resettlement increases the needs of the remaining population, because refugee camps require more training input to replace departing skilled workers. NGOs have noted an increase in their resource needs to fund: teacher preparation courses, apprentice subsidies, hospital referrals, and replacement trainings. Thus, costs in the short term remain high, even as the quality of camp services threatens to decline.

The following recommendations were developed specifically for the refugee population on the Thai-Burmese border, and incorporate additional recommendations from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[4] Many of these suggestions are already being taken up. In other mass resettlement situations, similar recommendations may be appropriate.

- Encourage donors to fund training and capacity building programs and initiatives for inexperienced and new staff in the camps.
- Implement trainings for new replacement workers as early as possible and pursue 'shadowing' with a pool of available individuals.
- As early as possible, undertake a survey of skills and employment abilities of the refugee camp population in order to identify refugees who could be included in a pool of replacement staff.
- Recruit camp workers from among new arrivals in the camps and from the local (Thai) population.

- Promote, as much as possible, an open and predictable resettlement process so that refugees know how long it will take for resettlement to occur, and agencies involved in delivering assistance in the camps know when their staff will be departing.
- Streamline service delivery by reassessing the assistance needs of the camps, combining some facilities and simplifying management structures.
- Encourage skilled refugees to relocate between camps.
- Encourage the host country to expedite the permission of refugees, expatriate workers and local staff of NGOs and CBOs to work in and travel between camps.
- Encourage longer-term contracts for expatriate and national staff to ensure continuity in the system.
- Advocate for greater integration of remaining refugees into national health and education systems, in addition to formal approval of livelihood programs inside and outside the camps.
- Consider the impact of resettlement on non-refugee groups such as undocumented migrants and IDPs, and work with humanitarian agencies to secure their protection as well.
- Continue to work with the international community to advocate for change in Burma and address the underlying root causes of protracted conflict there.

There have been some positive benefits of resettlement, such as a decrease in camp overcrowding, more remittances, increased opportunities for positions for younger refugees and streamlining of camp services. But for many of those who remain, particularly in the short-term, the changing dynamics on the border have exacerbated the difficulties of life for displaced populations. Predicting how and when these difficulties occur, and planning for their mitigation, is the first step to ensure a resettlement process that is positive from beginning to end.

[1]www.ccsdpt.org/

[2]Report by Susan Banki and Hazel Lang, 'Planning for the Future, The Impact of Resettlement on the Remaining Camp Population', July 2007; online on the Thailand Burma Border Consortium website at www.tbbc.org. The analysis, conclusions and recommendations are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the members of CCSDPT. The findings summarised in this chapter also

incorporate comments by UNHCR from their assessment of the original report: UNHCR, 'Assessment of Recommendations Relating to the Impact of Resettlement on the Remaining Camp Population in Thailand', October 2007, as well as follow-up research in July 2008.

[3]The US group resettlement approach, which has a relatively speedy resettlement process and for which there is neither a quota for the total number of refugees to be accepted nor 'integration potential' criteria for acceptance, should eventually redress the disproportional drain of skilled leaders from the camps. As UNHCR has noted, the demand for services in the camps will decrease as the population decreases significantly. But in some camps, the damage has already been done, and is nearly irrevocable.

[4]Ibid, and Herve Isambert, UNHCR, 'Impact of Resettlement on the Health Sector in the Thai/Myanmar Border Camps: Towards a Strategic Approach', September 2007.

KAREN VOICES ON RESETTLEMENT

Burma

This article is by the Karen Women's Organisation, along with Sarah Fuller and Eileen Pittaway It was first published in Forced Migration Review, 30 *in April 2008. The KWO (www.karenwomen.org) is a community-based organization of Karen women working in development and relief in the refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border and with IDPs and women inside Burma. The KWO also encourages awareness of women's rights and promotes women's participation in community decision making and political processes. With little support and often under threat, members of the KWO conduct research, provide programmes and support, and challenge the wisdom of international NGOs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Eileen Pittaway works at the University of New South Wales Center for Refugee Research, Australia (*www.crr.unsw.edu.au *) and Sarah Fuller was an intern and student at the Center.*

In 2005 the Royal Thai Government eased restrictions and allowed resettlement from the camps on the Thai-Burmese border to countries in the West. The impact of resettlement in the camps has been of great concern to the Karen Women's Organisation for several years. They want the voices of the refugees, in particular refugee women, and of their community-based organisations to be heard in discussions on the

provision of durable solutions. Sadly, refugee women have to scream to be heard whispering. As a result of the ongoing conflict, persecution and human rights abuses suffered by the Karen people, caused by the SPDC and ongoing encampment in Thailand, resettlement was requested by local refugee-run Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) on behalf of some refugees in the camps. Approximately 4,500 refugees were resettled to several third countries in 2006, and up to 15,000 by the end of 2007.[1] Since the resettlement programme began, the situation in the camps along the border has worsened significantly; as many key community members were speedily resettled, camp facilities and services suffered from lack of structure and capacity. Various reports compiled by NGOs detail some aspects of the consequences – but mainly present the NGOs' and UNHCR's views. They do not look at resettlement from a cultural identity perspective and they do not show the full impact of resettlement on people living in the camps. Despite the fact, for example, that rape and sexual violence are part of the SPDC's strategy and a big problem in the camps, there is little acknowledgement of gender issues in the reports.

Refugees' voices

The KWO and the Karen Refugee Council (KRC) are part of the refugee entity; we are from the camps and we are refugees. The people in the camps need us to be a voice and to speak out on their behalf. The authorities (donors, UNHCR, supporters) need to talk to the people in the camp and they do that through us. However, when we look at ourselves we are weak because Thailand is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention and has no obligation to support refugees or even accept them. They do not want to jeopardise their relationship with the de facto government in Burma but they do have humanitarian obligations. As a result, we can work and live here but we are kept in hiding. They will seldom permit foreigners into the camps, especially the media. We are always cautioned to be discreet when speaking with foreigners. We have lived in these camps for 20 years. The conditions are very poor. What has kept people going is hope – and the belief that one day we will return to our homeland, to a peaceful and democratic Burma. We have kept these dreams and have fought to educate our children and maintain a community structure which would sustain them when they return. The introduction of the

resettlement programme is a major challenge to that dream. While the Karen community fully supports the rights of its people to seek safety and security in a third country, this comes at a high cost. It challenges the struggle we have been engaged in for the past 20 years and the meaning of this to so many families. This is causing a deep loss of hope and grief for a homeland that may never be regained.

Initially people wanted repatriation. This is not possible – but people need a place to belong so we were the first to call for resettlement, especially for the young people who need good education. Education in the camps stops at level ten, which is not enough. We do not worry about the old people. Our concern is the young people; they are our future and they need citizenship and a place to belong where they are treated as human beings. Some young people have been in camps for 20 years. Resettlement has become a love/ hate issue for us. On the one hand it can provide good opportunities, including education. On the other hand, however, our camps need harmony and organisation and skilled people. We don't want to object, because we called for this and it will be good for those resettling, but it has left the community without resources and support and fearful for the future. All the educated and skilled people are being taken. From what we hear, their skills will be of little use to the country they are going to but they are important here. People think that if they have been teachers in the camps they can be teachers in the new country but it does not happen like that. And for those left in the camps it is having a terrible impact on health and education. We already struggle for our identity and our freedom, and we are losing this even more through all the people who are leaving. Community structures are falling apart because everyone is waiting for resettlement. It is causing a lot of stress and conflict within families. Some family members wish to resettle while others wish to stay. We still need to consider those refugees who remain here. It is the people who can speak out and have capacity who are leaving. Those left are illiterate, simple, hidden people. They will have no voice. Some of us need to stay because we need to help and work for the people here.

Journey to the new country

For those who opt to resettle and are selected, the process of resettlement itself is often traumatic. The International Organization

for Migration (IOM) and the NGOs in the camps do not tell the community the negative aspects of a country or the challenges. People choose quickly because they are encouraged to put their names down. The process happens very fast and then they find themselves in the third country and many want to come home again. CBOs report that there is insufficient time allocated and information provided for pre-departure briefing. Only three days' orientation is provided – insufficient for covering all the information needed to facilitate a dignified, positive and stress-free transition to a new life. Many refugees have lived in these camps for much of their lives. They have not been to doctors' surgeries, driven cars, lived in Western-style houses; they do not speak English and know little or nothing about the culture or laws of their destination. If they had more information, they could make better decisions. Something else that is needed is gender sensitivity from staff and translators. Refugee women report that they have to sit in public waiting rooms and are not given the option to have a female translator or a female doctor for medical check-ups. As conflict continues in Burma, more refugees are seeking entry to the camps. Fearing that resettlement is becoming a 'pull factor', the Thai government has closed the border with Burma, and UNHCR is not registering new arrivals. Those newly arriving have generally spent long periods in hiding in the jungle before crossing the border. Their health is not good and they are suffering from malnutrition. But they receive no food rations nor health services. There is not enough food in the camps for everybody and this is causing great hardship.

Recommendations

The Karen CBOs and Karen leaders do not wish to stop people resettling to third countries but they do want concerns openly discussed in order to maximize the possibilities for successful resettlement. We recommend that:

- third country governments, UNHCR, IOM and other agencies a) consult with Karen leaders to discuss the whole process of resettlement before implementation and b) plan how best to handle the negative consequences of resettlement

- all information be made available in the Karen language

- resettlement country governments provide information about their country's resettlement policies to the Karen CBOs

- general information about third countries and their social welfare, political and legal systems be provided, in a way that is accessible for rural refugees from extremely isolated situations

- the experiences and circumstances of families already arrived in third countries be reported back to the Karen community in Thailand – including both positive and negative aspects

- the process of resettlement be slowed down so that refugees have more time to make decisions and sufficient time to hand over their work to others and so that the community has time to train replacements

- an in-depth evaluation be conducted of the impact of resettlement on the community remaining and funding be allocated to enable CBOs to provide intensive training for new staff in the community to replace those leaving to resettle.

1. www.tbbc.org/resources/2007-6-mth-rpt-jan-jun.pdf

BHUTAN

The isolated Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan is known for its provocative development strategy of "Gross National Happiness." A lesser known fact is that the country has generated one of the highest numbers of refugees in the world in proportion to its population in recent history.

Bhutan is a nation made up of several ethnic groups. One of these is the Lhotshampa, people of Nepali origin, who began to settle in the south of the country in the late 19th century at the invitation of the Bhutanese government. By 1930, according to British colonial officials, much of the south was under cultivation by a population of Nepali origin that amounted to some 60,000 people.

In 1958, Bhutan passed its first citizenship act and the entire Southern Bhutanese population, which had until then had very little security in Bhutan, was granted full citizenship. Nationwide programs of development and modernization commenced in 1961, and the economic importance of the South continued to grow as major hydro-electric power projects were established. However, southerners did not own land or settle permanently to the north of a certain latitude, and there was very little interaction between the northern and southern populations until the late 1960s. During the late 1960s and 1970s, with the development of education, social services and the economy, many Southern Bhutanese rose to occupy influential positions in the bureaucracy.

During the 1980s, the government began to view the mostly Hindu, Nepali-speaking Southern Bhutanese as a threat to unified the political order. A new citizenship act passed in 1985 became the basis for a so-called "census exercise" in Southern districts, in which all members of the Southern population had to produce documentary evidence of legal residence in 1958, or else risk being declared a non-national.

In 1989, all Bhutanese became liable to a fine or imprisonment if they ventured out in anything other than northern traditional costume, and the Nepali language was removed from the school curriculum. In late 1990, public demonstrations against these and other new policies took place in all Southern districts, and those who took part were branded "anti-nationals" by the government.

Several thousand Southern Bhutanese were imprisoned for many months in primitive conditions; more than two thousand were tortured during heir imprisonment and very few were formally charged or stood trial, according to Amnesty International. Many of those who were subsequently released in amnesties declared by the King of Bhutan found that their houses had been demolished and their families had fled the kingdom.

As more and more people had their citizenship revoked in the successive annual censuses, a trickle of refugees into Nepal during 1991 turned into a flow of up to 600 per day in mid-1992. By the end

of that year, some 80,000 were sheltering in UNHCR-administered camps in Nepal's two south-eastern districts. The numbers have since swelled by some 20,000 more—100,000 Lhotshampas in seven Nepali refugee camps, living in legal limbo for almost two decades. Finally in 2009, a new option has arisen: third-country resettlement.

It is important to note that the history of Lhotshampa flight is contested by the Bhutanese government, which claims that: 1) many of those in the camps were never citizens to begin with; 2) government policies were not meant to be exclusionary, but only to maintain the character of the country; and 3) Lhotshampas are not refugees because they willingly gave up their citizenship when they left the country. Yet Lhotshampas in the camps have held onto old passports, land receipts and other documentation to assert that their land and property were taken away unjustly and by force. For the most current and comprehensive account of Lhotshampa emigration and flight, see Michael Hutt's *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (Delhi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

IN, AROUND, AND AWAY FROM BHUTAN: THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR LHOTSHAMPA REFUGEES

Bhutan

Susan Banki wrote this article in April 2009, partially based on research conducted for a June 2008 briefing paper: Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: Anticipating the Impact of Resettlement (Sydney: Austcare).

Bhutan is often considered the darling of the international aid community, accepting aid in careful measures that align to its Gross National Happiness metric, which includes environmental and cultural protection. The country also made headlines in March of 2008 when the 27 year-old sovereign Jigme Khesar Wangchuk voluntarily abdicated the throne in order to urge the country into a democracy. Reflecting on events such as these, the news from this country of about 650,000 is generally positive. Very little is known about the black spot on Bhutan's reputation: the treatment of the Lhotshampas – the primarily Hindu, Nepali-speaking minority groups from Bhutan's southern regions.

In 1990, tens of thousands of Lhotshampas fled from Bhutan in the face of discrimination and forced displacement. After crossing through India, they sought refuge in Nepal. Today, about 100,000 Lhotshampas live in 7 refugee camps in Nepal's eastern Jhapa and Morang districts, where they have remained in legal limbo, claimed as citizens by neither Bhutan nor Nepal.

After 18 years, a lasting solution to the plight of Lhotshampa refugees is now available. As on the Thai-Burmese border, several industrialised countries agreed to resettle Lhotshampa refugees *en masse*. As of May 2009, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nepal had already received 70,000 expressions of interest in resettlement, representing nearly three-quarters of the entire refugee population. Within several years, the refugee population that has resided in Nepal for two decades will be unrecognisable in size and structure.

This article presents a study of the Lhotshampa refugees as they are today. First, it describes the current situation for the Lhotshampa

population, both inside and outside of the refugee camps. Second, it examines how resettlement has affected the current social and economic climate for refugees and surrounding communities. Third, the article draws on field research conducted with recently resettled refugees to the US and Australia to provide a glimpse of what resettlement has thus far provided for this newly resettled population.[1]

Why Refugees? A brief history of Lhotshampas in Nepal

Bhutan's southern Nepal-speaking population began leaving Bhutan in early 1990, in the wake of increasingly rigid citizenship laws and cultural/linguistic policies that favoured the ruling Dzongkha class at the expense of the Lhotshampa population.[2] Protests by Lhotshampas during that time were followed by a swift crackdown by Bhutanese police, and soon after tens of thousands of Lhotshampas crossed the border into India and then continued on to Nepal. By September 1995, there were nearly 90,000 Lhotshampas in Nepal.[3] This fleeing population, and their children since born in eastern Nepal over the past 18 years, constitute the 100,000 Lhotshampa refugees currently registered in the camps in eastern Nepal.[4]

Several attempts to resolve the Lhotshampa refugee issue have floundered. Bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan intended to facilitate the return of some refugees to Bhutan resulted in claims by the Government of Bhutan (GoB) in June 2003 that only 2.4% of one camp's population were 'genuine' citizens of Bhutan. Even this small number was not permitted to return, however. Camp residents were so incensed at how few Lhotshampas were determined to be 'genuine' that they attacked Bhutanese government officials who came to visit the camp, stalling any further discussion of repatriation.[5] Not a single refugee has been permitted to return.

The Lhotshampa population today

Lhotshampa refugees share ethnic, linguistic and religious similarities with host communities in Nepal, which has permitted a *de facto* tolerance of some refugee movement and the possibility of low-paying daily labour. For example:

- Every morning, refugees ride their bicycles out of the camps to participate in informal daily (but irregular) wage labour. The availability of daily labour, and hence the number of workers exiting the camps daily, depends upon the season and the local economy, but it is estimated that thousands of refugees work daily in nearby fields or construction sites, where they earn between 50 and 120 rupees per day ($.77 to $1.85 USD).
- An estimated 1,000 refugees travel to India seasonally, to take jobs or study in schools there.
- It is estimated that hundreds of refugees live in Kathmandu, where, with a good education, they work in higher-paying jobs.
- Some refugee students attend local schools far enough away from the camp that they do not return each night, but instead, stay in nearby towns.
- Thousands of educated English speakers work in boarding schools throughout Nepal, where they provide a helpful boon to Nepal's English-speaking teacher force.
- More than 100 refugee families are registered with the Government of Nepal (GoN) and live officially outside of the camps, most of whom are political leaders.

Nepal's qualified tolerance to its refugee population in permitting such movement compares favourably to other refugee situations where camps are more restrictive. Nevertheless, refugees report being exploited by local bosses because of their precarious status. In addition, refugees' freedom of movement is contingent on the GoN, which can, and has, blocked exit from and entry to the camps at a moment's notice, most recently during the April 2008 elections, when officials were concerned that refugees might try to cast proxy votes in the name of other voters.[6]

Thus, Lhotshampa refugees are generally confined to camps for purposes of residence and the vast majority are unable to pursue secure livelihoods. Most remain dependent on international humanitarian aid. The World Food Programme (WFP) provides food and runs income-generating activities in the camps, while UNHCR ensures that fuel and housing materials are provided to the refugee population.

Over time, however, international donors have grown increasingly reluctant to continue funding a refugee situation with no end in sight, and, in light of Bhutan's refusal to accept any Lhotshampas back into the country, programs initially designed to prepare refugees for repatriation have been scaled back. Agencies' budgetary constraints have led to cuts in food, fuel, housing materials and clothing, exacerbating difficulties for the population.[7]

Even refugees with poor English skills know the words 'languishing' and 'warehoused' and use these terms frequently to describe their situation in the camps. Several fires in the camps in previous years have served as stark reminders of the refugees' vulnerability. For example, in 2006, a fire destroyed 95 percent of one camp's structures and left most of the camps 9,770 residents homeless.[8]

Non-camp Lhotshampas are the less familiar face of this population. An uncounted number of refugees have obtained citizenship in Nepal, either through intermarriage or by securing 'real documents the wrong way.' In theory, such refugees should no longer be registered in the camps, but 'secret citizenship' is obviously a present, if understudied, phenomenon. Refugees – those who have obtained citizenship and those who have not – live in various towns in Nepal, as well as in India.

There are also at least 80,000 Lhotshampa remaining in Bhutan. This population is difficult to access, because few tourists visit Bhutan's southern region where remaining Lhotshampas reside. Many of those who remain there – often the relatives of those who left for Nepal, and now, resettlement countries – have had their jobs and citizenship papers taken away. 'My sister can do nothing,' noted one refugee. 'She cannot travel from our hometown, she cannot vote, and she cannot work. I call her when I can, but we cannot talk about anything with meaning on the telephone.' It remains to be seen if Bhutan's shift in 2008 to a democracy will improve the situation for the internal Lhotshampa population, or if the resettlement of such a large segment of Lhotshampas globally will provide impetus and resources for change within Bhutan. The next section considers some of the ways in which resettlement may, or already has, impacted the region.

The Impact of Resettlement

As on the Thai-Burmese border, resettlement of Lhotshampa refugees is occurring quickly. The departure of large numbers of refugees over a relatively short period of time will significantly alter the camp population and structure. As with any significant change, this one will have both positive and negative impacts on the remaining Lhotshampas – those who don't want to resettle, those who cannot resettle and those who haven't yet resettled – and surrounding communities.

Since the resettlement offer first emerged in 2006, refugees' conflicting opinions about resettlement have resulted in a highly charged camp atmosphere in which hope, resentment, and anxiety have all played significant roles. At stake for those who oppose resettlement is the loss of their political movement, the loss of their community and the loss of the dream of returning to Bhutan. 'We have worked for so many years to make repatriation a reality,' lamented one refugee. 'With resettlement, I fear that we will give it all up.'

Implicit in this view is the opinion that the option of resettlement is disastrous, not only for those who espouse it, but for everyone, because declining numbers of refugees in the camps lessen the urgency of promoting return to Bhutan. Thus 'anti-resettlement' refugees have discouraged resettlement in a number of ways, from publishing statements to issuing threats to engaging in actual violence against agencies working toward resettlement and attacking 'pro-resettlement' refugees. In April 2009, a former member of the anti-resettlement Communist Party of Bhutan (Maoist) left the party. After applying for resettlement, he was killed.

Spates of violent attacks associated with the advent of resettlement in and near the refugee camps represent a clear deterioration of the security environment. In response, the GoN has brought in a larger police presence, which has reduced overall crime. Initial concerns that this might lead to restrictions on refugee movement have been groundless.

As large numbers of refugees depart from the camps, common resources (such as firewood) are more readily available and camp facilities less overcrowded. Remaining refugees are eager to exploit these resources, although the materials that remain after a refugee family's hut is disassembled are not sufficient for supplementing remaining huts. Still, a combination of desperation and resentment has led to house raids; the parents of one recently resettled family returned back to their hut after seeing their family off to discover that all their belongings had been taken, because other camp residents believed that the parents were resettling also. Refugees have also been known to sell their household belongings too soon after hearing that they are to be resettled. It is not uncommon for refugees to have to wait between three to six months after they receive word that they will be resettled. During those months, they still require items for everyday survival.

Because the skilled and experienced camp residents are the most interested in resettling and have put forward their applications first, there has been a depletion of educated, skilled and experienced workers in the education and health sectors. In education, resettlement has not only depleted the number of experienced teachers, but has also led to an irregular school environment. The NGO charged with primary school education in the camps, Caritas, is in the constant process of training replacements, but educators are leaving faster than they can be replaced. Morale in the schools, too, is wavering; both teachers and students on the verge of resettling are often absent or have difficulty concentrating, leading to a situation in which school is viewed as a 'casual' phenomenon. For those remaining in the camps, this presents a negative consequence of resettlement. As friends and relatives leave, remaining refugees not only lose members of their community, but the stable structure of school for their children.

The health sector, too, has been affected by resettlement, as experienced nurses and midwives depart for resettlement. One refugee noted that health agencies 'can get Nepalese doctors to do the work also, but for them, it's just work, and the refugees don't want to go to them.'
Thus, for remaining refugees, resettlement represents a deterioration of the quality of life in the camps. And while it was originally believed that overseas remittances would increase as refugees resettle

to richer countries, this has not materialised, mostly because 1) refugees are resettling with their entire families, and 2) those who have given money are interested in giving it to causes for political reform in Bhutan, rather than to camp residents.

The strength of the political reform movement in the face of resettlement has yet to be determined. There has also been fear among Bhutanese political leaders that resettlement will dilute the efforts of refugees who continue to promote political reform in Bhutan, as their cause loses its urgency and its constituents. On the other hand, resettlement may lead to an injection of money – and perhaps other resources such as media attention for political leaders.

Finally, for local Nepalis living near the camps in Nepal, the departure of large numbers of refugees represents a decrease in competition for local resources and employment, and over time, a contraction of the local economy. At the same time, because educated Lhotshampas serve as teachers at schools all over Nepal, in the wake of resettlement, several schools have lost among their best and lowest paid teachers.

Resettled Refugees: Early Reports

Early in the resettlement process, many refugees – both those eager to resettle and those who were simply curious about what resettlement represented – were reluctant to show an interest in resettlement for fear of being attacked. Thus, information sessions held by UNHCR were ill-attended at the outset, and rumours about resettlement countries prevailed. Expectations about jobs, housing, and social interactions were often inaccurate, sometimes presenting the resettlement country as a utopia, and sometimes presenting it as a place of despair and hopelessness.

As the number of resettled refugees has increased, however, realistic and accurate portrayals of resettlement countries have made their way back to the camps. Information sessions run by the International Organisation for Migration to refugees on the verge of resettling offer detailed information, specific to each resettlement country. Resettled refugees learn about job and education opportunities (and how these might be limited at first), the types of housing that they might be

living in, how to travel on local buses and trains, and cultural expectations. ‘It has been ok at the start because I didn’t think I would be able to get a job right away. They said it would be hard at the beginning, so I feel alright,’ admitted one recently arrived refugee to New York. A photo exhibit of resettled refugees in New York organised by UNHCR has been shown in the camps in Nepal as a way to dispel rumours and offer as accurate a depiction as possible of resettled life.

Expectations notwithstanding, the downturn of the global economy has made its mark on the most recent arrivals in resettlement countries. Elder care and child care are two categories where many educated immigrants have traditionally been successful, but in a slowing economy, these jobs have suffered cutbacks. In the US, for example, jobs are more difficult to obtain, and even menial work is unavailable. Refugees who used to be among the best educated in the camps, who have bachelor’s degrees and experience as teachers, cannot find any type of work. This affects not only Lhotshampa refugees, but all recent arrivals. In Syracuse, where 220 Lhotshampa resettled in 2008, one resettlement NGO reported that while it used to be able to find jobs for 90% of its clients, in May 2009 it could only find jobs for 50%.[9]

The lack of affordable housing is another issue, particularly for refugees settling in urban areas such as Sydney. ‘If you don’t have family nearby, they won’t send you to Sydney. Instead, they will send you to Adelaide or Tasmania,’ noted one recently arrived refugee, who recently found a three-bedroom unit that he planned to share with his wife, parents, and four children. It will cost him 420 AUD per week. Refugees accustomed to sharing a small hut with a large family might prefer to live in smaller and less expensive units, but settlement agencies, understandably anxious to ensure that refugees’ housing conditions are on par with other Australians, encourage more spacious accommodation.

As for other migrants, education is the viewed as the cornerstone of success. Recently arrived Lhotshampas in both the US and Australia are eager to educate themselves, recognising that this is the most effective path toward integration into their new countries. In Australia, several recently arrived refugees reported that they are

eligible for 510 hours of free English classes. These recent arrivals are in the top level of English classes, with classmates mostly from China and India. “We don’t only learn English, but also our civic duties, how to job hunt, Australian history, and how to write a resume. They are trying to prepare us for the future.’ Another refugee in Australia, deciding to forego the English classes, is studying pathology in the hopes of obtaining a job when his courses are finished.

In the US, the hope of higher education is a distant one. A refugee who resettled to San Francisco recently completed his first eight months in the US and is thus on the verge of losing his federally-funded monthly refugee assistance payments of 359 USD. He now realises that college is expensive enough that it will be a long time before he can consider attending.[10]

The majority of recently resettled refugees seem to understand that their first years will be difficult. ‘It’s frustrating to have no work. I have to start at the beginning. But it is great to escape the threats of the camp, and I hope there will be opportunities for good work. I was a big teacher before.’ When asked the hardest part about resettling, many mentioned the difficulty of leaving behind their friends, with whom they lived in very close quarters for their whole lives. For the elderly, whose English is often the poorest, and who sacrificed the most to leave the routine of Nepal, the hardest part is accepting that they may never go back to Bhutan. ‘I haven’t gone back for many years, but now it’s much more far. I miss my home, and I miss my father’s cardamom fields.’

At present, Bhutan is unwilling to accept Lhotshampa refugees back into the country. At the same time, Nepal is unable to provide structures that will permit refugees to integrate successfully. The resettlement program, which is moving forward at a rapid pace, promises to provide a durable solution for Lhotshampa refugees where none existed before. For those who resettle, patience will be necessary as recent arrivals navigate new cultures, new languages, and a difficult economy. For those who remain in Nepal, the challenge will be to continue camp services in the face of declining morale and a depletion of skilled and experienced staff. In Bhutan, where thousands of Lhotshampa remain with neither the possibility of resettlement nor integration available, the future is uncertain. It will

depend if the world's most recent democracy will accept the Lhotshampa residents as full-blown citizens.

[1]Quotes by international staff and refugees throughout the chapter come from interviews conducted in Nepal in November/December 2007 and in Sydney and via email in April 2009.
[2]Daniel Schäppi, "Cultural Plurality, National Identity and Consensus in Bhutan," (Zurich: Center for Comparative and International Studies, 2005).
[3]Michael Hutt, "Ethnic Nationalism, Refugees and Bhutan," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 9, no. 4 (1996).
[4]This history of Lhotshampa flight is contested by the Government of Bhutan (GoB), which claims that: 1) many of those in the camps were never citizens to begin with; 2) government policies were not meant to be exclusionary, but only to maintain the character of the country; and 3) Lhotshampas are not refugees because they willingly gave up their citizenship when they left the country. Yet Lhotshampas in the camps have held onto old passports, land receipts, and other documentation to assert that their property and land were taken away unjustly and by force. For the most current and comprehensive account of Lhotshampa emigration and flight, see Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[5]Rakesh Chhetri, "Betrayal of Hope and Dignity," *Kathmandu Post*, 26 July 2003.; and P. G. Rajamohan, "Terror and Refuge," *South Asia Intelligence Review* 3, no. 19 (2004).
[6]"Bhutan Refugees to Be Restricted in Camps," *The Rising Nepal*, 5 April 2008.
[7]As detailed in a 2007 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, agencies have made concerted efforts to plug the gaps created by cuts in essential services, such as distributing coal briquettes in place of fuel and organizing a clothing drive. Nevertheless, HRW reports that refugees' quality of life has suffered, particularly in the areas of education, physical health, and mental health. Human Rights Watch, "Last Hope:The Need for Durable Solutions for Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal and India," (New York: Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2007). p. 19 - 23
[8]"More Funds Needed to Aid Bhutanese Refugees after Fire Destroys Camp," *UN News Service*, 8 March 2008.
[9]Maureen Sieh, "Refugees are finding fewer job opportunities in Central New York," *Syracuse Post-Standard*, 20 April 2009.
[10]Matt O'Brien, "Bhutan's exiles hope for new start in Bay Area," *Contra Costa Times*, 25 April 2009.

SOUTHERN THAILAND

The conflict-zone in southern Thailand, is a sliver of land on the Malay peninsula with a population of around 2 million. The discontent here has simmered since the 1902 annexation by Thailand (then known as Siam) of what had been the kingdom of Patani. The latest outbreak of an on/off separatist insurgency since then started in 2004 and has already claimed 3,300 lives, a casualty-rate seven times that of the Troubles in Northern Ireland (a place of similar size and population).

The Muslims of this region—ethnically, religiously and linguistically distinct from the majority Thai Buddhist population—have more in common with their cousins across the border in Malaysia, and indeed, they lobbied for annexation by British Malaya following the Second World War when that country had returned to colonial rule. The community exists uneasily in a Thailand that has historically preferred to assimilate minorities rather than celebrate ethnic diversity. The scholar Duncan McCargo has observed that the "shared shibboleth 'Nation, Religion, King,'" intended to bind Thais together as a nation, "failed to resonate in Patani."

Patani (or Pattani) separatist propaganda emphasises the distinct identity and the glorious history of the region. Accounts of indoctrination activities in Islamic schools reveal extensive discussion of the history of Patani, with potential rebel recruits also motivated by pan-Malay sentiment and the abusive behaviour of the Thai security forces.

Some of the Malay Muslims' main grievances, reflecting the importance of identity politics and resisting assimilation, centre on education and language policy. Schools have become major battlegrounds in more than a figurative sense; there have been numerous brutal murders of teachers, singled out as state agents who indoctrinate Thai-ness into Malay Muslim students.

Torture and disappearance

A QUESTION OF JUSTICE

Southern Thailand

This story comes from the book Violence in the Mist: Reporting on the Presence of Pain in Southern Thailand[1] *by Sapara Janchitfah. The story was first published on March 28, 2004.*

Most locals want the government to lift the martial law in the South because it has provided an opportunity for authorities to take full military control of areas in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Searching of places or persons can be done without a court warrant, and the law allows the detention of suspects without charge.

“Police came to search my school again on January 10, they came for four consecutive days,” said Maska Haji Abdulla, acting manager of the Burana Tohnor pondok school in Narathiwat.

“I asked for a search warrant but they said we are under the martial law, we do not need one. I told them that Muang Narathiwat is not under the martial law, but anyhow they still continued searching and fingerprinting all the students in the school,” said Maska.

Maska said the searches have affected the students at the school psychologically. Often they suffer in silence, unable to express their pain. But anyone will understand what is being communicated by the big writing, which greets visitors on the school fence: “Where is Justice?”

Many people in the deep South have had to endure much under this martial law. Officials can go to their house and search at night time; their relatives can be taken away with no reason given.

This story was told by an Imam before the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Somshai Wongsawat, on March 19 in Pattani province.

“On March 8, a young man in my area was taken away to a police station. He was immediately interrogated. The police asked him if he knew anything about a gun and a killing. He did not know anything, and he said so. The police then beat and kicked him, but he did not confess as he had nothing to confess. They put him in a police car and pushed their heavy shoes on his neck, pushing it into the car’s floor. Another policeman used a hard object to beat his back as they went along the way to one ‘safe house.’ Here they used electricity to shock him seven times within two days.

“They continued to torture him, but he did not confess. They asked him what a Muslim should do before he dies. Read the Holy Koran, he told them. Then they took him to a mountain and used some material to pull at his throat... but still he did not confess to anything.

"Finally they sent him back home on March 12, his throat swollen and bruises all over his body," said the imam, the owner of a pondok school in Pattani province.

Since this meeting was a closed door meeting, the imam requested that the name of the young man, the place he stays, and the police station where he was taken be withheld to protect him.

The Ministry of Justice has learned about this. What will be the next move of the Ministry to restore justice in the deep South? Will Mr. Somchai understand the risks posed to the people by the boundless martial law? In this case, whether the Ministry of Justice deserves its title is yet to be seen.

[1]Janchitfah, Supara. Violence in the Mist: Reporting on the Presence of Pain in Southern Thailand. Bangkok: Kobfai Publishing Project, 2004. 171-172.

SOUTHERN DISAPPEARANCE: A CASE STUDY

Southern Thailand

This story by Erika Fry was originally published in the Bangkok Post *on November 23, 2008. She would like to extend special thanks to Pornpen Khongkachonkiet with the Cross Cultural Foundation in Bangkok, who served as Mayateh Maranoh's attorney in the case and was especially helpful in uncovering the story. While there is a well-watched record of enforced disappearance in Thailand, focusing more recently on the nation's South, this story features the first case in the three southernmost provinces in which justice has been sought from the courts.*

Before June 24, 2007, Mayateh Maranoh was a school caretaker in Yala's Bannang Sata district. He lived with his wife and two children in a small A-frame house, surrounded by palm trees and, at the time, Paramilitary Unit 41, which was conducting a survey of villagers in the area.

The unit had set up its camp behind Mayateh's home, and according to the testimony of one Unit 41 junior officer, the caretaker was quite neighbourly, and provided water for the unit's cooking and consumption.

At the time, Bannang Sata - categorised a "red zone" in Thailand's deep South - was especially plagued by the insurgency. Security forces were attacked and schools burned. There had been a couple of arson attacks on Banglang school, where Mayateh worked.

In response to the mounting violence, the region's security forces initiated a week-long joint operation, code-named the "Bannang Sata Plan", intended to "separate the fish from the water" and which, by week's end (June 28), had resulted in the arrest and detention of 384 men under the Martial Law and Emergency Decree.

Although Mayateh was not one of the 384 detainees, he was visited by security officials that week. A contingent of 25 or so paramilitary members arrived in four or five cars at his home on June 24. They said they wanted to question him about the fire at the school and, without presenting a warrant, they took Mayateh, his mobile phone, his registered weapon and his car to Bannangsta Intacharat school, where the paramilitary unit was headquartered. They didn't tell Mayateh's wife where they were taking him, why they were taking him or when he'd be back. They just left, and he has still not returned home.

Role play or foul play?

According to the testimony of paramilitary officers involved in the arrest, it was merely a ruse, a "role-play arrest", to protect Mayateh from neighbours or village insurgents who would likely harm him if they learned of his cooperation with authorities.

According to officers, Mayateh was invited to give information and he went to the Bannangsta Intacharat school to do so voluntarily. Some witnesses say he drove himself. Although stories vary and have evolved (by some reports Mayateh left the school and returned later in the day), Mayateh is said to have met with the Unit 41 commander, Colonel Tim Ruanto, at the school for about an hour that evening,

where he shared information about insurgency members and sympathisers and also expressed concern about his own safety. Even so, the meeting was said to have been friendly, conducted with tea under a tree in the school's courtyard.

The meeting ended around 7 pm, at which point Mayateh was said to have requested permission to leave and to have driven away in his car.

This is the story that has emerged in the three court hearings held since August this year, a result of petitions from Mayateh's wife, with the help of human rights groups, to the provincial court in Yala to conduct an inquiry into the whereabouts of her husband.

Because Thailand has no laws which specifically address disappearances, Mayateh's case was submitted to the Yala provincial court under Article 90 of the Criminal Code, which addresses habeas corpus and cases of unlawful detention. This Thursday, November 27, 2008 the court will bring down its verdict.[1]

In reaching its decision, the court will be challenged by the scant evidence that comes with the case. There is no record –although some say one once existed—of Mayateh coming or going from the paramilitary headquarters, nor any formal documentation regarding any "role playing arrest" or his invited conversation with the camp commander.

There is no evidence, no forensic samples, and no body. Although Mayateh's wife filed a missing persons report with the local police several weeks after his disappeared, there has been no progress—and perhaps no efforts made—in any official investigation. This is typical of such cases in the South.

The case was later submitted to the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), which has also taken on the disappearance in Bangkok of lawyer Somchai Neelaphaijit and a few others. The DSI rejected Mayateh's case, however, on the grounds that it was not a special case.

With no real hard evidence, the judges have only the conflicting accounts of six witnesses—a wife, a son, the district governor, and three paramilitary officials—to base their decision on Thursday. There are a few suspicious inconsistencies in the stories, particularly in the testimony of the three paramilitary officers.

There are also the irregularities and curiosities in the officials' actions. Neither a detainee nor an informant for the security forces, Mayateh was a uniquely categorised and completely undocumented "invitee" to the paramilitary headquarters.

The human rights lawyers working on the case point out the further oddity that Mayateh, who had supposedly just provided valuable intelligence and expressed such feelings of insecurity that the authorities had staged his arrest, was allowed to leave the school without protection or any sort of checking up in the following days.

The Unit 41 commander said he learned of Mayateh's disappearance in July, when he received a letter requesting information about him from the district governor. Mayateh's family now receives periodic housecalls and 4,500 baht payments from the military, usually the same officer who first took Mayateh away.

Panitan Wattanayagorn, a political science professor at Chulalongkorn University who specialises in security and other issues in the South, pointed out more obstacles to finding the truth.

"It's difficult. There are conflicting stories. There have been a number of cases where these suspects run to Malaysia, abandoning their wife and family, having been scared by questioning. Other times, individuals may have conflicts with local people who will take advantage of the fact that they were just released from police questioning," said Prof Panitan.

Even if that's the case, he added, the fact that officials were not following established protocol is problematic. "The military did not follow the established regulations. They are supposed to have a court order to pick up people they question. They should have followed proper procedure, and they must explain this in court."

No legal mechanism

Although the circumstances of Mayateh's case are unique, the general story is not. Nine cases of disappearance in southern Thailand were recorded and reported by human rights groups to the UN Working Group of Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) in 2007. These are added to the 39 previous unresolved cases—mostly from the 1992 political crackdown in Bangkok when troops fired on protesters calling for Gen Suchinda Krapayoon to step down as prime minister—reported from Thailand and monitored by the WGEID.

Meanwhile, an activist with Working Group on Justice for Peace (WGJP), a human rights group that documents disappearances and rights abuses in the South, says the organisation has recorded around 30 cases of disappearance in the region since 2002. While many of these were roadside abductions connected to the war on drugs, the activist says there are also a number of recent cases like Mayateh's, in which the disappeared were last seen in the custody of state officials.

It is speculated by human rights workers that most of the disappeared are victims of interrogations that have gone too far. Cases of torture in military detention and interrogation facilities in the South have also been documented, perhaps most alarmingly in the case of Imam Yapa Koseng, who died while in military custody in March of this year. His body was badly beaten and burned. A post mortem inquest is under way in the case and a verdict will be announced on Dec 25.[2]

While there is this well-watched record of enforced disappearance in Thailand, focusing more recently on the nation's South, Mayateh's case is the first from the three southernmost provinces in which justice has been sought from the courts.

"There is no legal mechanism for families of the disappeared," says Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, a human rights lawyer with the Cross Cultural Foundation, which is assisting Mayateh's wife with the case.

The WGJP activist adds: "There have been no prosecutions, investigations even, in these cases. No one has tried to take other cases to court. The biggest problem is no evidence. There has been no

investigation in most cases. Even if the family files a complaint, it's not investigated."

The activist says in Mayateh's case "it's impossible to judge what the verdict will be", although she worries that if the verdict does not fall in favour of Mayateh's family, "other victims' families will be even more reluctant to pursue their cases. It definitely increases the risk to the family, and if there's no hope, there's no reason to even try."[3]

"The courts are very weak. They're not independent. Lawyers don't want to take these cases and witnesses don't want to testify. There's very weak evidence collection and investigation techniques. This is one of the main reasons people have such little faith in them."

Prof Panitan agrees: "People don't feel there is justice. The courts will normally rule on clear evidence only."

He stresses the need for improved investigation capabilities and forensic science in the South, and says that while lack of evidence makes it difficult to deliver justice, at the very least officials should be punished for breaking established regulations in cases like Mayateh's. He concedes these are likely to be only mild measures of discipline, like the movement of an officer to a different post.

Ending the culture of impunity

The lack of justice served in cases like the Oct 25, 2004, Tak Bai incident, the mounting reports of torture (WGJP has documented 50 this year) and unlawful detention, and the general "culture of impunity" that has surrounded security officials in the South exacerbate this lack of public trust in state officials. Human rights workers are especially critical of detention procedures, which they allege are rarely carried out according to the law.

The WGJP activist claims most people are arrested without warrants and detained under the Martial Law and Emergency Decree for a period of 37 days. For the first few days they are not allowed family visits, and for the entirety they are usually not allowed access to a lawyer. Although their detention has to be extended every seven days,

the authorities are rarely required to provide a reason and the detainee does not have to appear in court, making it impossible for the court to detect possible cases of torture. Even if charges are not brought against the detainee in this period, many of them are just re-arrested "whenever there's a need to arrest someone", according to an activist.

"People are trusting the state less and less. They're very scared of state officers. Operations are very traumatic for the villagers. The government campaign to win over the hearts and minds of people here has clearly not worked," the activist said.

While Prof Panitan maintains that many officials act lawfully, he said Mayateh's case "shows there is a long way to go in the need to control agencies and make sure operations are conducted lawfully. It's good that these human rights groups are active. Whether they are right or wrong, they serve as a check on officials and will ultimately make operations more transparent."

In addition to the vigilance of rights groups, Prof Panitan believes Thailand's newly established security laws and structures will help to reduce human rights abuses in the South. He helped to develop the new Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) structure and draft the Internal Security Act, which he points out saw nine refinements, many of which were made to accommodate civil and human rights groups.

He says the new ISOC structure, in which civilians oversee security forces (the prime minister is the director, and leaders of security forces wield the same power as other governmental officials) is extremely new for Thailand, and a big step towards checking and regulating the activities of the military. Security structures will also become more integrated, which he says will provide better checks on the paramilitary groups that operate in the South, which are considered to be the most likely of regional security forces to lack training and regard for human rights.

He adds that the Internal Security Act—which he predicts will take the place of the Martial Law and Emergency Decree in the South

soon—provides for a monitoring committee of human rights officials that should have more power to challenge rights abuses.[4]

Prof Panitan concedes that these laws and agencies are new, and the transition will take both time and a more concerted effort to institutionalise the changes. Crucial to this will be the creation of a new manual documenting the rules. He also adds that the establishment of a justice centre, equipped to handle cases of human rights abuses, is badly needed in the South.

Human rights workers are less confident than the professor that meaningful change is coming to security procedures in the South via the new law.

"From what I see, it will only make it harder to break down the culture of impunity here. The military is given excessive power with the Internal Security Act and there are very few checks and balances on it," said the WGJP activist.

At the same time, the activist conceded that the government has begun to get serious about the issue of enforced disappearance, and among other things has begun responding to communication from the WGEID and expressed willingness to ratify the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearance. A study group is reportedly considering whether Thailand can actually abide by the convention.[5]

For the families of the disappeared, this would undoubtedly offer a small bit of hope—if not for the return of their loved ones then at least for justice.

[1]Mayateh's case was dropped at its hearing on November 27, as the court believed the testimony of a school principal (from a different school)—that Mayateh left the paramilitary unit independently on the same day he was detained Therefore, his lawyer appealed the decision and also submitted petitions based on what they saw as irregularities in the court proceedings.

[2]In the case of Imam Yapa Koseng. the post mortem inquest announced in December 2008 that the Iman was tortured and killed by soldiers while being questioned on March 20, 2008 at the army's 39th Task Force camp in Rueso district, Narathivath. Following the inquest, in March 2009 his wife and

children filed a civil suit against the Defence Ministry, the army and the police to demand 10 million baht in compensation. There has been no government action since the court decision in December.

[3]Indeed the verdict was not in favour of Mayeteh's family, and NGOs working in the South say complaints of torture have gone down—there were 15 filed against military and police officers for the period of January - March 2009. The activist suspects this drop perhaps reflects both a decrease in incidence and a decrease in reporting.

[4]The Internal Security Act has not yet been applied, but in October 2008 the Royal Thai Government instituted a form of religious training for suspected insurgents/past detainees at a military camp being called the Peace Center. The 15-20 day training is voluntary, though enrollment bears some consequence on their future treatment.

[5]No progress yet on ratifying the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearance

State Policy and Diversity

UNDERSTANDING, NOT TROOPS, NEEDED IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Southern Thailand

This article was first published by Common Ground News Service *(www.commongroundnews.org) on March 17, 2009 as part of a series on lesser-known Muslim societies written for the CGNews. Its author is Phaison Daoh, a political science lecturer at Prince Shongkla University in Thailand.*

Songkhla, Thailand—Those living outside of Thailand often imagine the country as a homogeneous society, but closer examination reveals much diversity. Although the majority of Thais practice Buddhism, the unofficial state religion, small but notable Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Taoist populations exist, and many estimate that up to 10 percent of Thailand's 64 million inhabitants are Muslim.

Muslims make up the second largest minority group in Thailand, after the ethnic Chinese population. While some Thai Muslims are ethnically Persian, Cham (Cambodian Muslim), Bengali, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese, most are Malay, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group living in the Malay Peninsula and parts of Sumatra, Borneo and Malaysia. Although Thailand's Muslims live in different parts of the country, Malay Muslims live mainly in Thailand's southern provinces of Pattani, Yala Naratiwat, Songkhla and Satun, which border Malaysia.

Unlike their fellow non-Malay Muslims who tend to be more assimilated, Malay Muslims have found it difficult to become an integrated part of Thai culture. A significant number of separatist movements have emerged as a result. Measures by the Thai government to suppress these movements have resulted in decades of violent conflict.

Recent violence has created a renewed urgency to find alternative solutions to the conflict. One such approach is to review the

assimilation and integration policies that the Thai government has tried to implement in the south for decades.

Malay Muslims lived in what is now Thailand before the formation of the Thai Kingdom and were incorporated into the Kingdom during the latter part of 18th century. The Malay Muslim population opposed this incorporation because they had been living under an independent Muslim sultanate and preferred to be integrated into a Malay state or govern themselves.

Massive assimilation policies launched by the Pibul Songkhram-led nationalist party in the 1940s created further resentment amongst Malay Muslims. The government tried to force the Malay people to shed their identity both as Malay and Muslims. They were prevented from wearing the traditional Malay skirt-like sarongs and head coverings, or kerudung, were not allowed to speak Malay and were expected to adopt Thai names. They were also prohibited from practicing Islam on the basis that Buddhism was the dominant religion of Thailand.

The government abolished Islamic courts that had been established to rule on Muslim family affairs, and Malay students were made to pay their respects to images of Buddha placed in public schools. Those who refused to adhere to these policies were arrested, some even tortured. This policy had a devastating effect on the relationship between the Thai government and people in the south.

Although these policies were later lifted, one thing that seems unchanged over decades is "the government's unwillingness to recognise the nature of the conflict as one involving deep-rooted social and cultural issues," to quote Michael Vatikiotis, a Singapore-based scholar on Southeast Asia.

While the government has made efforts to engage in constructive initiatives, the cultural insensitivity of many policies demonstrates a continued lack of understanding. For example, former Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra's government implemented a scholarship for southern students allotted by lottery, which is considered a form of gambling unacceptable to Malay Muslims.

Instead, Bangkok tends to see the conflict as a result of criminal activities by religious militants in the south. Military operations therefore are always the backbone of government policies. Also, government officials from the Malay Muslim region are still predominantly ethnically Thai and religiously Buddhist, resulting in a lack of representation for the majority Malay Muslim population in the region at the national level.

The government needs to reconsider its integration policies. One way peaceful integration of Malay Muslims into Thailand could be achieved is for the government to grant Malay Muslims the autonomy to govern themselves. Autonomous rule would enable Malay Muslims to directly impact their ability to improve the standard of living in their communities.

A greater understanding of cultural and social realities could also result in policies that are less focused on military action and lead to engaging southern populations in culturally respectful ways.

Assimilation and integration policy lies at the heart of the conflict in southern Thailand. Conflict in this region will continue to erupt unless those involved proactively address the problem.

MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

The Moro people of Mindanao consider themselves as the unconquered people of the Philippines. While it is true that the American colonizers were able to subjugate the whole Philippines including the Cordilleras and the entire Moroland, the Moro people's heart and spirit have remained independent and unconquered. This explains the failures of both the American insular government and subsequent Philippine Republic to assimilate the Moro people into the mainstream and dominant culture that is hispanized and Americanized.

The struggle of the Moro people for self-determination dates back to 1565. This struggle is not an isolated cry of religious community seeking accommodation within the framework of the Philippine society. As a matter of fact, the Moro people's struggle—like the struggle of the majority population of the Philippines and other ethnic minorities—is the struggle of a people desiring the right to be subjects of their own land.

It is the Moro people's patient endurance over centuries of domination and marginalization that has led them anew to assert their basic rights as a people to live decently according to their own set of values and customs within the greater community of peoples. The present armed conflict in Mindanao is the continuation of their long history of struggles against all forms of colonialism and subjugation


CHINA
Taiwan
120
124
0 100 200 km
0 100 200 mi
Luzon Strait
20
BABUYAN ISLANDS
South China Sea
Aparri
Philippine Sea
Baguio
16
Luzon
Angeles
Quezon City
MANILA
Batangos
Legaspi
Mindoro
Samar
12
Panay
Iloilo
Bacolod
Leyte
Cebu City
Palawan
Guimaras Island
Surigao
Puerto Princesa
Negros
Butuan
Iligan
Cagayan de Oro
Sulu Sea
8
Mindanao
Davao
Zamboanga
Mount Apo
Jolo
Basilan Island
MALAYSIA
4
Celebes Sea
INDONESIA

The Use of Religion to Divide People

PEACE IS BECOMING A REALITY

Mindanao, Philippines

This is the story of Bobby Bentio. He shared it at the CJPA workshop in Cambodia in 2003.

I am a Maguindanaon Muslim. I was born in 1972 in Shariff Aguak (former Maganoy), one of the 18 municipalities of the central Mindanao province of Maguindanao. The Maguindanaon tribe is one of the largest of the numerous ethno-linguistic groups indigenous to the island of Mindanao, which converted to Islam sometime in the 13th century, giving birth to some of the first Muslim Sultanates in the region. The area named after the tribe has the highest concentration of ethnic Manguindanaons and one of the highest concentrations of Muslims South of the Philippines. It was thus no mere coincidence that the province was also one of the hardest hit by the intense violent conflict which enveloped this part of Mindanao just three decades ago, about the same time that then President Ferdinand E. Marcos moved to establish centralized authoritarian rule throughout the Philippines.

As a little boy growing up in war-torn Mindanao, life was one misery after another. I was a few months old when Martial Law was declared in 1972. My family's well-ordered, happy life was turned upside down, as Maguindanaon Muslims we were the targets of the military. The worst Muslim-Christian conflict in my recollection swept to our doors, catching us unaware. We had to flee to the hills with many other Muslim families leaving everything behind—our houses, farmlands and livestock—and face a hard life. It was a bitter struggle. My father, along with other men from our village, would come down the mountains to the lowlands to harvest our own crops only when the occupying army was not around. Most often the occupying Philippine troops would harvest the crops themselves as if they owned them. Ironically, we became thieves in our own backyard.

I was five when a group of Philippine soldiers shot my mother and 3 year-old sister as they were walking down to the rice fields looking

for my father. The incident resulted in my father's derangement. He wasn't able to care for us then so my younger brother and sister and I were shunted from relative to relative willing enough to care for us. Being poor themselves we had to help augment their family's income by selling firewood and vegetables. As the eldest it was my job to carry the heavy wood to the market every day. It was backbreaking work for a boy of seven, but in order to survive I had no choice. There were other children like me then, and more now, doing this hard labour—children who should have been playing and going to school, not living in evacuation camps and surviving off of relief services. But who put us there in the first place? What events led us into this place and handed us this situation?

Much has been said about the war in Mindanao, especially the Muslim-Christian conflict. Books and journals are full of it. Countless historians, politicians and experts have given their opinions about its causes and why it never stops and what should be done about it. Sadly though, expert opinions remain only in the books, for how can you begin to give a name to a conflict that one group of people does not want to end? How do you face your brother, who is now an enemy created by the same group of people that does not want the conflict to end?

Martial Law was lifted some years ago they say. But I say it is still going on. What the books and the papers fail to reveal is the stark reality that conflict is very much continuing and that hundreds of Moro Muslims are still being displaced due to military operations, that many atrocities continue to happen almost every day, that there are outright killings and kidnappings, that some of the so-called "peace" advocates are just government people in masks, that relief operations sometimes do not bring relief because there are too many refugees and too few supplies, and that the refugees become dependent on such aid. There are those who willingly return to their homes only to find they have nothing to return to and no livelihood to sustain them. It is very sad but realities in life are seldom pleasant.

Having experienced displacement twice, first in the early 70's and recently in 1996, my heart goes out for these people living in camps and centers. Life there is never easy. The camps are too crowded, too noisy, very filthy and a breeding ground for disease. Any security

offered there is impermanent. However, it is the only security available to these people.

When our Barangay (community) was razed with fire in 1996, I was left with a realization that things should not happen this way. Somehow there must be another and better means of dealing with conflict so as to curb it before it escalates. That realization gained meaning with the arrival of the Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc., (KFI) in our community. They helped organized us and train us in ways that slowly began to heal the rift caused by the burning. I was asked to be one of the leaders. They sent me to seminars and trainings in other places. The knowledge and skills I got from these trainings has enabled me to rise above the apathy of my belief that nothing could resolve the Mindanao conflict except conflict itself and thus, armed struggle was the ultimate answer to the war issue. However, the burning reality staring at me is this: violence breeds more violence. There is no victory in countless deaths and children left as orphans all in the name of armed struggle for peace.

The idea that conflict could be resolved by peaceful means took hold of my consciousness. The example of the work done by others, all in the name of peace and justice, has inspired me to work for peace and has shown me how I can help my tribe best. And so I became a peace advocate to campaign for justice, freedom and the rights of my people to exercise our culture, religion and way of life. With this work comes another reality: it is a very difficult task. It is an uphill battle against almost insurmountable odds. It is no joke telling people the truth about the government's policies, worthless economic promises and the insincerity of its peace efforts. It is also very difficult to organize the youth in places we think hold promise for the development of future peacemakers.

As a peace advocate and builder, I help educate the youth we organize about peace building then help them obtain skills and knowledge through capacity building. Being the national vice-president and spokesperson of our organization, United Youth of the Philippines (UNYPHIL), it is also my task to inform the public of the work we have done, including giving opinions of the events unfolding in the country and refuting, if untrue, whatever version of the story the government has given to the public.

I believe that slowly we have gained ground. Even though it is just a small step, I believe that since we work together hand in hand with the common people, the seeds of hope have been planted and are being continuously nurtured, they will grow in time and bloom. It may not happen twenty years from now, fifty years from now or in my lifetime, but I am happy and hopeful just the same because peace is no longer just a dream. It is slowly becoming a reality.

COLONIALISM AT THE ROOT OF RELIGION DIVISON

Mindanao, Philippines

This is a reflection by Bobby Bentio shared at the CJPA workshop in Malaysia in 2002.

The ongoing conflict in Mindanao is not simply a struggle for control over the island's land and other natural resources, and it is erroneous to say that religion has nothing to do with the situation in Mindanao. It may not be the principal reason for the conflict, but religion was used by the Spaniards to divide the Muslims and the Christians. Written history tells us that the Spaniards came to what is now the Philippines to introduce a new religion but also, and most importantly, to control the political and socio-economic life of the people – in short, to colonize them. In Mindanao, however, the Spaniards had insufficient strength and force to impose their will upon the well politicized Moro people. It should be understood that before the Spanish colonizers stepped on Mindanao soil, the Sultanates of what now constitutes western Mindanao, including parts of Sabah (Borneo) and what is now Central Mindanao, were already well established.

Recognizing the formidability of the Moro community, the Spaniards used the Christianized natives from Luzon and the Visayas to fight the Muslims in the south under the pretext of spreading the correct religion and to annihilate the religion of Islam. Thus, mutual prejudice, common distrust and stereotyping began and has since been

nurtured through various forms of media, including schools, books, etc.

Such kinds of relationships still exist up to now. The religious propaganda propagated by the Spaniards to enlist the participation of the newly converted indigenous people from the Visayas and Luzon to attack their brothers in the south hid the real intent of the expedition and has produced the religious color of the conflict in Mindanao today. It is important to take note of this event because this is the main reason why, since then and up to now, unity among the Muslims, Christians and the indigenous peoples is not easy to forge, thus making it difficult for them to face their common problems.

MILITARY TRIES TO PIT CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS AGAINST EACH OTHER

Mindanao, Philippines

This story was told by Bobby Bentio from Mindanao, Philippines. He shared it at a CJPA workshop in India in 2005.

Basilan was once a very beautiful island. It is now turned into a battlefield between the Abu Sayaaf Group (ASG) and the Philippine military. When the ASG took two Christian teachers hostage and subsequently killed them, there was potential for a serious conflict. The teachers were killed even though the Philippine government paid the ransom demanded by the ASG. This act could have sparked a violent conflict between the Christians and Muslims but was averted when the Muslim civilians attended the vigil and joined the funeral activities for the two Christian teachers and expressed their sincere sympathy and condolences.

The villagers discovered that some government and military officers received part of the ransom money, so it was clear that they were not serious about solving this problem. The villagers felt that the military was simply trying to use this event to create violence between the Christians and the Muslims.

UNITED IN BASKETBALL, DIVIDED IN WAR

Mindanao, Philippines

This story comes from Bobby Bentio from Mindanao, Philippines. He shared it at a CJPA workshop in Malaysia in 2002.

Regarding the Muslim-Christian Youth Movements for Peace and Development, we established this organization to unite the three youth groups of our community: the Muslims, Catholics and the Miracle Life Fellowship International. We did this after our community experienced some serious conflict between Christians and Muslims.

The structure of the organization included youth representatives of every faith. I was the president representing the Muslims. There were three vice-presidents representing the Ilocano tribes. They were from the Miracle Life Fellowship International, a denomination represented in the Ilacano village.

There was also a vice-president for the Ilonggo tribes, (they represent the Catholics) and a vice-president for Muslim affairs. After we set up the group, we organized a series of seminars and workshops on the Culture of Peace, Peacebuilding and other issues. The Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc. funded by the Catholic Relief Services gave these seminars and workshops to us.

During those trainings, the prejudices, stereotyping and biases of these diverse tribes, cultures and religions were brought out and discussed. In time, the non-Muslim people began to understand why the Moro Muslims were struggling for the right to self-determination. Before this, it was not easy for us to explain the history of the Bangsamoro people and have a good discussion on this history with others. But after the seminars, many of non-Muslim friends were enlightened and we became good friends.

Then there was the time under the administration of Joseph Estrada, when he declared his all out war policy against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Our community was never directly affected by this war because the three groups of people were now united, unlike before. In other areas, when there was a conflict between the

government and the MILF, there would also be suspicion between civilians on both sides. The Christians didn't trust the Muslims because they perceived that all Muslims were helping the MILF, and the Muslims suspected that the Christian would join the military government to attack and kill the Muslims. But because of the unity of the people in our community, those attitudes were minimized and when there was an encountered between the MILF and the Philippine military, everybody in the community remained vigilant at night to avoid sabotage from outsiders.

Everyone in our group knew that some of us belonged to MILF groups and that some were recruited by the Philippine military as para-military troops used to attack the MILF. When there was fighting, these youth knew that their friends were going to the other group to fight. Yet when the fighting ceased, they came back together and even engaged in basketball and other games. However, each time, some of these friends did not return because they had been killed on the battlefield.

Friendship transcending politics did not happen only in our organization. There are also some members of the Philippine military who have brothers fighting in the other groups. They even extend some financial help to the others because, according to them, they have a salary and their brothers going to the battlefield on the other side do not. When leaving for the field, men from both sides often leave their homes on the same day and take the same transportation. Some even pay for their brothers' transportation fares.

This is just one small piece of an ocean of sorrow that the war has brought to us here in Mindanao. We are all neighbors and help each other when there is a need. We may even be relatives. When we are together we have seminars and play basketball together. But these friends and relatives become enemies on the battlefield. This brings heavy tears to my eyes.

SRI LANKA

A long-standing rivalry between Tamil and Sinhalese inhabitants of Sri Lanka has created an extremely volatile relationship between the two groups. The combination of religious and ethnic differences continues to create violent conflict between the parties, though they have shared Sri Lanka for many centuries already.

The Tamil minority originated in India, immigrating to Sri Lanka between the 3rd century B.C. and the 13th century A.D. Though they make up a small proportion of the population, Tamils constitute almost the entire Hindu population of the land.

In the 5th century B.C., Indo-Aryan emigration from India created the Sinhalese population in Sri Lanka. It still holds the majority today and thus, much political power. The greater part of the Sinhalese populace consider themselves to be Buddhist. Religious tension intensifies the struggle for political supremacy between Tamils and Sinhalese.

Prior to colonial occupation, Tamils controlled the northern part of Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in 1972), while the Sinhalese ruled the southern regions of the land. In 1505 the Portuguese took control of the country and began its history as a colonial settlement. Throughout its relationship with the West, Sri Lanka has been dominated by world powers that have prevented its national self-rule. Finally, in 1948 Sri Lanka gained independence and thus, sovereignty over its lands. Prior to this momentous occasion, Tamil and Sinhalese forces combined to fight for their common freedom. However, this alliance did not last long.

The Sinhalese population has retained power throughout most of Sri Lanka's history because of its size compared to the Tamils, which is the second largest ethnic group in the country, though comprising only 18 percent of the total population. With unquestioned economic and political power, the Sinhalese inhabitants face the anger and bitterness of the minority Tamils who must struggle to have their voice heard.


INDIA
Jaffna
Palk Bay
Bay
of
Bengal
Mannar
Trincomalee
Gulf
of
Mannar
Anuradhapura
Puttalam
Polonnaruwa
Batticaloa
Matale
Kandy
Kalmunai
Negombo
COLOMBO
Pidurutalagala
Badulla
Sri
Jayawardenepura
Kotte
Moratuwa
Ratnapura
Beruwala
Galle
0 30 60 km
0 30 60 mi
INDIAN OCEAN
80
82
10
8
6

Conflict between the Tamil and Sinhalese rose to a new degree in 1956 when Solomon Bandaranaike was instated as Prime Minster and declared Sinhala the official language of what was then Ceylon. The Tamil minority was outraged by this act, and opposition to the Sinhalese-dominated government grew as the State backed Buddhism on an official level. Bandaranaike was later assassinated and succeeded by his wife who became Prime Minister in 1960. In 1983 civil unrest could no longer be contained, and the country broke out into civil war.

After two decades of fighting and three failed attempts at peace talks, including the unsuccessful deployment of the Indian army as a peacekeeping force from 1987 to 1990, a lasting settlement to the conflict finally appeared possible when a cease-fire was declared in December 2001, and a ceasefire agreement was signed with international mediation in 2002. However, limited hostilities renewed in late 2005 and the conflict escalated until the government launched a number of major military offensives against the rebels beginning in July 2006, driving them out of the entire eastern province of the island. The rebels then officially declared they would "resume their freedom struggle to achieve statehood".

The government then shifted its offensive to the north of the country, and formally announced its withdrawal from the ceasefire agreement on January 2, 2008, alleging that the rebels violated the agreement over 10,000 times. After intensive battles that killed thousands of innocent Tamil villagers and drove hundreds of thousands into crowded refugee camps, the Sri Lankan military declared a complete victory on May 18, 2009 with the destruction of the final LTTE strongholds and the death of most of their leadership.

Whether peace will truly come to Sri Lanka now depends on whether the grievances of the Tamil people will be heard and taken seriously. The vast majority of the people in Sri Lanka long for peace and unity. Yet, so many hurdles still remain to be cleared before peace and unity can become the reality for this country.

CHRISTMAS 2008 IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka

This piece as originally published by Ruki Fernando on December 25, 2008 on the blog "Groundviews: a Sri Lankan citizen journalism initiative" *(www.groundviews.org/2008/12/25/christmas-2008-in-sri-lanka).*

It's Christmas day. For a change, I was at home with my family.

Early morning, I went for Christmas Mass in my parish. Many years ago, I had been active in the church, as a student and teacher in the Sunday School, as an Alter Server and in the Young Christian Students Movement. But I had not gone to my parish for a long time, though I have been visiting and staying in churches all over Sri Lanka, especially in the war ravaged North. I thought I will go today, as it was Christmas, also because of my family.

Unlike most people, I didn't go to the crib in the Church. But I did have images of Jesus being born in a cattle shed 2008 years ago. Images of Mary, compelled to give birth to Jesus away from her home because she and Joseph were forced to leave her hometown by orders of the rulers of that time.

I sat quietly in the church and said a silent prayer for the baby that I saw a few weeks ago in Menik Farm, Vavuniya. She would be 40 days today. She had no name when I visited her. A baby born as her parents fled the advancing Army in Vanni. A baby who is forced to live in a mosquito infested, muddy and murky camp, as her parents are not allowed to live with their relatives, but confined to a defacto prison by the military, even though they are not charged with any crime.

The Christmas Mass was taking longer than the usual Sunday service, many prayers and long preaching by the priest.

There were prayers for the rulers and the military that they will soon bring about an end to the conflict with their ongoing military operations, which is on the verge of "victory".

But there were no prayers for a negotiated, just, political solution that will meet aspirations of all communities.

There was no mention of a call for ceasefire by the two Anglican Bishops and three Catholic Bishops.

There were no prayers or mention of hundreds of thousands of displaced, men, women and children, with inadequate shelter, food, medicine, education, water and sanitation.

There were no prayers for children and adults conscripted as soldiers, their families.

There were no prayers for families of the disappeared, those killed.

No remembering churches that were shelled and bombed, as they offered shelter to people fleeing the war, and no prayers for priests killed and disappeared as they were helping the war affected.

No remembering those tortured, those being detained merely on suspicion in inhumane conditions, worse than conditions that some animals are kept.

I wondered whether I was living in the same country, whether I was part of "one Catholic Church".

Amidst my frustration and gloom, some gave me hope and inspiration.

A Catholic sister told me a while ago that she and a priest had shared about the plight of the displaced in the North during a Christmas Mass and asked people for their prayers and donations. People had donated more than Rs. 50,000.

After the mass, I visited three journalists being detained, one of who had written about children being conscripted as child soldiers just before he was detained. I went with a diplomat attached to an embassy in Colombo; she brought chocolates, and stood patiently in

the sun with me for close to an hour, while waiting to get in. I will remember the smiles of the people we met and chatted briefly.

I also remembered the wife of one of the journalists, with who I had been in close contact. What would Christmas mean to her? What Christmas greetings, what Christmas gift could I offer her? Will my usual greeting, “Happy Christmas” have any meaning to her?

I met some Catholic sisters who were coming from the prison as I was about to go in. Several other priests - Anglican, Methodist and Catholic – as well as some other friends, who had got my text message, also told me they will visit detainees in the coming days.

So this is Christmas in Sri Lanka, 2008 December.

I could not help reflecting that if Jesus was to be born in Sri Lanka, he would not be born in the Church I went for the Christmas Mass.

It is possible though that Jesus might be born in a Church in the battle zones in the North, that offers shelter to people fleeing bombing and shelling from the sky and around them. Or probably in the prison I visited. Or in the house of a family member of a disappeared. Or amongst the hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

Happy Christmas from Sri Lanka.

OH FREEDOM

Sri Lanka

This song was composed in Sri Lanka in 2006. As brothers and sisters of human family, we have hopes for a lasting peace in our country. We have dreams to go back to our own land, to our own people and to our own communities to sing, dance and to live freely. We have dreams to live together with our friends of different religions. However, the dark clouds of war have prevented our dreams, and now we are waiting to be buried. But still, we have a dream to be happy and to sing and dance in the land of God and be free forever.

Oh freedom /// over me
And I before I'd a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
I'll go to my land and
I'll be free

There'll be singing
There'll be dancing
There'll be loving over me
And I before I'd a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
I'll go to my land and
I'll be free

No more shooting
No more killing
No more bombing over me
And I before I'd a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
I'll go to my land and
I'll be free

There'll be sharing
There'll be caring
There'll be bearing over us
And I before I'd a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
I'll go to my land and
I'll be free

These pictures are by young people who are part of Peace Groups in Sri Lanka. They have experienced the consequences of war are now hoping for a peaceful and just Sri Lanka. The Peace Groups bring together children and youth from different ethnic groups and faiths to do peacebuilding activities together.

TRAPPED TOGETHER

HELD TOGETHER

WE DRINK FROM THE SAME RIVER

Burma

This story takes place in 1991. It was told by a Burma Issues volunteer and recorded by Max Ediger.

Soldiers of the Democratic Kayan Buddhist Army (DKBA) under the control of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) entered a small village and called all of the people together. They demanded that everyone join their organization or else the local church would be burned to the ground. Few people, Christian or Buddhist, heeded their orders. The leader of the DKBA troops then went to the Buddhist monastery, which has a small generator, to get fuel to burn the Christian church.

According to a peasant present at the event, the Buddhist monk told the DKBA, "I will give you the fuel. Then when you have burned the church, come and burn down my monastery. If you do not, I will do it myself. The Christians and Buddhists have lived together in peace for many years. When they have a celebration, we help them. When we have a celebration, they help us. We all drink from the same river." The DKBA hung their heads in disappointment and left.

While it all may seem a bit hopeless, it is not. There are many signs of hope and there is much that can be done to support that hope. The people of Burma, especially those living in the deep interior areas, have been creatively fighting for peace and justice for many decades now. We need not so much teach them as we need to support them.

Chapter Two:
AFTER CONFLICT

The challenges and stories featured in Chapter Two come from places that have ended major conflicts within the last half century: Aceh (Indonesia), East Timor, Nepal, Cambodia, Viet Nam, India and Thailand. A few more stories from Burma are also included. Like Chapter 1, this chapter is divided by challenge, each challenge illustrated by stories, and stories group together by country. In this chapter you will find that, in fact, even though peace agreements may be signed to officially conclude a war, the effects of violence live on, creating many new challenges. This is especially true if the root causes of the conflict have not been resolved.

These stories offer those from nations currently in conflict, like the ones featured in Chapter One, a glimpse into the future of what new obstacles may emerge in peacetime and the action necessary to meet them when they do.


Bauchy 1974

MOVING FORWARD

This picture is by Bui Chi, a well known Vietnamese artist from the central Vietnamese city of Hue. Born in 1948 into a traditional royal family, he is a painter and etcher with a strong modern style.

During the American war in Vietnam, Bui Chi was a law student at the University of Hue. He was arrested many times because of his opposition to the Thieu government and the American military presence in his country. His art was often the cause of these arrests. In 1962 he was arrested while helping refugees in a refugee center near Hue. He was accused of “disturbing the peace.” After a long time of imprisonment, he was ordered to join the military service. He refused, and in 1964 his case was changed from "disturbing the peace" to "non-support and disobeying orders from the government." The charge brought him five years in the Chi Hoa prison where he suffered serious torture.

This piece was done while in the Chi Hoa prison and was smuggled out to friends for use in the struggle for justice and peace. His artwork done in prison expresses not only the severe suffering of prison life, but also the hope that the war might finally end and genuine peace come to pass.

In 2002 Bui Chi passed away from medical complications. His desire for peace and justice continues to be shared with audiences through his art. For a full introduction to the conflict in Viet Nam, see page 171.

PEACE SONG
Sri Lanka

This song was written and composed by the project officers of a faith-based organization in Sri Lanka in 2006 during a time when there was the hope and light of peace in the country. This song speaks of that hope. The people wanted to live in harmony irrespective of cast, creed and ethnic barriers. See the end of this book for the music to accompany these lyrics. For a full introduction to the conflict in Sri Lanka, see page 118.

Peace is a quest, for arms to be at rest
Fight for rights, not to kill and blow
No more Fears, no more Pain and Tears
We shall see a dawn of Peace

CHORUS

Step by step we shall live in Love
Side by side we shall walk in Peace
By and by we shall march for Peace
We shall see a dawn of Peace

Let's break the fetters, which bind and shatter our Hopes
Build us with Joy, to live in Peace and Share
To dream to Bond and Bear, lighten the woes and Care
We shall see a dawn of Peace

We are a better Nation, no more Separation
Call for unity, stand in unity
Live in Harmony, sing the symphony
We shall see a dawn of Peace

ACEH, INDONESIA

The Indonesian province of Aceh is located on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra. The region is rich in natural resources, such as oil and natural gas. However, the uneven distribution of the wealth obtained from these resources was central in the development of a conflict between the Indonesian government and the people of Aceh represented by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

In 1971, Mobil Oil Indonesia discovered massive reserves of natural gas in north Aceh. The development of the oil and gas fields in northern Aceh, and the influx of migrant workers into the province annoyed the conservative Muslim rural population. At the same time, not much money filtered back to the Acehnese; in the 1970s only 5% of the oil and gas revenue went to the local government.

Religious and economic grievances led to rebellion against the government, and the founder and chairman of GAM, Teungku Hasan M. di Tiro, declared an independent Aceh in December 1976. However, the organization mainly consisted of idealistic intellectuals, and the swift Indonesian response through a combination of military repression and economic programs, soon ended the rebellion.

Throughout the 1980s, an increasing influx of migrant workers and their non-Islamic behaviour led to widespread dissatisfaction among the Acehnese population. After an increasing number of violent incidents, the government created the Aceh DOM (Daerah Operasi Militar—Military Operations Area) in 1990, and launched a large-scale campaign against GAM and Acehnese civilians. After a few years of clashes, it appeared that GAM was defeated.

During the 1990s, GAM reemerged and low-intensity violent conflict ensued. The early 2000s brought outside mediation and peace talks between the government and GAM, all of which eventually derailed. Then at the end of 2004, Aceh was hit hard by the December 26 Indian Ocean tsunami, with a death toll now estimated at over 160,000 for Aceh and around 225,000 for the entire region.

Moves toward peace emerged in the wake of the tsunami with both GAM and the Indonesian Government declaring unilateral ceasefires

the day after the natural disaster. A peace accord was implemented during the fall of 2005, as governmental forces withdrew from Aceh and GAM carried out decommissioning of their weapons.

The peace accord between GAM and the Indonesian government has held, and the people of Aceh have been actively rebuilding their society. After so many years of war, many problems related to the conflict remain and much creative work is needed to continue the move toward justice and peace for all.

Reintegrating Ex-Combatants

WOMEN EX-COMBATANTS MUST RISE

Aceh, Indonesia

This story from Aceh, Indonesia first appeared in December 2008 in a publication entitled "Bungong" *put out by the organization Beujroh (*www.beujroh.org*). Beujroh is a local NGO that works to improve the lives of Acehhnese woman who live in areas affected by Tsunami and violent conflict, including women ex-combatants. Beujroh empowers women to learn new skills, other than those of war so that they can support themselves. Anjar Aulia, who is featured in this story, is a beneficiary of Beujorh's programs. The story was written my Yunidar, a Beujroh staff member.*

Anjar Aulia is an Acehnese woman from Kandang, Lhokseumawe district, Aceh, Indonesia. She was born on November 25th 1984. People usually call her Dek Ti. In 1998, when she was a student in junior high school, Dek Ti met Inoeng Balee (a woman combatant). Soon after, she felt an interest in the "Aceh Freedom Movement" (GAM).

During the armed conflict in Aceh, the villagers of Anjar's village had to migrate to other places for their security. In the new place, Dek Ti met a member of GAM who came from another area. She learnt many things from his explanations about Aceh. Then he gave her a book of Aceh history. After reading and analyzing the book, Dek Ti decided to join with Inoeng Balee.

In this movement, Dek Ti was a courier who picked up bombs rafted to different areas in Aceh. In 2003, while she was sitting together with other combatants on a bamboo couch, a group of military soldiers came. Dek Ti with some friends was hiding under some bushes. Feeling insecure, Dek Ti ran to one of villager's houses where there were many school students cracking the areca nut. Dek Ti asked the owner of the house to provide her a school uniform. Fortunately, the uniform was fitted to her size. When the military was sweeping the village to search for her, Dek Ti and the other school students were enjoying the cracking of areca nut. At the beginning, the military soldiers felt suspicious about the way she behaved.

Finally, they could not recognize her. Many times, Dek Ti Spent her days in the jungle, sleeping under brushes, drinking dirty water and eating unhealthy food. These experiences are unforgettable in her life.

When the situation of Aceh during the conflict became very unstable, Dek Ti migrated to Malaysia, the country where the most combatant fled. In this neighbor country, she had to work a lot to make a living. All the while, she kept a deep yearning for her hometown.

The 2004 tsunami presented its own blessings for peace in Aceh. Dek Ti returned to Aceh on January 28th 2005 and pretended to be a volunteer assisting Aceh's people. Then on August 15th 2005, the peace agreement was signed between the Indonesian government and GAM. She expressed her happiness to welcome peace in Aceh.

She has since gotten married and had one child. She hopes that all parties, including governments and civil society, will maintain peace for the sake of prosperity in Indonesia. She also wishes that all agreements will be implemented completely. Agreements should be carried out in a way that satisfies all parties. Enjoying peace means there should be justice. Lose your thoughts about who lost and who won. Otherwise, it will lead to new conflict.

She also enthusiastically said that Acehnese women should be independent. Maintaining that desire, Dek Ti started to run a woman-focused economic enterprise (women's co-operative) called Tjut Njak Dhien, locating at Gajah Street, lr. Cut Mutia No. 36 Bireun district. This cooperative will serve all women, including Tsunami and conflict victims and women ex-combatants. She said Acehnese women must rise. One of the ways is through this co-operative.

Even though she faces many obstacles in running the co-operative, especially with a lack of human resources and capital, she is always optimist. The name of the co-operative is the name of an Acehnese hero, Tjut Nya' Dhien, a hero who had a strong spirit in struggling, not only for herself, but also for her nation. Dek Ti believes this spirit must be owned by other women today.

According to Dek Ti, sadly our government is not brave enough to fully give opportunities to Acehnese women. Unfortunately, the people give a wrong interpretation to the meaning of equality between men and women. Not many women are rising yet. They are still silent. They should be aware that there are no other people who will raise us up except ourselves. Hopefully hope will bring the reality.

BASKETS FOR LIVELIHOOD

Here are some of the beautiful handicrafts made by a women's group in Aceh, Indonesia and sold in the capital city of Banda at the INOENG Gallery, which means "women's gallery." The gallery was opened in 2008 by the organization Beujroh in order to promote small-scale women's handicrafts, as the market for such products in generally dominated by large companies. At the INOENG Gallery, women can make a living by selling their crafts.

EAST TIMOR

The nation of East Timor, also known as Timor-Leste, comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor, the nearby islands of Atauro and Jaco, and Oecussi-Ambeno, an exclave on the northwestern side of the island, within Indonesian West Timor. The small country of 15,410 km² is located about 640 km northwest of Darwin, Australia.

East Timor was colonized by Portugal in the 16th century, and was known as Portuguese Timor until Portugal's decolonization of the country in 1974. In late 1975, East Timor declared its independence, but later that year was invaded and occupied by Indonesia and was declared Indonesia's 27th province the following year.

Indonesian rule in East Timor was often marked by extreme violence and brutality; estimates of the number of East Timorese who died due to the occupation vary from 60,000 to 200,000, according to Amnesty International. A detailed statistical report prepared for the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor cited a minimum bound of 102,800 conflict-related deaths in the period 1974-1999, namely, approximately 18,600 killings and 84,200 "excess" deaths from hunger and illness.

The East Timorese guerrilla force, Falintil (English translation from Portuguese: the Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor), fought a campaign for national independence against Indonesian forces from 1975 to 1999.

In 1999, following the United Nations-sponsored act of self-determination, Indonesia relinquished control of the territory, and East Timor became the first new sovereign state of the 21st century on May 20, 2002.

East Timor is a lower-middle-income economy. It continues to suffer the after effects of a decades-long independence struggle against Indonesia, which damaged infrastructure and displaced thousands of civilians. It is placed 158th by Human Development Index (HDI) among the world's states, the lowest in Asia.

RECONCILIATION IN EAST TIMOR

East Timor

This story was written by Max Ediger in February 2002 follow a fact finding trip to East Timor with the Asian Human Rights Commission, which is based in Hong Kong.

At the time my colleagues and I visited East Timor, the need for reconciliation between villagers who had earlier joined the militias and the people whom they had abused during their time in power was a serious issue. Some foreign organizations working in the country had designed rather complex programs to deal with this issue on a large scale, but the question remained as to whether or not these foreign models of conflict transformation could be really effective. It

was a Pakistani member of the UN police force who explained to us how the traditional peacemaking practices of the East Timorese were perhaps more effective at dealing creatively with many of the conflicts facing the people.

He related that in one instance, three members of a militia returned to their old village after spending some time in exile in West Timor. Strong feelings immediately emerged because these three men had beaten some of their neighbours and had burned down a number of homes and the village meeting hall.

The village members all came together to hold a trial. The three men had no option but to admit to their crime since everyone in the village knew them and had witnessed their behavior. After hearing their confessions, the elders spoke: 'A crime like this must be punished. There must be justice.'

Fearing the worst, the three hung their heads in fear. The elders continued, 'You have destroyed our homes and our meeting hall. We have already collected the materials to rebuild these buildings. You must each rebuild the homes you are responsible for burning and then you must rebuild our meeting hall.'

Quickly the three men set to work. They worked hard and the villagers watched them closely to see if they would do a good job or not. In time all of the buildings had been rebuilt.
Once again the elders called a meeting. First they collected a small amount of money from each villager, and with that money they bought a cow that was slaughtered and the meat prepared for a feast. When everything was ready, the villagers gathered around the food."

'You have paid for your crimes,' the elders said. 'Now let us share this meal together so that forgiveness can be complete.' The crime was paid for and forgiven.

NEPAL

Nepal had been a monarchy throughout most of its history. King Prithvi Narayan Shah unified the many small kingdoms in 1768. Since then, the country had been ruled by a dynasty of kings. However, the government of Nepal, as well as the monarchy, showed little interest in improving the lives of the rural masses (85% of the population), and toward the end of the 20th century, discontent was growing rapidly.

In February of 1996, a Maoist insurgency began with the aim of ending the monarchy and bring much needed change to the country. The insurgency spoke to the people of gender equality, improved living conditions and the elimination of the caste system, issues which the poor and marginalized could easily relate to. The decade-long Nepal Civil War and more than 13,000 deaths ensued.

With much popular support, the insurgency grew quickly, and by 2006, the Maoists controlled most of the country. Also in early 2006, a massive non-violent movement began in the capital of Kathmandu, bringing about several weeks of mass protests by all major political parties of Nepal. The protests succeeded in their aim culminated in a peace accord and the ensuing elections for the Constituent Assembly, in which the Maoist party claimed the most seats. The Constituent Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of the abdication of the last Nepali monarch, Gyanendra Shah, and Nepal was established as a federal democratic republic on May 28, 2008.

After the war's end, rebuilding the country and bridging the gap between the urban communities and the rural masses has become an important issue. This transformation is slow and difficult, and many obstacles remain. Despite these problems, much work is being done in the rural areas to raise awareness of the marginalized and help them participate fully in the economic, political and social systems of the country.

Writing a New Constitution

CONSTITUTION MAKING AND PEACE PROCESS IN NEPAL

Nepal

This is a paper written by Advocate Dinesh Tripathi of the Nepal Supreme Court and presented at the CJPA workshop in Nepal in 2008. He examines the challenge of writing a new constitution for Nepal immediately following the end of that countries recent violent conflict. This is common and complex challenge for any nation following civil war.

Nepal experienced a decade-long armed conflict. It was one of the painful times in Nepalese history; it took 13,000 lives, displaced nearly half a million people and destroyed billions of dollars worth of property and infrastructure. It also caused a lot of pain and suffering in Nepalese society. The decade long conflict impoverished the nation and halted the process of economic growth. But there are some positive outcomes of the conflict as well. It also initiated and brought great debates and transformation in Nepalese society and polity. The

debate on inclusive and broad based democracy is a direct outcome of the conflict.

The Twelve Point Agreement was signed by the Nepal Communist Party (Maoists) and the mainstream parliamentary parties. This agreement paved the way for conflict transformation in Nepal. The Maoists joined the democratic mainstream and accepted the multi-party system and pluralistic democratic order. The People's Movement was launched in Nepal to establish democratic political order. The Maoists also participated in the historic mass movement, popularly known as 'Janaandolan Two.' The people's peaceful and unarmed movement brought a historic political change in Nepal. The king stepped down under pressure from the force of the people's mass movement. It was a huge victory for people's power and the non-violent movement. In order to make real the people's democratic will, the movement restored Parliament and curtailed all the power and privileges of the king. The institution of monarchy became the most discredited institution in Nepal.

A comprehensive peace agreement was signed between the Government of Nepal and the Nepal Communist Party (Maoists) in November 21, 2006. The agreement provides a detailed framework and comprehensive road map for sustainable peace in Nepal. It also promised an election for constituent assembly sovereign bodies, which would be empowered to write a new constitution for Nepal. The election for the constituent assembly was postponed twice, which created an atmosphere of political confusion and uncertainty, but eventually, the election was successfully conducted. The election of the constituent assembly was a landmark event in Nepalese history. It represented the first time the Nepalese people have had the opportunity to write their own constitution. The election brought an unexpected and surprising result: the Maoists emerge as the majority political entity in the new government.

Many post-conflict societies opt for writing a new constitution in order to build lasting and sustainable peace. The constitution making process is part of the peace process in Nepal. The constitution can be a tool for conflict transformation in Nepal because it can address the structural causes of conflict. The root cause of conflict is embedded in the unjust polity, governance, economy, society and culture of Nepal. Genuine and sustainable peace requires human rights, rule of

law and vibrant democratic institutions. Peace does not mean only absence of war or armed conflict.

Nepal needs a holistic approach to build and sustain peace. Nepal's conflict is a byproduct of lack of democracy, accountability and overly centralized governance and polity. The constitution making process is the defining moment in the history of any nation. It is the process of creating a new identity for the nation. Nepal must now engage in that process. The new constitution shall be the transformative document. It must produce a massive socio-economic transformation in Nepalese society, polity and governance structures that provide a framework for the empowerment of the people.

The Nepalese people have been alienated from the governance structures in the past. The vast majority of people had no meaningful say and participation in the decision making and governance of the nation. The state worked only for the fortunate few, and the rest were marginalized and disempowered. There was no genuine autonomy for any level of governance. There was a democratic deficit, and people are denied an access to resources. The right to development cannot be ensured without genuine autonomy and access to local resources. Nepal needs a broad based, inclusive and genuine democratic order, not only a procedural one. A procedural democracy ensures only the right to vote in periodical elections, which do not provide room for the genuine participation of people in political decision making. Nepal needs a more participatory governance structure at this juncture. Participation is the key to empowerment.

The challenges

No doubt Nepal has taken a big step towards the establishment of sustainable and democratic peace. The completion of the constituent assembly election was itself a landmark achievement in this regard. The constituent assembly emerged as an inclusive body. The diversity of the nation is, to a large extent, reflected in the composition of the constituent assembly. This is a first inclusive political institution in Nepalese history. The new constitution needs to be a peace charter. The broad based inclusive and participatory constitution making process will be an efficient and authentic way to address the conflict. But still, Nepal has a long way to go to establish a genuine and sustainable peace. Nepal is facing a difficult and painful transition. Right now, the peace is extremely vulnerable and

fragile in Nepal. Below are the basic issues and challenges facing Nepal at present:

1. The Nepalese peace process is heavily top-down. There is no effective and meaningful civic engagement in the process. The civil society groups and organizations, which played such a significant role in the democratic movement, are largely excluded from the process. There is a growing gulf between civil society organizations and political actors. The people are not encouraged to actively participate in the process. So instead of being actively engaged in the process, people are just becoming silent spectators.

2. Respect for the rule of law is a basic ingredient in any peace initiative, and it is a hallmark of civilized society. However, presently in Nepal there is a state of lawlessness and anarchy. The law enforcement agencies and institutions are weak, fragile and inefficient. Nepal is suffering from the "soft state syndrome," meaning a state that is unable to properly implement its own laws.

3. There is serious and growing political disagreement over key political issues among major political actors. The widening gap might derail the entire peace process and constitution writing process. Unreasonable delays in constitution writing could also disrupt the process.

4. A successful peace process needs an effective built-in monitoring mechanism. All the actors must be held accountable for their actions. An unmonitored peace process cannot reach its logical end. The peace process is a sensitive one. Any tiny mistake might derail the entire process. In Nepal, there is currently no effective monitoring mechanism in place.

5. Human rights are the central theme of any peace building effort. There can be no genuine peace without full guarantee of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. There is widespread violation of national and international human rights law in Nepal. The national

institutions lack an effective mechanism to enforce national and international human rights standards.

6. Peace building and conflict transformation is a gigantic task. It is directly associated with the nation building process. To deal with a post-conflict society, Nepal needs a set of institutional mechanisms to deal with past abuses and create a basis for peace and justice. No such mechanisms, such as a truth and reconciliation commission, peace commission, commission on state restructuring, etc., are in place yet.

7. A culture of impunity is the biggest enemy of any peace initiative; it can destroy the very fabric of society. Nepal is deeply suffering from a culture of impunity and state lawlessness. No one is brought to justice for wrongdoing or for serious crimes committed in the past. There is politicization of crimes. The justice delivery mechanism has also become weak and fragile. Nepal needs an effective and credible mechanism for transitional justice.

8. The effective participation of women and people from marginalized communities is necessary in any peace building effort. However, in Nepal no such effort has been made.

9. The writing of a new and fully democratic constitution for Nepal is a part of the peace process. A constitution based on justice, peace, genuine equality and democracy will be the basis for a sustainable peace in Nepal. To write a new constitution for Nepal requires political consensus among the various political parties. However, politics of consensus have been replaced by politics of confrontation in Nepal. There is a growing gulf among the political parties. The constitution needs to be promulgated within the given timeframe. If it is not, it would be a disaster for the peace process. The people are growing skeptical that the constitution will be written in the given timeframe.

Recommendations

1. The peace process needs to be democratized. The ownership of the people in the peace process is necessary for successful conflict transformation. A process that is far away from the people cannot go very far and will not produce any meaningful result. Civic participation in the peace building effort must not be cosmetic only. The civic engagement in the peace process must be genuine and meaningful.

2. The structural causes of conflict need to be addressed. The exploitation and marginalization of populations, such as Dalit, women, indigenous peoples and Madhesi, must be addressed in a systematic way. Their equal participation, dignity, respect and basic human rights must be ensured and effectively protected.

3. The rule of law needs to be strengthened, and no one should be treated as above the law. Political will must be mustered in order to ensure the effective functioning of the rule of law. Nepal is facing a complete breakdown of the rule of law and the phenomena of criminalization of politics and politicization of crime.

4. The comprehensive peace agreement is not fully respected by all concerned parties. In fact it is not only disrespected, but it has become a kind of forgotten document now. Since it provides a comprehensive roadmap for the peace process in Nepal, all parties must fully abide by it. Otherwise the peace process will be derailed.

5. The constitution writing process is the basic component of the peace process in Nepal. The constitution writing process requires politics of consensus, and constitution should be also made in the timeframe stipulated by the interim constitution. Therefore, total energy and concentration must be directed toward writing the new constitution. The political parties need to sort out their differences quickly or instantly for the larger interest of the nation and people. The parties need to build a

democratic culture in which to live and work together. The political parties should build an all-party mechanism to sort out their differences because the constitution writing process is also a consensus building process. It is evident that without consensus and cooperation among the major political parties, the constitution cannot be made.

6. The undemocratic behavior of the political parties is the chief obstacle for the peace process. The parties are the key vehicle for democratic politics. If political parties are not democratic in their inside structure, they also cannot behave democratically outwardly. The Nepalese political parties are currently undemocratically organized. The political parties needs to be democratized and should be made into inclusive and broad based political institutions. The political parties are the basic tools available to the people to participate in democratic politics. The vast majority of people are currently not allowed to participate in the political process of the nation. The diversities of the nation must be reflected in the organizational structure of its political system.

7. Security Council resolution 1325, which underlines women's role in the peace building process, must be taken into account. The women are the ones who suffer the most massive abuses, violations of rights and difficulties during an armed conflict. So special attention needs to be paid to their plight.

8. The decade long conflict produced the vast number of internally displaced peoples. Special attention should be paid to them, and the government should follow UN guidelines to deal with IDPs.

SHAN STATE, BURMA

The country of Burma is divided into seven states and seven divisions. The states are formed on the outer regions of the country and each state is named after the ethnic group that lives as a majority in the state. For the most part the dominant Burman people occupy the seven divisions which rest in the central areas. All states and divisions are governed by a military junta that goes by the name of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and controls all aspects of power with an iron fist.

The Shan State is the largest of all the states and divisions. It borders Thailand, Laos and China. Several Shan organizations have been fighting against the military junta for many years. In mid-1995 some of these groups entered a ceasefire with the SPDC. Ten years later, the political issues which the Shan people wished to have resolved were still ignored by the junta, and the shaky ceasefire was ended in some parts of the state.

Despite the difficulties that the constant threat from the military junta brings to the people, many progressive and creative activities are being carried out by Shan groups striving to build up the marginalized communities so that they can resist military oppression and at the same time prepare to participate in a democratic government once it is established.


Kachin
Myitkyina
Sagaing
Hakha
Sagaing
Mandalay
Chin
Shan
Mandalay
Taunggyi
Magwe
Sittwe
Magwe
Loikaw
Naypyidaw
Rakhaing
Kayah
Bago
Bago
Kayin
Pathein
Yangon
Hpa-an
Yangon
Ayeyarwady
Mawlamyine
Mon
Dawei
0 100 200 300 400 500 km
Tanintharyi

GRASSROOTS CONSTITUTION IN SHAN STATE

Shan State, Burma

This piece was written in 2006 by Nang Zawm Aye of the Shan State Youth Organization.

Since the Constitution Drafting Commission Shan State was formed in September 2000, it has worked hard to be acceptable to the majority of the people, to get wide participation of all sectors of society and to get consensus on methods of drafting and approving the constitution.

First of all I would like to share a brief history of the Shan State.

The Federated Shan States came into being in 1922 as a protectorate through agreement under the British Empire. Traditional chieftains called *Sao Hpa* had ruled the Shan States for centuries and carried on under the British. The Shan Federation existed up to the end of the Second World War.

After the Second World War, to show their desire for independence from Britain, a Shan States' Council was formed on February 7, 1947. Half of its members were representatives of the people nominated by the people and half represented by Sao Hpas elected by the Sao Hpas themselves. Against the British Governor's request, the Council did not allow the Governor's representative to chair the Council's meeting or participate in the meeting. This action became a symbol of defiance against the British colonial overlords.

Hence, in recognition of the action of defiance and the aspiration of the people of Shan State, February 7 was named Shan National Day. It was also a day that the Shan States' Council decided to jointly take independence, along with other states, from Britain. The Pang Long Agreement was signed on February 12, 1947. The initiative for genuine democratic federalism was born.

To develop a democratic system that respected the rights of the Ethnic Nationalities, the Shan leaders suggested each ethnic group draw up a constitution that would enshrine the rights that that ethnic group was most concerned about. Then these various constitutions could be combined into one, giving each Ethnic Nationality

assurance that they would have free and true participation in the federal state system in Burma.

To carry out this work, the Constitution Drafting Commission of Shan State (CDC-SS) was established in 2000. Each ethnic group included in the CDC-SS is working on a constitution in their own way.

The CDC-SS has established the following aims:

- Empowering the people (from the grassroots level up)
- Bottom-up democracy
- People are sovereign (not the Parliament or State institutions)
- Civil society and peaceful conflict resolution
- Building pressure for tripartite dialogue and genuine federalism
- Preparing for the participation in the tripartite dialogue (direct or indirect) the transitional period and beyond.
- To build up the unity of the people of Shan State
- To serve as a unit sample for all the Nationalities of Burma in developing their future

For these reasons we, as Shan members of Burma Issues, joined with the CDC-SS group, while at the same time working with community organizations. We believe writing a good constitution requires a good process because the new constitution must have the support and respect of all the grassroots people. This is very important because a constitution can only survive if it is protected and enforced by the grassroots.

We organized a survey of the grassroots to find out what rights they want protected and to find out what ideology and vision they have for the State. Each State must have a unique form of government and a unique constitution to respond to the special culture, traditions and history of that group. A constitution, or a form of government, cannot be successfully copied from one country to the next. A constitution in Burma should not begin by studying the constitutions of other countries, but by first studying the unique needs of the grassroots people of Burma.

If the grassroots cannot understand the political and economic structures, they cannot participate and, therefore, will not be able to control these systems. Soon they will be oppressed by these systems. That is why the political and economic systems must come from the experiences of the grassroots people and from the culture and traditions of the people. We must design political and economic systems that will support the protection of the human rights the grassroots people have identified.

Our group's work with CDC-SS and community organizing is an effort for the grassroots in Shan State. We believed one day we can go back to our country with the grassroots empowered in a society of peace and justice in Burma.

Addressing All Facets of a Conflict

REPORT FROM THAI-BURMA BORDER FACT-FINDING TRIP

Burma

The longer conflicts are allowed to fester, the more complex possible solutions become. In many of these conflicts, there is a call by the oppressed for democracy because they see hope within a democratic system that allows them a chance to participate. However, democracy is not a magic cure for all the root causes of violence. In fact, as the people of Burma experienced in 1948, a civil war can break out even though a well written constitution and a participatory democratic political system is in place. For a full introduction to the conflict in Burma, see page 3.

A democracy must grow out of a sincere attempt by all people to solve the inequalities that exist in society, which create marginalization and instability. If these root causes of conflict are not addressed, there is danger of the conflict continuing and even escalating. According to the World Bank, the average country reaching the end of a civil war faces a nearly 50/50 risk of returning to conflict within five years, depending largely on whether the root causes of conflict have been effectively addressed.

In December 2007, a fact-finding trip to the refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border was sponsored by CJPA and organized by Burma Issues. The team of four talked with ethnic people of Burma, who have fled persecution under the military junta there, and worked at understanding the causes of their conflicts and suffering. Their report was written by Rachel Derstine, a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer working with Max Ediger, and emphasizes the need to identify and attempt to solve the root causes of conflict so that democracy can, indeed, begin to grow and flourish.

Mission and objectives of the trip

The fact-finding trip to the Thai/Burma border sponsored by the Center for JustPeace in Asia was organized by the Burma Issues group to allow a team of four participants to speak with the victims of military oppression in Burma, and to identify the root causes of the conflicts and suffering of the ethnic peoples. In addition to speaking

with victims, participants were able to meet with a number of relevant political groups, international organizations, and community-based organizations (CBOs).

Participants gathered the stories of people who have suffered under military oppression and heard their calls for action. The team tried to identify the most important root causes of the conflict from the perspective of the most marginalized peoples in order to bring the ethnic struggle for justice and rights to the forefront of discussions on Burma, and to urge the international community to give this cause priority. More specifically, the group had five objectives: (1) putting the struggle for democracy in Burma into a broader context; (2) identifying some of the root issues that must be addressed in order to work toward an end to military rule and oppression in Burma; (3) develop a more comprehensive response to the Burmese military that would seriously address the issues of the ethnic groups; (4) identify the role which ASEAN, China and India are playing in the conflict and to suggest ways to challenge their role; and (5) after the trip, to prepare a detailed report on the team's findings.

Background of conflict

As a colony of the British, Burma was subject to the usual abuses that accompany colonial exploitation, but more importantly it was subject to the power strategy of "divide and conquer." This strategy included treating the ethnic groups as states with a semblance of autonomy, showing preference to some groups while abusing others, arming the ethnic groups against each other, and proliferating stereotypes and fear among the groups. During WWII, the Japanese partnered with the dominant Burman group to push out the British. Other ethnic groups promised their loyalty to the British in exchange for independence from the Union of Burma after the defeat of the Japanese. Both the Japanese and the British eventually left Burma.

Officially, the Union of Burma was formed as an independent state with the signing of the Panglong Agreement on February 12, 1947. The newly formed Burmese government under Aung San recognized and respected the full autonomy of the ethnic groups, but this was short lived as he was assassinated shortly thereafter. Independence was just one event in a long history of tension among the ethnic groups in the region, but was indeed the beginning of a momentous shift in the life experiences of all Burmese citizens. Independence in Burma was followed by much political unrest, culminating in a

military coup in 1962. Subsequent oppressive military regimes have regarded the ethnic groups as rebels or separatists.

Burma is home to seven major ethnic groups, and over 100 smaller ethnic groups. The largest of these are the Burmans who make up about 60% of the population. Each group has developed a complex system of cultural values, language, governance, gender roles, traditions, art, and techniques for living off the land. These groups have had conflicts throughout history, and were especially vulnerable to the "divide and conquer" tactics employed by the British, which continue to be utilized by the military regime to control the people of Burma.

Causes of conflict

The root causes of the conflict, as identified by the leaders and refugees met on the fact-finding trip, vary according to the ethnic group. The most basic and commonly agreed upon causes are: (1) the rule of the military government and total disregard for even the most basic human rights of the people of Burma, and (2) repressive policies targeting ethnic groups, which they see as, "ethnic cleansing or chauvinism."

Military dictatorship and human rights violations

With one of the most ironic names in the history of oppressive military regimes, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has ruled over Burma with divisive terrorist tactics. The British pulled out of Burma in 1947, leaving behind a host of social problems, such as a lack of education, widespread proliferation of leftover firearms and ammunition from the invasion of Japan, and a stewing ethnic conflict exacerbated by outside pressures. This is when opportunistic military leaders and corrupt politicians enter the picture. The relative success of the SPDC during the last twenty years is a result of the effective control strategies they employ, as well as their ability to ally themselves with wealthier countries in the region.

The role of the ASEAN countries, China and India has been one of economic support for and inclusion of the military regime in Burma. The country was invited to become a part of ASEAN in July of 1997. China regularly promotes trade with the SPDC's Union of Myanmar through trade exhibitions at the border to increase bi-lateral trade. Jade and rubies, two of the most prized gems coming from inside Burma, can be bought in the region, especially through gem traders

in Thailand and China. The major ASEAN project of a trans-Asia highway has allowed funds and resources to flow into Burma for the construction of an over-land trade route, which will connect the central sea port of Da Nang in Vietnam to the Andaman Sea in Burma, and eventually extend all the way into India. And while Japan has since gone back on its promise to give development aid to the military regime, it gave the SPDC a total of $78 million USD in 2001 alone. All of these activities allow the SPDC to create an appearance of positive trade relationships in the region. In addition, the SPDC receives an economic boost from foreign investment and regional projects, adding to their strength and authority.

Ethnic Cleansing

Military offensives conducted by the SPDC in ethnic states have successfully forced hundreds of thousands of people out of their homes to seek refuge in border areas. Control tactics include exploitive demands, such as the confiscation of food and money, the stealing of supplies for soldiers, forced conscription into the army, and portering and forced labor. In addition, forced relocation, the destruction of villages, burning of crops, the rape of women and girls, planting of landmines, and implementation of shoot-on-sight policies further terrorize the people and ensure their cooperation with the SPDC. These heinous crimes are committed in the name of national security against insurgents and armed ethnic militias. Any deaths caused by these policies are written off as collateral damage.

Informants pointed out a number of underlying reasons why the SPDC has been targeting ethnic states and attempting to neutralize ethnic insurgent and opposition groups. Most importantly, the SPDC wishes to exploit the natural resource-rich areas currently under the possession of ethnic groups. These states contain some of the most valuable resources to be found in Burma, such as mineral deposits, logging areas, and agricultural land. The need to control these resources has been used by the SPDC to justify the killings and displacement of innocent people. The SPDC's violence toward those in ethnic states is also a result of the rise of ethnic insurgency, which has been fueled by the abrogation or non-recognition of the Panglong Agreement that guaranteed ethnic states' autonomy and independence.

Based on accounts gathered by the team, there seems to be a deliberate move to displace ethnic peoples, specifically the Karen,

Karenni, and Shan, from their states to allow the SPDC to occupy the territory and control the resources found there. At present, there are more than 600,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) living within Burma and more than 130,000 people from Burma living in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. The number of refugees continues to rise as military offensives persist unabated in the ethnic territories.

The need for security against armed ethnic militias brings to light another issue fueling the conflict in Burma, and that is the further division of the ethnic groups by the SPDC. It is difficult to understand how villagers forcefully conscripted into the army could possibly perpetrate such crimes against their own peoples. Although the SPDC is in fact comprised of soldiers from all ethnic groups, they are carefully brainwashed and desensitized in order to carry out what the military asks of them. To eliminate the risk of a soldier recognizing his homeland and fellow ethnic people, soldiers from western Burma are stationed in eastern Burma and vice versa. This helps solidify villagers as "the other" and easily makes them the enemy, justifying the soldier's acts of violence against them. What appears on the surface to be a conflict between the SPDC and the people of Burma quickly breaks down into many long-existing conflicts between ethnic groups, which the SPDC are presently exploiting.

Another example of this exploitation is the fragmentation of the armed ethnic militias themselves. Some ethnic groups have at least two armed resistance groups actively fighting with the SPDC. Many of these are in the northeastern part of Burma in mountainous areas with dense jungles. In most cases these ethnic groups have fallen victim to splits and factions breaking off as a result of selective ceasefire agreements, the spread of misinformation by the SPDC, and long-standing conflicts with other ethnic groups. By terrorizing the local population, the SPDC is able to break down the people until they are either forced to ask their militia group to accept a ceasefire agreement with the military or to flee further into the jungle, leaving everything behind. Armed groups who do make ceasefire agreements with the SPDC are often used to fight against the armed resistance groups of other ethnicities.

The making of these agreements, the use of terror tactics, and constant fighting create confusion among the people. Who is

perpetrating violence against whom? Who can the people trust, and where do they draw the line between friend and foe? By creating battles among the ethnic groups, the SPDC can further dismantle any semblance of a unified movement against them, ensuring their own control in the area.

Consequences of conflict

As a result of these abusive control tactics employed by the SPDC, as well as the instability of the armed groups, villagers are left with very limited choices. They are often forced to submit to the SPDC, accept relocation, and allow themselves to be made vulnerable to abuses in the future. On the other hand, they can flee to the jungle areas controlled by armed groups or to the border area. To human rights groups and refugees alike, it is essential to regard the act of fleeing to the jungle or the border areas as an active choice in resisting the control of the military government. Sadly, their act of resistance most often leads them to a transient life of instability, insecurity, and one fraught with danger. While on the run, they risk a myriad of diseases, malnutrition, and injury or death by land mines, and a guaranteed lack of reliable education, healthcare services, or way to make a living.

Burma is classified into three different zones according to the SPDC, the white zone, black zone, and brown zone. Areas labeled white zone are areas where the SPDC has firmly established control. These are concentrated in the southern and central plains in Burma. Northern and eastern Burma are most often classified as brown zones—disputed areas—and black zones—totally resistance-controlled areas.

Life in the brown and black zones, also referred to simply as "the jungle," is a perilous existence, especially in the brown zones where the "4 Cuts Strategy" is employed by the SPDC. The 4 Cuts Strategy involves cutting the links between the armed groups and villages to (1) food, (2) funds, (3) recruits, and (4) information. It is clear that there is no way to control who is affected by the strategy, but that is precisely the point. It is in these areas where the lives of the people are threatened on a daily basis.

According to a report by the Backpack Medics Association, the most common causes of death in the brown and black zones are diarrhea, malaria, and ARI (Acute Respiratory Infection). Childhood

malnutrition affects over 15% of the children living in black zones in eastern Burma, and 5% of the children are severely malnourished. The maternal mortality rate is 1,000-1,200 / 100,000 live births after 28 weeks gestation and before 6 weeks post partum. Overall, only 4% of internally displaced women had access to emergency obstetric care.

Burma also has one of the highest numbers of landmine victims with as many as 1,500 people killed or injured annually. This number is an estimate and actually believed to be significantly higher. The reason for such high numbers of land mine victims is that both armed groups and the SPDC plant land mines in the brown zone where villagers are likely to fall victim to them. The land mines that the SPDC purchases from China remain active for as many as twenty years, while the homemade land mines planted by armed resistance groups last about four years.

Major risks for the villagers fleeing to the brown or black zones are the SPDC offensives, which include planting landmines, extra judicial torture and executions, sexual violence, and shoot-on-sight policies. If villagers are found in the jungle it is likely that they will be forced to porter for the soldiers or may even be shot with no questions asked. The terrain in northeastern Burma is mountainous, and creates difficulties for the army in controlling the population, and especially in transporting their supplies to outlying military bases. Villagers may be forced to carry extremely heavy packs with no food or water provided for them. For many the burden becomes too much, and when they can go no further they are beaten or shot and left for dead where they fall. For women, there is a high risk of rape and sexual violence and along with it high rates of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

For villagers who choose to flee Burma all together, life in the refugee camps is a slight improvement over a life running from the SPDC. Security for the refugees comes at the cost of freedom to live their lives as they choose, to grow their own food, to move freely between or within the camps, and with limited resources for a growing number of people. The refugees themselves expressed a growing desire to leave the camps to join resettlement programs and an almost total loss of hope for the future of Burma. Life in the camp is frustrating for the refugees with no privacy, limited education

opportunities, and total control and manipulation by the Thai authorities.

People have been fleeing from Burma for so long that some of the new generation of student activists and leaders of CBOs were born in the camps or came as young children. They have no memory of their homeland, and are raised amidst the anger and hopelessness of the camps. For many of the ethnic groups, Karen especially, education is essential. Children who do not have a chance to be educated while fleeing the violence in Burma may start the first grade at 12 or 13 years of age, putting aside their embarrassment for the chance to learn. Even in primary school ethnic students begin learning four languages: Thai, Burmese, their ethnic language, and English, as well as traditional subjects such as math, history, and science.

Outside the refugee camps there are a growing number of undocumented Burmese people often referred to as migrant workers. These people are subject to abuses in the workplace such as working without pay, working in places that do not meet health or safety standards, and sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse at the hands of their employers. They live in constant fear of both the SPDC and the Thai Authority, and the volume of migrant workers in Thailand is becoming a more pressing political and social issue for Thai citizens.

Beacons of hope

At the heart of this conflict are the narratives of individual people. The team's encounters with many young ethnic men and women who are emerging as the next generation of leaders show that there are reasons to hope and avenues for social transformation. In telling their stories to the team, community leaders reflected on their experiences and the ways that they strive to build a future away from their homeland. Their inspiring stories demonstrate how lives can be shaped and transformed through faith, courage, hope, and a willingness to sacrifice. These actions have a clear and lasting impact on the lives of the people around them and the communities they serve.

Some common themes emerged in the stories of the young ethnic leaders, even across different ethnic groups, as they retold their childhood memories. They talked about being constantly gripped by fear, gave accounts of how they fled Burma with their families to escape the atrocities of the SPDC and of living in the jungle along the

Thai-Burma border, and shared what it was like growing up inside refugee camps. Here are some glimpses into their stories:

> *"The SPDC came to our village and set up a concentration camp. So my family and my village decided to come to Thailand. It was hard and very hot crossing the rivers and mountains."*
>
> *"When the SPDC started a railway project in our state, they stole our lands, our farms and subjected people to forced labor."*
>
> *"In our area, we grow tea but the SPDC army forced us to grow opium."*

Most of the young people the team met are those engaged in work with community-based organizations and it was truly amazing to see how they passionately seek new knowledge and skills in the face of such hopelessness and devastation.

Education is often cited as a crucial tool towards change. "The best way towards change is to change the mindset of the new generation," said K.R., a 25 year old Karenni teacher who heads a leadership and management resource center.

"I teach concepts of non-violent peaceful means to achieve goals, to change the mindsets of the young people, equip them with skills and knowledge." K.R. and his colleagues also teach students how to handle conflict in the community.

"We teach our students to have the courage to talk, to be able to do things but with the right means in a polite, non-violent way," he said. "I hope that whatever I teach them in school would make a difference in the community in the long-run."

The course was established in 2003 to provide further education for high school students. It is non-academic but geared towards skills development that includes community organization and management skills.

"We need lots of human resource (education, health). We have human resource problem brought in part by the resettlement of skilled individuals," he said.

Since 2003, 93 students have graduated from the program. "We expect them to work in the communities for three years after

graduating. In the long-term, we expect them to lead organizations, to take some roles in the community, and to work in an administration under a new government in Burma in the future."

K.T.L., age 32, is among those who took and successfully passed the leadership course in 2003 where he was taught conversational English, correspondence, human rights and democracy, organizational and financial management, social studies, and computer skills. Under the banner of human rights and democracy, students are taught very basic concepts of law, constitution, and democracy.

"The course improved my writing and organizing skills. "There were 20 of us graduates and I am happy to be able to help others," he said. Right now, K.T.L. applies his skills with dedication and purpose to an environmental advocacy group, the Burma River Network, which is composed of members from many ethnic groups.

K.T.L. said that he was 16 when he left Burma in 1992. "I was a student leader in high school, I was still very young but at that time all the leaders were gone after the 1988 uprising." He was forced into hiding because the SPDC hunted him down.

"I had to leave and I stayed in the refugee camp. I had no relatives and I studied without a teacher. There was no school," he recalled. After some time he joined the rebel army and underwent three-months of training, but soon realized "I am not cut out for jungle life. I was stricken with malaria. Later, I just took responsibility in an office, did documentation, shoot photos." It was at this point that he left and lived in a refugee camp where he got to learn about the leadership course.

P.W. is a headmaster in one of the camps the team visited. Education inside refugee camps is where the hope for the future of the next generation lies. Taking a look at classrooms in the camps visited, children are bent over their work or reciting words in Karen and English. More than a thousand students are studying in the primary school and some 853 students are in grades 5 to 10. P.W. shared with the team that one basic problem is the lack of teachers because many have already resettled.

"So we choose from among our high school students and train them as teachers," he said. The teachers are Karens who are also refugees themselves. Subjects taught include English, Burmese, Karen, math,

history and geography. He himself was not always a teacher—"I was a farmer in Burma," he explained—but he was trained to teach history when he arrived in the camp ten years ago.

Another constraint, he said, is the lack of interest among students to learn "because they think about the new country all the time." To address this, parents and the school/education committee hold meetings and find ways to work together to encourage students to learn.

Referencing to specific motivation strategies he said, "Sometimes we hold contests and the first prize winner gets 1000 bahts."

He himself is going to be resettled with his family, and they are set to leave for Australia on April 5 of this year. "That would be my official last date," he said. Asked if he still dreams of going back to Burma, he said yes, but that if he ever went back he would be sent to jail because, "I used to be a revolutionary soldier. We left because we had to flee for our lives." And what is there to go back for, he said—only sad painful memories of many deaths in his family.

"My elder and younger brother, father and uncle were all killed inside Burma." He recounted the day they fled Burma. "I was three years old. My mother took my hand and she was carrying my younger brother on her back. I could not run. There was fighting in our village. I could remember the burning and killings.

"Before I came here, my life is one of fear and running, where to run, and I always worry how my children get education," he said. He found refuge in the camp, "where the emotions could not disturb me." There is in fact no rage in his heart against the people who killed his family members as he has found peace in his Christian faith.

His only desire now is for his children to go to school and to have access to food and medicine.

> "But here in the camp it is not enough because we could not go outside the camp and we do not have the same equal rights as the Thai people," he said jokingly, referring to his community as the "wild people." He wants to start a new life now and is preparing himself for his resettlement in Australia.

"I ready myself to do anything, any work for my children. We must always have hope and try our best. I work hard for my wife and my children, to make them happy."

Responses to the conflict

There is not a single framework for understanding the conflict among the ethnic groups in Burma, but a complex layering of perspectives and means of addressing the issues. Looking at the macro-level—at militaristic or political frameworks—the conflict becomes over simplified. Looking at the micro-level, at the individual villages, quickly exposes a complex web of identity and struggle. The political struggle both inside and outside Burma involves complex cultural and ethnic identities, histories of whole groups of people, and the narratives of individuals suffering at the hands of other human beings. Is there a political solution to such a complex issue? In order to address the rights of the ethnic groups, politics must be involved. There is no doubt that the system of government in Burma needs to be changed, but how that change happens and the final product of that change is less clear.

There is a loud cry for *democracy* among international organizations, political parties in exile, armed resistant groups, CBOs, refugees, political prisoners and IDPs. The cry for democratic process to be allowed in Burma is in fact the loudest cry heard at the moment, with the celebrity of Aung San Suu Kyi and the impressive demonstrations of monks and students in Rangoon sending the message to people around the globe.

Initial attempts by activists and groups opposed to the military regime to introduce the concept of democracy began with an elite group of people from Burma being taken to Germany to learn about democracy and basic political concepts, but this is a democracy built on a formula and not on the needs of the people. As the United Nations and other international groups add their voices to a call for tripartite dialogue—between the SPDC, the National League for Democracy (NLD), and an ethnic representative—the ethnic leaders expressed doubts that such a dialogue could actually serve the needs of all the groups involved. As recognized by ethnic leaders themselves, it is hard to see how just one single person could be asked to represent the needs of all the different ethnic groups in Burma should such an occasion arise. Surely any political solution that is realized in Burma must also include great reconciliation and

national healing. It seems that the ethnic identities of the people must be utilized in the political solution. Cultural identities that have so strongly withstood years of persecution, torture and unspeakable terror can also be used to bring about the healing and rebuilding of a country so thoroughly destroyed.

Education may also be the key to unifying an ethnic movement against the SPDC in reducing inter-ethnic conflict through awareness and understanding. The effectiveness of education has already been proven in the number of ethnic high school and leadership program graduates who have taken a leading role in CBOs, such as ethnic Youth Unions, Women's Unions, and international NGOs, such as the Alternative Network on ASEAN (ALTSEAN). Education is needed because human resources, such as healthcare workers, teachers, administrators and community leaders are lacking in the refugee camps because of resettlement and even more so inside Burma because of widespread displacement and violence. Also importantly, educated ethnic peoples are able to participate in human rights advocacy activities, benefiting both themselves and other people from Burma.

Many ethnic leaders expressed the belief that equipping their people with knowledge about constitutional law, human rights, and organizational and financial management will provide them with leaders now and for the new Burma in the future. Recognizing that the future of Burma rests in the hands of the younger generations, ethnic leaders also expressed their hope that education would provide future leaders with knowledge of non-violent transformation and the skills to bring about change. In order to achieve a free Burma, the ethnic groups must be invited to actively participate in any dialogue between the SPDC and the NLD or any other political group but also must be equipped with the skills to do so.

The UN model for tripartite dialogue leaves room for a single representative to speak for all of the ethnic groups. The ethnic leaders, however, are calling for a multi-partite dialogue in which all of the ethnic groups are invited to the table, along with the SPDC and the NLD. They argued that since all ethnic groups are a part of the problem in Burma, they should be granted the right to be a part of the solution. Already there are groups working to give voice to a unified ethnic struggle, including the Burma River Network and the Ethnic Nationality Council (ENC), and inter-ethnic organizations focused on

a peaceful revolution in Burma that representing the needs of all the ethnic groups. However, these groups are being successfully stifled by the SPDC and could be completely suffocated if ignored by the international community.

Alternative solutions/Recommendations

Alternative models of democracy should be allowed to develop in Burma with the help of ethnic leaders and communities. As leaders work to address the issues facing the ethnic groups, a system utilizing a process that all the participants can have confidence in must evolve, and to that end, a formulaic democracy cannot be the answer. While a political system in exile tries to gain its footing outside of Burma, its leaders need to be equipped with the ability to build a government that can effectively address the people's needs, such as healthcare, a legal system, financial institutions or a military. However, this type of education should not be targeted at wealthy elites or the majority Burmans; rather, the target population should be grassroots, ethnic communities who are ready to mobilize. The burden cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of those who have been elected, but also on the people themselves.

If a grassroots political solution is to be found in Burma, there are a few things that the fact-finding team feels should be addressed. While interviewees were not all in agreement about the effect that resettlement has on the refugees and the future of Burma, our team felt it important to note that an extreme "brain drain" is a real and possible detriment to the entire community. Many of those who are not accepted into countries giving asylum are the sick, disabled, elderly and very young. Where are these people supposed to find support as their community slowly shrinks? Who will they rely on for medical care and who will educate them?

The second issue that must be addressed is urgency. The time to act is now, as people inside and outside of Burma continue to suffer the same patterns of widespread hopelessness, depression and degradation as they have for the last 60 years. There must be an international call for bordering countries to allow aid to get inside Burma and certainly inside the refugee camps under their care. The deplorable living conditions not only harm refugees' health, education and livelihood, but also fuel anger, hostility, and violence, which, if unaddressed, will only compound and perpetuate itself.

THE BARBED WIRE

This picture is by Saw Eh Kaw Taw, one of the children who participated in the Refugee Children Drawing Workshop organized by Burma Issues and the Karen Student Network and held in the Mae La Camp on May 26-29, 2009. The workshop included 40 children between the ages of 10 and 14. The goal of the workshop was to reveal children's thoughts, experiences and feelings about happenings in the camp via drawing, and to raise awareness among outsiders to the refugee camp so that they might show recognition and empathy toward children's rights and dignity. The children's artwork was exhibited at the Fly Beyond the Barbwire Fence Festival organized by the Friends Without Borders Foundation in Chiang Mai as part of World Refugee Day on June 20.

CAMBODIA

During the long and drawn-out American war in Southeast Asia, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia slowly gained more and more control of the countryside. In 1968, they launched a national insurgency with the intent of taking over the entire country. As the US grew more and more dissatisfied with the rule of Lon Nol, the Khmer Rouge gained strength. On April 17, 1975, following the end of US aid to the Lon Nol government, the Khmer Rouge captured the capital of Phnom Penh and consolidated their control over all of Cambodia.

Within a short time they had emptied the cities and towns of the populations and began a repressive rule that resulted in the death of almost two million Cambodians. In terms of the number of people killed as a proportion of the population of the country, this was one of the most lethal regimes of the 20th century.

In 1979 an invasion by Viet Nam ended the Khmer Rouge rule and slowly the country has begun to rebuild. Yet the atrocities experienced under the Khmer Rouge remain traumatic memories for the people. After much debate, a tribunal to try Khmer Rouge leaders began in 2007and is expected to continue over the course of many years to come. While the people look forward to these trials with the hope that the truth will be revealed, justice carried out and healing started, many fear that the trials might only be a showcase that does not solve the pain of the people.

Truth and Reconciliation

KHMER ROUGE TRIBUNAL
Cambodia

This is a reflection written in 2006 by recent university graduate Nget Borey expressing his concerns about the Khmer Rouge tribunal and how it might be carried out.

Cambodia had gone through many regime changes. Of those, there was our darkest history called the "Pol Pot era" from 1975-1979. During this period, around 2 million Cambodian people were killed, many being executed and many others dying as a direct result of the Pol Pot policies. Today the Khmer Rouge Tribunal has become an important topic of international and local discussion, especially for Cambodians. In Cambodia there are different views on this tribunal. I agree that the tribunal should happen, but I do not think it can bring real justice to the Cambodian victims of the Khmer Rouge. I believe this for many reasons.

Firstly, as far as I am concerned, some current government leaders are former Khmer Rouge leaders or members. Even though the Pol Pot regime has been eliminated, this does not mean that all the Khmer Rouge leaders and important members have been arrested and punished yet. On the contrary, some high ranking Khmer Rouge leaders are now living a luxurious life and holding high positions in the government. How can they sentence themselves? Do they want to seriously hold this tribunal? The logical answer that comes to my mind is NO! The tribunal court is being prepared by the government, so I do not think the court will have enough independence in their decision-making.

Secondly, I am inclined to believe that the Khmer Rouge leaders who have already died are going to be held personally responsible for the massacre. It means that Pol Pot and his comrades who have died already will be found guilty for what was committed against the victims. This is the way, I think, the government and related countries plan to carry out the tribunal. The government has promised some Khmer Rouge leaders that the government would let them go free or cancel accusations and punishment if they joined the

government. So I think the responsibility for this massacre will be placed on Pol Pot and his comrades who have already died or perhaps some leaders who are still alive but may die soon.

Finally, I do not think the super power countries and neighboring countries, which related to the Khmer Rouge and provided support, will be brought into the court and punished. For instance, China was one of those countries which supported the Pol Pot regime in terms of weapons, technical training skills, experts, and others things. Moreover, the present Cambodian government right now has much influence from these countries, so the real murderers will not be shown. One more thing is that the UN also needs to respond about this because the UN recognized this regime from 1975 until 1991. Even though the UN is helping to prepare the tribunal, I think it is just like a drama to show to the world and the Cambodian people so they might forget and stop talking.

To sum up, I agree to that the Khmer Rouge tribunal should be held. I hate this killing regime that destroyed my country. However, I do not think that this tribunal will find justice for Cambodian victims because the court will be dominated by some former Khmer Rouge leaders who are holding high positions in the government and have good relationships to the powerful countries that will influence the tribunal process.

Viet Nam

For almost one hundred years beginning in 1859, Viet Nam was a colony of France. After a long violent struggle, the French were defeated in 1954. The country was temporarily divided along the 17th parallel by an international conference in Geneva, Switzerland. The socialist-oriented Democratic Republic of Viet Nam supporters gathered in the north of the country, while the Republic of Viet Nam supporters with US backing gathered in the south. The Geneva agreement stated that elections to reunify the country would take place in 1956.

However, when it became clear that Ho Chi Minh, the leader of North Viet Nam, would probably win a landslide victory, Ngo Dinh Diem, the president installed by the US in South Viet Nam, prevented the elections. War soon broke out between Ngo Dinh Diem's US-backed forces and opposition forces in the south, which received logistical support from North Viet Nam. After many deadly years of fighting, the war finally came to an end in 1975 when North Vietnamese revolutionary forces defeated the South Vietnamese and Americans forces.

With the country now unified, efforts to bring the conflicting sides back together, rebuild the country, heal the wounds of war and restore diplomatic relations with the US began in earnest. This has not been an easy process. Stories from Viet Nam help us see some of the issues that continue after a war comes to an end and how creative and courageous responses to the challenges that follow can help bring hope to all of us.


0 50 100 km
0 50 100 mi
104
108
CHINA
Fan Si Pan
Lao Cai
HANOI
Hong Gai
Haiphong
20
LAOS
Vinh
Gulf of Tonkin
Hainan Dao (CHINA)
Mekong
Hue
16
THAILAND
Da Nang
Quy Nhon
CAMBODIA
Tonle Sap
Nha Trang
Cam Ranh
Ho Chi Minh City
Mekong
Long Xuyen
Dao Phu Quoc
Can Tho
Gulf of Thailand
South China Sea
Con Dao

WITH SOLIDARITY WE CAN LIVE BETTER LIVES: VICTIMS OF AGENT ORANGE SPEAK

Viet Nam

This article was written by Max Ediger in May 2009 following a visit to The Association of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange in Quang Ngai, a city in Central Viet Nam that was hard hit by Agent Orange during the American-Vietnamese War where Max himself lived as a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer in 1971 and 1972.

Agent Orange is one of many herbicides sprayed by American planes over Vietnamese forests and fields. According to the website of Casper Platoon (http://www.casperplatoon.com/AgentOrange.htm), Agent Orange was developed in the early years of WWII to destroy rice crops in Japan. However President Roosevelt and Admiral Leachy decided that this "heinous chemical" should not be used.

However, in 1961 President Kennedy signed orders allowing Agent Orange to be used in Viet Nam to destroy crops and defoliate the jungle. From 1961 to 1970 over 21 million gallons of Agent Orange containing about 400 kilograms of dioxin were sprayed over vast areas of South Viet Nam. Dioxin is one of the most toxic chemicals known to science.

The poison continues to destroy the lives of people directly and indirectly affected by it. The Vietnamese government has called on the US government and the chemical companies that produced the poisons to help take responsibility for the victims. To date, both have refused to recognize their responsibility in this human tragedy.

Mr. Huynh Van Thiet is 86 years old now. From 1962 until 1969 he served in the North Vietnamese army and led patrols along the east side of the Truong Son mountain range where the Ho Chi Minh Trail served as a link between North and South Viet Nam. Many times planes flew over his unit spraying the mountains with Agent Orange and other herbicides. The people tried to protect themselves from the poisons with plastic sheets, but still the toxins entered their lungs and

bloodstream. Today, Mr. Thiet suffers from severe pain in his bones, his teeth have fallen out and heart problems burden him.

Mr. Thiet's wife also worked in the resistance and after being arrested, spent seven years in prison. After the war, the couple had seven children. One died at birth and another is suffering from the probable affects of Agent Orange. Their grandson, Huynh Tan Bi, lives with them now. He is a third-generation Agent Orange victim, and the entire right side of his body is slowly deteriorating. For years he tried to go to school and loved math, but finally he had to quit school because he could no longer manage his studies sufficiently. A war that ended more than thirty years ago has destroyed the future of this young man who had nothing to do with it.

Human rights groups and lawyers in the United States have helped Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange file a class action law suit against the US companies that produce the dioxins: Dow Chemical, Monsanto, Uniroyal, Hercules, Diamond Shamrock, Thompson Chemical, and T.H. Agriculture. The courts have consistently thrown the case out. On March 2, 2009, the US Supreme Court threw out the case without offering any explanation or statement.

The argument of the courts is that there is no scientific proof that the health problems and deformities are really the result of the toxins, despite research and facts that have proved Agent Orange used during the war is related to cancer, diabetes and fetal deformities. The fact that these problems are rampant in areas known to have been sprayed with Agent Orange is considered circumstantial only. Thus, the victims receive no help from the US government in dealing with their serious problems and, sadly, not even an apology for the horrific environmental destruction and human suffering these poisons have caused.

US statements claim that the chemicals used were not purposefully aimed at humans and that they are only herbicides. Researchers, however, point out that dioxins were sprayed directly over at least 3,000 villages affecting more than 3 million people, most of them innocent farmers, women and children. And, as one purpose of the spraying was to destroy food crops, the target was, indeed, humans. The Association of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange (VAVA)[2] tries to assist those most seriously affected, but is unable to deal

completely with such a large problem. That is why VAVA wants the US government and the chemical companies that produced these poisons to help take responsibility. It is not a matter of blame or pointing fingers, but rather taking unified responsibility to help care for those who continue to suffer so terribly from the war.

Mr. Phan Thanh Long, Deputy Chairman of the Quang Ngai Provincial VAVA, expressed deep disappointment at the Supreme Court's decision. "Taking the issue to the US courts was not about finding winners and losers. We are not interested in simply proving who is right and who is wrong. What we want is that all people, including the US government and the companies, recognize the pain of the victims of Agent Orange and join together with us to help them."

When I gave Mr. Thiet, his wife and Huynh Tan Bi each an origami peace crane, they accepted them with warm smiles. I asked them what they would say to the American people if they had an opportunity to go to America. Looking carefully at the peace crane in his hand, Mr. Thiet said, "We need solidarity now after all of these bad things. With solidarity we can live better lives. I don't want solidarity just with Americans, but with the entire world."

There is no anger in the voice or the eyes of Mr. Thiet, his wife or his grandson. Their dream of solidarity and unity with the world is an honest one. How will we respond to that dream?

[1]www.historiansagainstwar.org/resources/torture/luce.doc
[2] www.vava.org.vn

PEACE EYE

This picture is by Bui Chi (1948-2002), a well known Vietnamese artist from the central Vietnamese city of Hue. It was created while Bui Chi was held captive in Chi Hoa prison between 1964 and 1969 for refusing military service. During this time, his artwork was smuggled out to friends for use in the struggle for justice and peace. For more information on Chi Hoa and his work, see the beginning of Chapter 2.

THE EFFECTS OF AGENT ORANGE CROSS SIDES, GENERATIONS

Viet Nam

An International Peoples' Tribunal was held in Paris, France on May 15-16, 2009 to listen to some of the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange and to decide if the US government and chemical companies bear some responsibility toward them. The tribunal found parties guilty of all charges; however, it is yet to be seen if any action comes about as a result. On May 17, 2009, ThanhNien News.com *published the following report on the tribunal.*

Two septuagenarians and a man in his thirties representing two generations and two sides of the Vietnam War flew to Paris on Wednesday last week.

The three victims were united by the common goal of fighting for justice as they prepared to depose in front of the International Peoples' Tribunal of Conscience which held a hearing on Agent Orange (AO) victims last weekend.

Ho Ngoc Chu from the central region's Quang Ngai Province was fighting for the Vietnam Liberation Army and his base was located in a zone sprayed with AO from 1968 to the end of 1972.

The 73-year-old says he had been sprayed directly five times, including one instance in which he was wet from top to toe.

"When you are at war, you hardly avoid the chemical though you know it's toxic. You were in the wild, you have to drink the tainted water and eat the cassava (root) after the plant has been killed by the poison."

The impact of the chemical on his own health became obvious when at 36 years of age, he lost his teeth and began having bouts of fainting, skin inflammation, tumors and a spinal condition.

He and his son Ho Ngoc Tin were both infected with AO.

“Agent Orange has made our family miserable,” says his wife Quyen.

Their pension is barely enough to buy Chu’s medicine.

But Chu considers himself luckier than many other AO victims as he and his wife had given birth to their first child in 1966, when he was not affected.

“My girl is healthy like any normal person.”

Chu says, “It’s time the chemical producers and the US government stopped evading the evident truth about what AO has done to many Vietnamese people.

“I hope the international tribunal will be a success so that the AO victims feel consoled and I hope the outcome of the court will lead the US government to moral and righteous decisions.”

The other side

Mai Giang Vu from Ho Chi Minh City is also in his seventies, but fought for the US-backed Saigon regime, earning public contempt and comments like “he got what he deserves.”

In 1968, he joined US airforce soldiers in spraying the toxic defoliant in four provinces without knowing its purpose or its effect.

He was infected and so were all three of his sons, who started to suffer paralysis at age ten, were completely paralyzed by 15 and died in their twenties.

It was a shocking blow when doctors told him his sons died of the Agent Orange that he had been spraying.

“I’ve thought about committing suicide many times. But I cannot. I want to spend the rest of my life fighting for justice for victims like me.”

Second generation

The youngest representative of the three victims, Pham The Minh of Hai Phong City, is the son of war veterans.

The 34-year-old wished to become a teacher but many state education colleges rejected him because of his congenitally deformed legs.

In 1996, four years after he finished high school, Minh passed the test to teach English at a district vocational school.

When the school closed because of a shortage of funds, his students suggested he opens a class at home, and he has been doing that for more than 10 years now.

Minh's mother Vu Thi Anh says, "The classroom is outdoors with a straw roof, the teacher is handicapped, but no student has dropped out of class. They have only increased in number."

Last year, Minh opened a language and computing center to teach AO victims and disadvantaged children for free.

"Many people and I are indirect victims of the war. We suffer spiritual and physical pain every hour, every day," Minh says.

"We request the US government and the defoliant producers to bear responsibility for the consequences left in Vietnam."

INDIA

The Republic of India is considered the largest democracy in the world with a population of over one billion people. The country was a colony of Britain from the mid-1800s until it received its independence in 1947.

India is a very diverse country of many different religions and ethnicities. Some people estimate that there are more than 2,000 ethnic groups throughout the country. Hindi, English and 16 other languages are considered the official languages of the country.

While India has found ways to encourage all these diverse groups to live together, many inequalities between groups remain, which often results in severe violence. The caste system, which has been a part of the Indian social system for centuries, continues to break communities into different castes with the Dalits, the untouchables, being the most excluded and oppressed. Religious conflicts have also broken out from time to time. Fundamentalist Hindu movements occasionally target Christian or Muslim communities, demanding that Hinduism be recognized as the national religion of the country.

As India moved out of the colonial period, they began a development process designed to bring India into the modern world. The economy has grown steadily, but often at the expense of the marginalized communities who may lose their land, become cheap labor in factories and end up living on the streets of the cities begging for money. The benefits of development have not been spread justly among the population. Much blood has been shed, and continues to be shed, because of these ethnic, social and religious differences.

Unresolved Internal Conflicts

CASTESISM PERSISTS IN PEACE-TIME INDIA

India

This story was written by Goldy George of India in 2004.

A Dalit boy during his teenage years witnessed much caste oppression. His own beloved grandfather, father, mother and people of his community were ill treated, humiliated and beaten up by the so called “upper caste” people. This boy grew not with affection and care, but amidst atrocities, discrimination, oppression and humiliation. This childhood experience and exposure to the Indian social reality of caste oppression later made him take a very strong stand to vehemently challenge the oppression of the dominant caste Hindus.

One day, with feelings of burden, pains of oppression and tears in his eyes, he was lying in the dark corner of his dilapidated hut when he heard someone singing a folk song at a distance. Slowly it grew louder and louder. He realised that it was a song inviting all those who are broken and humiliated in the name of caste. Soon he rouse from his mat, threw off his patched blanket and ran to the street corner from where the voice was coming. He found a team of youngsters at the centre of the street playing a skit depicting the affliction of Dalits.

An hour of performance was over without him even knowing how the time went off. After the presentation, this team initiated a discussion with the community members, who were closely observing the play. Many of them felt that their condition was nothing less than what was presented there. That evening was the best gift in his life. The open discussion encouraged him to have further discussion with the performing troupe and to learn more about them. Indeed it was a wonderful experience for him to know that there are people who sing songs of the suffering of Dalits and perform street theatre that animates their poignant history and distressing present, all with a revolting spirit.

Narayanaswamy, the boy, became a volunteer of this team called "Sunanda". For the next seven years, he remained with this team, gaining exposure, knowledge and skills. This motivated him in building up a process to stand for equality and justice. Through years of experience, he realised that among Dalits, women are the most oppressed in the present situation, particularly with the advent of globalisation.

Kolar district of Karnataka, from whence he hails, is infamous for Dalit atrocities, particularly Dalit women. It is the same district where eight Dalits were charred to death in the wee hours of 8th March 2000. That was a black day in the history of Karnataka. Besides this, there are other such incidences of Dalit atrocities in the district, clothed in various forms and appearances.

With this background, it is a big challenge to organise the womenfolk. But Narayanaswamy and his team bravely took it on. This led to the formation of "Aadima Shakthi"—a Dalit Women's

Movement. Narayanaswamy, now in his early forties, says, “The atrocities committed against Dalit women in Kolar district are very high. Forces that strive to divide the community into sub-castes dominate the district. Recognising the fact that they are goaded to stay divided, Dalit women in the district have come together as a Dalit Women’s Movement, viz. Aadima Shakthi".

This movement evolved through the struggles of Dalit women in Kolar, Malur and Bangarapet Taluk of Kolar district. At present Aadima Shakthi is efficiently addressing the questions of caste oppression, landlessness, bonded labours, agriculture workers and so on. Aadima Shakthi means “ancient women’s power”. In Kannada, “aadi” means ancient, “ma” means women and “shakthi” means power.

DON'T SAY HINDUS KILLED MY FATHER

India

This is a story by Max Ediger written following travels in India in 2008 along with School of Peace participants. It was published in June 2008 by PeaceSigns*, the online publication of the Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA, and is reprinted here with their permission (*www.mennolink.org/peace*).*

"I'm not saying that every Muslim is a terrorist, but I am saying that every terrorist is a Muslim!"

These words of a young leader of the fundamentalist Hindutva movement brought cheers from the angry mob gathered in an open field in the Indian state of Gujarat. It was February 2002 and the local Hindutva leaders were feeling powerful and invincible. Their calls to drive all non-Hindus out of the state were bringing in large crowds and local political leaders often acted in open support of them.

Ahmadabad, capital of Gujarat, is home to large mixed communities of Hindus and Muslims who had been living together in relative peace for generations. They shared the same streets, the same markets and mingled happily during festivals. They were neighbors who knew each other by name, exchanged local gossip and felt

comfortable in their ecumenical neighborhoods. All that came to an abrupt end during the early months of 2002. The rallies organized by the Hindutva fundamentalists grew in size and hostility. As the poorer members of the Hindu communities were agitated into a frenzy, they were also given money to do the dirty work of the leaders. A short time later, the violence began. Mobs tore through the narrow streets of the neighborhoods looking for Muslin homes and businesses. Fires burned everywhere, people ran in panic and blood flowed. Within a few days, more than 2,000 people, including many pregnant women and small children, had been killed. Almost all of the dead were Muslims. The survivors gathered in makeshift camps in safe areas and waited. Many of them are still waiting—waiting for a sense of security and waiting for the government to investigate the rampage, provide compensation and make certain such violence does not happen again.

In March of this year, I traveled to Gujarat with a small group of young Asians representing different countries and different religions. We went to Gujarat to meet with survivors of the massacre to learn what lessons they could share with us about justice and peace. We were worried. How would they receive those of us who were Buddhist, Christian and Hindu? Would vengeance be on their minds and would they direct their anger against us?

Perhaps our fears were too influenced by what we would expect from our own societies, or perhaps we did not deeply believe that amidst so much terror and death we could find the seeds of forgiveness, compassion and hope. We were kindly invited into the small temporary rooms of the Muslim refugees, given the most comfortable places to sit and graciously offered tea and snacks. Their stories were shared quietly but always with deep emotion. They had lost so much in the riots. Homes and businesses were burnt, but most of all they mourned the loss of their family members. Homes and businesses, they said, can be replaced but the loss of a husband, wife, mother or child can never be given back.

As they shared of their losses tears filled their eyes, but there was no anger in their voices. "They were our neighbors," our new friends repeated many times. "We knew them and we used to eat together and laugh together. Suddenly they turned on us. We don't know what happened to them."

The highlight of our brief sojourn with these people, who refuse to feel like victims, came during a chat with a young 17 year old Muslim boy. He was only 11 when the mobs destroyed his house and killed his father. Now he lives in a tiny two-room house with the remaining members of his family, dreaming of one day becoming an airplane pilot.

"What do you think of the Hindu people now?" we asked. "They killed your father so brutally and left you alone to care for your mother and siblings. Don't you really hate them?"

His answer came without a moment's hesitation. "Don't say that Hindus killed my father. It wasn't Hindus who did this but evil persons. When someone in your religion does something bad, do you say it was the religion that did it?" Then he repeated again, "Don't say it was Hindus who did the violence. It was evil persons."

And thus, healing and reconciliation becomes possible through the words of wisdom of a young man who knows the reality and pain of violence. His response is reminiscent of the story in Matthew 8 in which the Roman captain comes to Jesus seeking healing for his servant and notes that Jesus need not make the journey to see the young servant, but can heal him simply with a word. Jesus is astonished and responds to those around him, "I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know all about God and how God works."

Would Jesus respond to the words of this modern young Muslim man in a similar way by saying, "I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust in Christian communities, the very people who are supposed to know all about God and how God works"? We need to listen to God's wisdom coming to us from strange places. Perhaps then we could also become stronger disciples of God's forgiveness, compassion and hope in a world so filled with words of vengeance and anger. Perhaps then we would not be so easily swayed to support war by the agitated shouts of angry leaders.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEVELOPMENT

AMERICAN CORPORTATION VS VICTIM OF BHOPAL

India

On the night of December 2, 1984, forty tons of a lethal cocktail of poison gases made up of methyl isocyanante, hydrogen cyanide, monomethyl amine, carbon monoxide and up to 20 other chemicals, leaked from Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide factory in Bhopal, India. There was no warning. Before anyone could realize the full impact of the disaster, an area of about 40 square kilometers with a resident population of over half a million was engulfed in dense clouds of poison. People woke up coughing, gasping for breath, their eyes burning. Many fell dead as they ran. Others succumbed at the hospitals where doctors were overwhelmed by the numbers and lacked information on the nature of the poisoning. By the third day of the disaster, an estimated 8,000 people had died from direct exposure to the gases and a further 500,000 were injured. Today, the number of deaths stands at around 20,000 and several hundred thousand others still require medical attention. Union Carbing in Koki Village. They cleared the land themselves and settled on it.de continues to withhold information on the composition of the leaked gases and their effects on humans. Although such information is needed for proper diagnosis and care, Union Carbide maintains that these facts are trade secrets.

When multinational corporations invest in a country, they bring considerable economic development, creating jobs and injecting money into local economies. However, they also bring with them serious human and environmental problems, as shown by the disaster in Bhopal. This poem was written in 1984 by a survivor of the Bhopal Gas tragedy.

TORTURE ME

Aim a blowtorch at my eyes
Pour acid down my throat
Strip the tissue from my lungs

Drown me in my own blood
Choke my baby to death in front of me
Make me watch her struggles as she dies

Cripple my children
Let pain be their daily and their only playmate
Spare me nothing

Wreck my heath so I can no longer feed my family
Watch us starve
Say it is nothing to do with you

Don't ever say sorry
Poison our water
Cause monsters to be born among us

Make us curse God
Stunt our living children's growth
For seventeen years ignore our cries

Teach me that my rage is as useless as my tears
Prove to me beyond all doubt that there is no justice in the world

You are a wealthy American corporation
And I am a gas victim of Bhopal

DEFINE "JUSTICE"

India

Modern judicial courts seek legal solutions to conflicts that depend on determining a winner and a loser. However, many traditional communities historically have sought amicable solutions so that human relationships are restored and the conflict is truly transformed. Here is one such story from the Naga people of modern-day north east India. This story was shared by Gentleson Vashum at the 2002 CJPA workshop in Malaysia.

A conflict arose between the villagers of Chupfuketa and Vishepu over the felling of trees near the Vishepu village. The felling of trees from the forest located near Vishnu village disturbed the natural flow of water that goes to the neighbouring village of Chupfuketa and nourishes their paddy fields. The matter was taken up by the councils of both villages, and they agreed that since the cutting of trees denied the inhabitants of Chupfuketa the basic source of their sustenance, Vishepu villagers should stop cutting trees from that forest.

Hypothetically speaking, if this case was taken to a legal court, the ruling would most probably favour the villagers of Vishepu, as immovable property acts and other such laws would come into play and as a result, undesired animosity might arise between the two villages. However, the magnanimity of the Vishepu villagers in respecting the genuine need of Chupfuketa villagers goes a long way in forging friendly ties between them. In obtaining such amicable solutions that uphold natural justice and restore good human relation between the conflicting groups/individuals, the mediation process, which engages a third party, is of prime importance. The mediation role is normally played by village elders (jury members) who mediate between the two conflicting groups/individuals to reach an amicable settlement that will be acceptable and binding to both. To ensure a fair outcome of impartiality an oath is administered to the jury members.

Thus, the wisdom of delivering justice in the Naga customary court is to restore the human relationships that break down in a conflict. Justice at the expense of human relationship is avoided, but this doesn't mean that justice is compromised for the sake of restoring relationships. This is made possible because justice is largely

determined by the acknowledgment of truth by the wrong doer. If this acknowledgment takes place, the victim or the victim's family is willing to compromise and punishment becomes secondary. This aspect of the Naga culture explains its high regard for truth and honesty on which lays the basis of justice, mutual respect and peaceful community living

DEVELOPMENT UPSETS TRADITIONAL VALUES

Viet Nam

In the context of Viet Nam, human relationships are essential to establishing harmony within the community. This tradition, however, has been weakened by many modern forces. Particularly, the spread of more individualistic ideology has contributed to violence in previously harmonious communities. Here is a story of how the Vietnamese people view human relationships as a vital component of harmony. This story is by Dr. Bui Quan Dung and is from a research paper he did with assistance from Mennonite Central Committee in 2001.

In the minds of Vietnamese peasants, the concept of human relationship is synonymous with kindness and impartial help in their everyday lives. The following examples show certain changes taking place in the minds of peasants as a consequence of the adoption of market production in rural areas.

In the traditional agricultural society, those who provide loans with interest were hated, and insisting on getting the loans paid back was considered very inappropriate behavior."

Similarly, in the traditional agricultural society, people usually did not get paid for helping others. Men who repaired the yard or the kitchen roof for neighbours were not paid. In this case, the family head just invited them to a meal or gave some present for their children. The helper would be quite happy because he felt sure the family head would not refuse to help him in case he needed help later.

Elderly people and the common people continue to maintain these expectations as morality in rural society. For these people, kindness and impartial help to others is regarded as one of the moral virtues. Meanwhile, the youth and middle class have developed a "practical" culture imported along with the monetary economy. For them, help must be fairly and straight forwardly paid. Non-payment now would cause the same annoyance as payment did before.

Increasingly, everything requires money. Neighbours who help each other expect some money; otherwise nobody wants to help.

In research done by Dr. Dung in 1999, a rural household head told interviewers that, although he asked for a favour from a commune cadre, he failed to get his son, who had just finished school, a job at a local administrative management agency.

“Before everything seemed easy,” the household head said. “Just talk with someone I knew, then everything seemed okay. But now such relationships don’t help. The commune cadre even argued that in accordance with official rules and regulations, my son has to have a high school certificate. He said there is no need for me to ask for their favor if my son has that degree.”

For this man, this is a break from traditional values, from the world of principles that he believes should be strictly observed in order to be true human beings. Kindness and impartial help as main principles are now replaced by impersonal standard requirements.

RESISTANCE IN KOKI VILLAGE
Cambodia

This story was shared at the 2002 CJPA workshop in Malaysia by Thorn Kakada who was at the time working with Khmer Ahimsa, a local NGO working to build peaceful communities in Cambodia.

After the Khmer Rouge rule ended in 1979, people across the country returned to the land they had occupied prior to 1975 or settled any unoccupied land they could find. The latter was the case for eighty families living in Koki Village. They cleared the land themselves and settled on it. As was the case in much of the country, the government tacitly recognized their right to occupy the land, but they were never given official title.

In 1996 the provincial governor sent armed police and military police to evict the villagers from the land, saying the land belonged to a rich businessman. They plowed down houses, fruit trees and crops and arrested two people who were incarcerated for 11 days.

In 1998 following various efforts by the eighty families to complain, including sleeping in front of the National Assembly, the provincial governor's office found new land for 56 of the families. No one understood why there was no settlement for the other 24 families. The 24 families maintained contact with each other, continued to file complaint letters to Phnom Penn and even tried to get to the prime minister's house.

The 24 families had seen examples of people from another village who had successfully reoccupied their own land, and they got together to discuss doing something similar. They decided to move back onto their land, which was now vacant except for a military police guardhouse. The military police were protecting the land for the businessman. Everyone helped to pull out hundreds of concrete border posts that had been put up all around their land. The next day the families borrowed 200,000 Riel to buy a small house, and everyone helped to carry it onto their land. They also tied up a tarpaulin and put up signs in Khmer that said, "Villagers ask for their own land back again."

A few hours later, two truckloads of military police came and asked

them to move their houses off the land. The villagers refused, though the military police all had guns. The military police asked who had pulled out the border posts and the villagers replied, “If you put posts on our land, we will pull them out.” Later, while most people were busy preparing lunch, five military police kicked down the house. The police tried to put the remains of their house in their truck, but the families pulled them out of the truck and loaded them onto a truck they had hired. Everyone got in the truck and went to the provincial governor’s office. The governor wasn’t there, so they left the remains of the house with a guard and asked him to watch over it.

The next day, the 24 families came back to their land and put up a tarpaulin. The military police came when people were putting up the tarpaulin. They tried to keep people from putting up support poles, but they persisted. They ordered people to take down the tarp. The people refused. The military police said, “If you want peace, get off this land.” The villagers asked, “Who ordered you to move us off of our land?” The military police said, “If they won’t move, throw them in the truck.” The villagers asked, “Who ordered you to arrest us? And where is the warrant asking you to arrest us?” The military police said, “What right do you have to ask to see a warrant? Just look at my uniform.” The villagers asked, “Don’t you support the villagers?” They replied, “We don’t stand by the villagers. We stand by the businessman. We can get money from them, not from you.” The military police were unable to take down the tarp because the villagers were holding onto it. At night the villagers took the tarp down and went home.

The next morning, the poles used to hold up the tarpaulin had been cut down. The one tree in the middle of the land had also been cut down. People found other poles to put up the tarp. After awhile, the military police came again, and there was a standoff for several hours before things quieted down. At night the people took the tarp down. The next day, the poles had been chopped up. After putting up the tarp for four days in a row, and having the poles chopped up every night, people decided to guard at night.

Everyday, the military police came with guns. For the first ten days, two truckloads of military police came every day. After ten days, only a few came to watch what people were doing.

Several weeks later, people started to plant cassava, bananas, and other crops. After a while, when people had planted quite a bit, the military police forbade them to plant any more. The villagers complained, and the situation became very tense. They continued to plant, and the military police continued to forbid them. People from the governor's office told them, "What you're doing doesn't look good. If you want to complain, you should go to the National Assembly. But the people believed they were more effective staying on their land.

Currently the families continue to live on their land. They have planted fruit trees and other crops so now they have vegetables to sell or offer to visitors. Two families have built real houses (despite the military police forbidding them) and two have built huts. The other families come by regularly, and if anything happens, everyone comes. The families have never yet been taken to court. They have neither been given permission to stay on their land nor been permanently evicted from it.

CAMBODIA
FISHING FOR JUSTICE

This story was also shared at the 2002 CJPA workshop in Malaysia by Thorn Kakada who was at the time working with Khmer Ahimsa, a local NGO working to build peaceful communities in Cambodia.

Anlong Chrey is a small village in one of the central provinces of Cambodia. The village is located in an area that floods every year during the rainy season.

After the Khmer Rouge rule ended in 1979, people went back to live in their villages, and the government encouraged them to farm and settle the area so that it would become more secure. Throughout the 1980s, people were allowed to fish wherever they wanted to.

In the late 1980s, the government opened up the country to the international market economy, and those with power began taking over local resources that could promised good profit. In 1988 the government began auctioning off the fishing lots across the country as businesses. A businessman bought the concession for one pond near Anlong Chrey village. There were still three other ponds that villagers could fish in, so there wasn't an immediate problem. But eventually the lot owner claimed and took over these three community ponds as well. In 1992 people complained. There had been a letter from provincial officials recognizing that the other three ponds were not fishing lot ponds, rather they belonged to the community. The commune chief borrowed the letter and lost it.

Over time the situation got worse. A new lot owner employed guards with guns to keep people from fishing in the four ponds. An even bigger problem was that the new fishing lot owner destroyed the irrigation dikes in rice fields, claiming they interrupted the flow of the fish into his ponds. He also kept people from pumping water from the lot ponds into their fields. Community members were arrested for fishing anywhere within the village, even just behind their homes, and were forced to work for the lot owner for five to ten days without compensation. They were also arrested for clearing the annual re-growth from their rice field, and charged with cutting flooded forest. The lot owner also pumped ponds dry to catch every last fish.

The community wrote several letters and petitions between 1992 and 1999, but the government addressed none of them adequately. Finally in 1999, villagers met fisheries officials who said any ponds that were supposed to belong to the community would go back to the community. That gave the villagers the confidence to go on and try to get the ponds back.

In late 1999, when the floodwaters had receded, the community organized its first "fish-in." When the lot owner pumped out one of the three ponds he had taken from them, to catch the fish, community members descended on the pond and caught the fish with baskets. The lot guards tried to stop them. One guard started shooting in the air and people ran off, until one person suggested they run towards the gun so they could see who was shooting. Everyone turned around and ran towards the guard, who was frightened and ran off
The lot owner took one of the community leaders to court, charging that he had destroyed his fish. The leader informed the court that as soon as the owner pumped the other community ponds empty, the people would again catch the fish.

When the lot owner pumped another pond, about 400 people from four villages descended on the pond to fish with baskets. Lot guards pointed guns at the villagers to try to scare them off. One woman said, "Sorry, but you should know that the government in Phnom Penh doesn't let people use guns anymore, so you should put your guns away, they are not to be used again." The guards couldn't do anything. They had a set of handcuffs and said they would take her away. She said, "Then you'll need 400 handcuffs." Eventually the lot guards knocked down a dike and water flowed back into the pond so the people stopped fishing.

Seven people were called to court. Seventy people went. The district chief tried to get the people to agree to an in-absentia trial. He said, "It's so much trouble for you to go there, and they won't find you guilty." But the people decided to all go and they found a lawyer to represent them. The court found them innocent.

THAILAND

The capital of Thailand is Krung Thep Mahanakorn, more popularly known as Bangkok. It is now a city of nearly 9 million people. Following the turbulent 50s and 60s, Thailand began a process of rapid economic growth. From 1985 to 1995 it had one of the fastest economic growth rates in the world. Later financial crises dampened this growth, but Bangkok still continued to grow and develop. As more and more wealth was collected in the city, the old infrastructure was unable to accommodate the increasing number of cars and people. Roads needed to be expanded and the mass transit system developed. To accomplish this, the government needed land for new highways to ease the serious traffic jams. As purchasing land is expensive, many new roads and other development projects appeared to be focused on areas occupied by slum communities. Although these communities had occupied the land for generations, the people often did not have land titles, making it easy for the government to confiscate the area and force the people to move. Resistance against these relocations grew as the slum residents became more aware of their rights within city laws. Many struggles for the right to remain in the old locations failed. A few were victorious. Their stories were, and continue to be, an inspiration to other communities facing similar evictions.


CHINA
VIETNAM
BURMA
LAOS
CAMBODIA
Mekong
Salween
Chiang Mai
Doi Inthanon
Lampang
Mae Nam Yom
Mae Nam Nan
Mae Nam Ping
Udon Thani
Phitsanulok
Khon Kean
Khorat Plateau
Nakhon Sawan
Nakhon Ratchasima
Ubon Ratchathani
Chao Phraya
Mae Nam
Nakhon Pathom
BANGKOK
Si Racha
Ban Laem Chabang
Andaman Sea
Prachuap Port
Gulf of Thailand
VIET.
Surat Thani
Nakhon Si Thammarat
Phuket
Songkhla
Hat Yai
South China Sea
Strait of Malacca
MALAYSIA
INDO.
0 50 100
0 50 100

DISPLACED BY DEVELOPMENT

Thailand

There are different modes of dispossessing people of their roots. One way is direct war, another is creeping community conflicts. But an easy method that has been discovered over the last half a century is displacing people in the name of "development and progress." This phenomenon has grown in the wake of construction of dams, power projects, mining, roads, infrastructure and various other pretexts. This story is about one community in Thailand that resisted the process of eviction from their land. The story takes place in the mid-1980s and was recorded by Max Ediger when he worked with this particular community while working for the People's Organization for Participation, a community development group in Bangkok.

A community of Cham Muslims who have lived in Bangkok for nearly 200 years were facing eviction because of the construction of an expressway off-ramp. This off-ramp would cut through the community and displace many homes. The people in the community decided to fight against the expressway project.

They sent objection letters and worked with opposition parties to lobby support. They also organized people in the community to act as guards to protect their community from strangers and to protect their children. The fight continued for nine years. They organized cultural tours for people from outside to visit their community in which people can come to see their cottage industries of silk weaving and other activities. This helped demonstrate that the community is a healthy and productive one.

While the government referred to them as a slum, they wanted to show others that, even though their community is very old and not so modern, it was a healthy and viable community. Finally they went to the prime minister's office and sat outside for three days until the he finally agreed to meet with them. The eviction effort was brought to an end, but the people continue to be alert because they know that the eviction can always start again without warning.

The people of this community were very successful in organizing themselves to struggle for their rights. Religion played a major role in this struggle. The Koran was a source of support and strength. The

mosque was the main gathering place where discussions and planning for the resistance occurred. Many Thai people from outside the community were inspired when they learned how determined and courageous the community was. They also wanted to learn from the community people's experience because they saw that their non-violent way was very successful in stopping the project.

Moving On

Friends and Enemies
Viet Nam

This story was written in by Max Ediger who lived in Viet Nam between 1971 and 1976 while volunteering with Mennonite Central Committee.

I was in Vietnam in 1976 after the war ended. I met a North Vietnamese soldier who had been in the jungle for more than 10 years fighting against the Americans. He used to come to our house and eat with us. Sometimes, when we were sitting around chatting, he would share horrible stories from the war. He told about his family members and friends who had died under American bombing and artillery shelling. He talked about how terrorizing it was to be caught in B52 bombing attacks and the affects of napalm on people.

As I listened to these stories, I felt strange because he never indicated any anger with me as an American, or even against America the nation. One day I asked him why he wanted to befriend me, an American, and why he did not show any anger against Americans. He looked at me with some surprise and then said, “We have to be able to differentiate between our friends and our enemies. If we can not, we will force our friends to become enemies.”

Chapter Three:
A VISION FOR JUSTPEACE

Chapter three brings together works that express the deep hope for JustPeace in our own communities, the conviction that external peace must begin with internal peace, the role religious faith plays in peacebuilding and the inspiration to move forward using the wisdom and energy gained from past successes. There is always hope even when situations are desperate. We only need to know where to look to find this hope. Through the stories in the two preceding chapters and in this final chapter, we hope you can see the potential of marginalized and oppressed communities to provide us with the hope we need to stand beside them, support them in their struggles and learn from them how JustPeace can truly grow from the grassroots up.

REACHING FOR PEACE

This picture is by Bui Chi (1948-2002), a well known Vietnamese artist from the central Vietnamese city of Hue. It was created while Bui Chi was held captive in Chi Hoa prison between 1964 and 1969 for refusing military service. For more information on Chi Hoa and his work, see the beginning of Chapter 2. For a full introduction to the conflict in Viet Nam, see page 171.

AS I WALK. . .

Sri Lanka

Here is a poem written in summer 2009 by a Soul of Hope in Sri Lanka. This particular soul has been actively involved with CJPA since 2004. For a full introduction to the conflict in Sri Lanka, see page 118.

As I walk along the path
Of a new hope – a new hope for my
Beautiful land….
I see a little girl
Walks toward me…

I hear a sound – which
Calls me to listen to her
Slowly I get closer, closer and
Closer to her

She keeps walking….
Slowly I try to listen to her – to listen
To the call for my soul – A call
For my new hope – a new life

Hmmm…. It's a familiar song
A song for my soul – A new song
For my new life…for my
New path…

I'm so closer to her – and
She looked at me
With a pleasant smile
Offered me a bunch of flowers – and
Shared the secret which I was longing to hear…

Yes, it is the song of secret -
The Mantra of my new life

And she gets closer to my ears and said
"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me…"
Yes it is the Mantra which awakens me….

Which asked me "Am I a real peacemaker?" – Am I
Really working for a change of people's lives?
Am I standing on behalf of the oppressed? – OR
Is it my profession? Is it the earning for my life?
My dear little girl, help me to answer…

Yes, the long standing war is over…are people living in Peace?
No more division in this land
No more boarders – BUT
Are we united in our souls? I'm I prepared to forgive?
Little girl, help me to answer…

Yes, no more minorities in this land…
No more separations – BUT
Am I still dominant on others? Are we prepared to be equal? OR
Am I still gazing at others with suspicions?
Little girl, help me to answer…

Yes, no more guns… no more fights
No more fighter jets… no more war ships – BUT
Am I ready to live in harmony?
Am I ready to accept others - as my own
Brothers and sisters?
My dear little girl, help me to answer…

Yes, we talk peace, we write about justice – We
Walk on streets for equality – BUT
Am I a practitioner of Peace, Justice and Equality in my own life?
Am I ready to forgive and forget the evil past of this land?

Yes, my dear little girl, I should be ready…
As I walk a journey of a new dream – A ray of hopes,
A path of righteousness for my land…
Yes I should be ready…

Yes, my dear little girl, it is my dream –
For a prosperous, peaceful and a just land,
Yes, a dream for a true pearl of the Indian Ocean…
No… No… a pearl of the Universe…

PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF HUMANITY

Sri Lanka

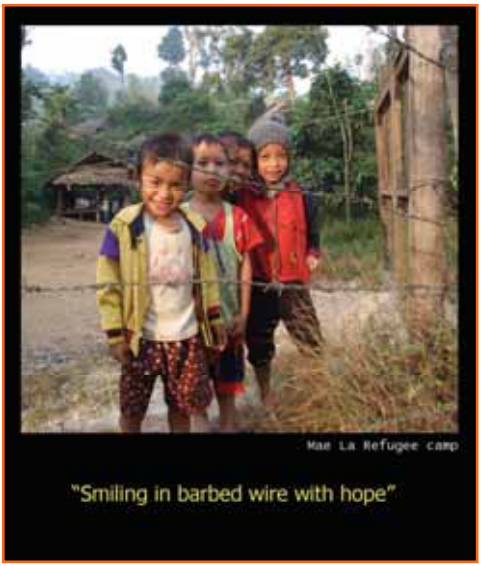
This song was composed by a faith-based organization in Sri Lanka in 2006. The song allows us to sing the word "peace" in the different languages of Sri Lanka. Even though we speak peace in different languages, we are all brothers and sisters in one family of humanity. See the end of this book for the music to accompany these lyrics.

Pray for the peace of humanity //
Humanity shall live in peace //
Shalom, Salam, Samaya, Shanthi, Samadanam, Peace
Humanity shall live in peace //

IDENTITY AND FREEDOM TO TRAVEL
Burma

This piece was written by Saw Mort on July 6, 2008. Saw Mort currently lives on the Thai-Burma border where he works with Burma Issues doing community organizing with villagers, training of new staff and developing a special program for children from the war zones to help them express their feelings and participate in seeking solutions to the conflict. He has been involved with CJPA since 2008. For a full introduction to the conflict in Burma, see page 3.

I am a human and I was born a free man, but boundaries and laws have withheld justice from me. When I reflect on my life, I see that there are many people in the world like me. They are also hungry for freedom, and struggle for true liberty and justice that respect human dignity. I understand that freedom is not available to everyone, and that it cannot be easily attained while selfish, egotistical people perpetuate stereotypes and are inhumane in their treatment of others. I know that I have to work at stopping injustice, exploitation and oppression. This means not seeking revenge against those who discriminate and oppress, but sticking with the system of love, justice, and peace. So my story begins…



Living in Barbed wire

I was born in the war zones in a village called Kaw Moo Rah between the Thailand and Burma borders. It was in the territory of the Karen revolutionary group known as the Karen National Union (KNU), a

special battalion of rebels fighting against the Burmese government for the right to self-determination

In 1984, when I was five years old, an offensive began in eastern Karen state. This affected my village, and we were forced to cross the border into Thailand, becoming refugees. Living in a refugee camp is like the life of a chicken; we were provided for but could not go outside of the camp. Our elders tried to organize a school, and we were fortunate to have a chance to study and learn our own language. There were few good things about life in the camp because we lost our self-esteem and sometimes thought our only choice was to succumb to our fate as refugees.

My father was a revolutionary who fought against the Burmese military government, and so it was my mom who had to take care of our family with fear, suffering and much pain. When I was 10, my father was killed on the battle field. That was a day of great darkness for our family.

At that time, I was registered as a refugee in Thailand but this identity allowed me to live and travel only within the refugee camp. NGOs and humanitarian groups from other countries came and gave us food rations, and they supplied us with mosquito nets, blankets and some building materials. We were so thankful for their kindness and sympathy, but even as a child I wondered why they couldn't give us our freedom or allow us to protest in our homeland without fear? In the camp, we were ashamed because we knew how to grow rice for our family, but our land was destroyed by the Burmese military. We knew how to make our own clothes and build our own houses from what the environment and nature could provide. Our traditions and our land gave us enough to live. Why did people who wanted to dominate others take that away from us? Why did they kill us and oppress us? At a young age I learned the reality of ethnic cleansing and chauvinism.

My mom didn't want her children to join the revolutionary group because the experience taught her how painful war is and she didn't

want to lose her sons in the same way she lost her husband. Most Karen people think that revolution is to be a soldier and fight for freedom and self-determination and there is no other way to get liberation without armed struggle.

At that time, I also thought that the only way to get freedom was armed struggle and in my mind I wanted to take revenge on the Burmese soldiers. My father was killed, my uncles were killed, my cousin was killed, my friends were killed and my people were killed by war, tortures, abuse and rape. "Without your sacrifice of blood you cannot be free from slavery," our elders told us. Fighting meant I could protect my family, my village and my people. When I was 14 years old, I went to the battlefield with my uncle and saw war, death, injury, pain and suffering. I had no other idea and what I experienced motivated me to be a freedom fighter.

First time in Jail

When I was sixteen years old, I followed my uncle and other soldiers from the 6th KNU Brigade in Dooplay district, close to Umphum province in Thailand, to the 4th KNU Brigade in Mergui-Tavoy district, near Kanchanaburi province, Thailand. All together there were nine of us and I was the youngest in the group. During our journey, we had to pass through Thailand because Burmese military camps had been set up in the area and they were patrolling heavily. After we entered Thailand for two days, we were caught by Thai police and put in jail because we were inside Thailand without legal documentation. This was my first time in jail, and I was there for seven days. I knew that this was the law and that the police were just doing their job—I could not refuse that—but I also knew that there were innocent people in jail. Did I steal someone's property? Did I kill any Thai people? Did I commit crimes in Thailand? I only was undocumented in Thailand, under Thai law.

In jail I was scared. I had never been in jail before, and I was the youngest in the group. A Thai police official called me into his office. He started questioning me, "Where will you go?" I said, "I will go to

Mae The Mi Kee," the location of the 4th KNU Brigade. He continued asking, "What will you do there?" I said, "I will study." He asked many questions but I could only answer what I understood. I was feeling sorry for myself, but I remembered something that my mom told me before I left, "Before you do something, think." Now I was wondering, did I make a wrong decision? I learned a valuable lesson from this bitter experience.

When I spent those seven days in jail I had food to eat, but it was not enough and it was not good quality curry. I had to drink toilet water, while those prisoners who had friends and family outside the prison got good food and clean drinking water. There was only one bowl of water for each person to take a bath. Every day the prison was full of undocumented refugees from Burma and most of them were migrant workers. I remembered one man who said that living in the Thai jail was better than in a Burmese prison. I wanted to ask the others, "What do you think friends?" My seven days in jail felt like seven years. We were set free after one of the KNU officers from the 4th Brigade came and negotiated with Thai police and provided them with a bribe.

My story has happened again and again along the Thailand-Burma border to many others just like me. Increasingly, people from Burma are flowing into Thailand seeking jobs and facing many of the same problems that I faced.

My mom didn't want me to join the revolution, and she just wanted me to finished high school in the refugee camp. However, my mom couldn't prevent me from joining so she prayed for me to be safe in the dangerous situation. I had a chance to be a soldier for two years in the jungle. We had to live in a very poor condition with no good food, no shelter and hard work. Some nights I had bad nightmares but I don't regret the experience because I learned so much from it. After our territory was taken over by the Burmese army, I came back to the refugee camp and finished high school.

I can fly, but beyond flying!

Since that first time in jail, I have had many other experiences with trying to travel legally in Thailand and abroad. I have been working with an organization called Burma Issues for many years, and in 2007 I got a chance to study at the School of Peace in India. I tried to find a way to get a passport because I did not want to lose such a good opportunity. I had no official ID allowing me to travel in Thailand and the police had arrested me several times before, but by now I knew how to deal with them. India would be a different story.

First, I tried to find a person who could help me get a Burmese ID card. I was born in Burma twenty seven years ago, but I didn't have any citizen identity card and only a refugee registration. Without an ID card and house registration, I could not travel in Burma and apply for a passport. It was a very difficult process, and I had to lie to the Burmese regime to get a passport. It is true that I had to lie in order to realize my dream to not only travel freely, but to gain knowledge about how to struggle effectively. My lies were only a strategy, a kind of tactic to achieve a greater mission for freedom, justice, and peace.

This entire process was very dangerous for me, and as an opponent of the Burmese junta, I was worried that they could catch me anytime. My personal security was incredibly compromised. For the first time, I went and stayed in the capital of Burma and lived there for one and half months while applying for a passport and a Thai visa.

I prayed for God to help me, and to give me a chance to visit India and study at the School of Peace. God listened to me and fulfilled my desire. Although I traveled alone to the Rangoon airport for the first time, everything went smoothly and I flew from there to Bangkok. When I was in the air I felt free. I looked down at the earth and saw the mountains, ocean and clouds. As I flew, I thought about my brother and sister who were still living in the refugee camp and know that they also want to see the ocean, the sky and the beauty of the planet. I hope they will be able to see it one day, and not only them,

but also all the other children who live in refugee camps and displaced areas.

Now, I am free to travel and I don't have to be scared of the police in Thailand anymore. To come to this point, I struggled for many years and suffered bitter experiences. I do not want the next generation in Burma to face the same circumstances that I did. Earning the right to travel freely has become the task of the next generation. I will find faithful friends and work effectively with them to see that the root causes of the conflict are destroyed and the key issues are resolved. Injustice and chauvinism in Burma must be stopped. Human rights and human dignity for the next generation will someday be realized in a new society based on the principles of equality, justice, and peace.

My process of change

I remember the day of personal change and the reason. I had gone to Bangkok to learn about community organizing work. I knew the person very well, the one who fed me the ideology to be a real revolutionary. So I reflect today and have hopes for my dream. I am not like before but I still commit myself as a revolutionary. I want deep changes in my community and long for my people to gain freedom, self-determination, justice and security of life. Armed struggle is not the only solution, and I am ashamed for wanting revenge. Yet I don't hate armed struggle because I understand that we are fighting to protect our family, our children and our people. Of utmost importance is to have revolutionary thinking so that we can understand the root cause of the problem and dream about how to live together in the future.

My mom was resettled in the USA in the middle of 2008. She called me and said how much she worries about my future. Most people say that in Burma today, the IDPs have no tomorrow and refugees have no future. As I am her son, she doesn't want me to get in trouble and become older without life insurance. She told me to come to America to become a citizen, earn money, then go back to Burma and resume work. She said that if I stayed in Thailand, I wouldn't have any legal

travel documents and the Thai police could arrest me at any time and make my future difficult. She worries about me so much.

I understand my mom very well and she loves me so much. I just want to tell her not to worry for me. American citizenship can't give me life insurance. I have faith in God and only God can give me life insurance. I don't know what will happen tomorrow, but today I have to work here and give my life for my people. I believe my dream can give a guarantee for my people.

I told my mom not to worry about my future, because I know what my future holds. My future is not in property or good living conditions. My future is to stand against injustice and oppression, to live in harmony with the earth and build up a peaceful society. I have friends who support my dream, but I have to clearly show them what I would like to implement.

I want to set up 'Appropriate Education' for my people and give them the seed of critical thinking. I will find a place to implement my dream. When I went to India and studied in the School of Peace, I got a lot of ideas from the Visthar campus. In my dream campus, I will have a school and training center filled with trees, flowers and vegetables to give us medicine, food, fresh air and a peaceful mind.

I want to bring children from the war zones and IDP (internally displaced people) children to have a chance to study about life, peace, equality, art, music, traditional knowledge, culture and the way to overcome injustice and oppression. On the campus they can reflect on their lives and dream of a happy future built with their own hands and minds.

True change in the future will only come through education, but there are many different kinds. Again, my dream is for Appropriate Education that can help our society become peaceful. The challenge is to change yourself, plant peace in your heart and share your peace with others. Then stand against any kind of oppression and injustice.

PEACE BE WITH YOU

This picture is by a member of a peace group in Sri Lanka that brings together children and youth from different ethnic groups and faiths to do peacebuilding activities together. These young people have experienced the consequences of war are now hoping for a peaceful and just Sri Lanka. For a full introduction to the conflict in Sri Lanka, see page 118-123

KILLING OUR ANGER
Burma

This story was told by a Karenni man by the name of Beh Reh in 1998 and was recorded by Max Ediger. It takes place in Karen State. For a full introduction to the conflict in Burma, see pages 118-125.

One evening when it was almost dark, my friend and I were coming back to our village from the jungle, each with a bullock cart that was carrying logs. One Burmese soldier suddenly came out of the underbrush and stopped us when we were very close to our village. He ordered us to turn our carts in another direction toward the military base. My friend got angry with him because we were very tired. He yelled at the soldier that he wouldn't do as the soldier ordered and tried to continue moving in the same way. The soldier also got angry and ordered my friend again to come down from his cart. The soldier was so angry that he cocked his gun ready to shoot because my friend defied everything that he had ordered.

The situation turned into a crisis. I was so afraid and realized that something would happen to my friend. I came down from my bullock cart and tried to explain our situation. I told the soldier how hard it was to get these logs from the jungle. We had to wake up at 3:00 in the morning and it took seven hours to get to the jungle. Then we had to spend around three hours finding and cutting the logs. It had taken the whole time until now to come back. Even though it was very difficult to do this work, we had to work because our families were very poor and we had no other work. We were also students and had no money to buy books.

After I shared our story, he began to understand us and told my friend, "You should have told me that before." Then he allowed us to continue on our way.

The most difficult thing to kill is our anger. That is more difficult than killing people. We cannot really solve any problem if we respond with our anger. Acting in anger we are already 80 percent of the way

to making a mistake. We are already on the losing path. But the problem might be easy for us to solve if we really understand the essence of smiling and love.

A BUDDHIST JUSTPEACE MAKER
Thailand

This reflection was written in spring 2009 by Ngamsuk Ruttanasatian, a lecturer at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand and an active member of CJPA since 2001. For a full introduction to the conflicts in Thailand and Southern Thailand, see pages 196 and 94.

Being in the Buddhist world for 40 years and relating to the social work world for more than 20 years has taught me how to deal with both outside and inside suffering. I have been thinking about and observing people who get involve in so called "peacebuilding." Many of these people are contradictions between their life and work. They do not link the inner and outer peace together. People focus more on the outer peace but ignore the inner peace. That why is I wonder about the meaning and value of peace for the peacebuilder. From my perspective, it is important for people to pay attention an inner peace. I also believe that if we do not practice inner peace, we can easily harm the other, also a human being full of emotions—love, hatred, anger and illusion. But we all have the ability to tap into the self.

I remember when I worked with Burma Issues. We analyzed the conflict in Burma and concluded that it was the result of chauvinism. The Burmese military thinks they are better than the ethnic groups like Karen, Shan, Mon, etc. From my observation, I saw that some of the peacebuilders sometimes had actions similar to those of the Burmese military. They thought the work that they were doing was special and better than what the other was doing. The sense of "better than the other" can devalue the other and will lead to disrespect.

The teaching of Lord Buddha can help us develop inner peace so we can work more effectively for outer peace. The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism describes the way to end suffering. It is a practical guide to ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions. It finally leads to understanding the truth about all things and through this, we can find inner peace. Loving kindness, tolerance and forgiveness are needed for the peacebuilder to grow inside themselves and develop a balanced mind.

The Noble Eightfold Path teaches us to develop our wisdom by learning right views and right intentions. It helps us develop our ethical conduct by learning right speech, right action and right livelihood. Finally, it helps us in our mental development through learning right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

JustPeace work needs this Nobel Eightfold Path so that through right understanding and thinking we can develop inner peace. It seems simple in words, but it is difficult to follow. It requires serious self-reflection and also mindfulness. I understand the target of JustPeace to be the negative structures in society and not individual persons. It means we have to fight to transform the structure. The question that comes to my mind is: how can one overcome a violent person who is a victim of structural oppression when all of us are included in the same structural oppression? So we should not see an individual as the enemy, but systems and structures as the enemy. We might argue that man creates the systems and structures. This is true. In my view, a human exists equally as good and bad. That is why we always have to be mindful of the self. If we ignore mindfulness, we will easily lose control of our emotions and can do harm to others. To be mindful also can help us to understand and think deeply toward others.

From my experience, I used to hate the Thai authorities and Burmese soldiers. They are violent to the civilians. But the way that I thought toward them was even more violent. How can a person who believes in peace not respect other people as the humans they are? After I discovered this about myself, I tried to understand why the

authorities, both Thai and Burmese, use violence. To understand people when we see them as an enemy, we need to be mindful and have right understanding. We cannot work only with people that we love, but must work also with the enemy. Both of these groups of people are human and exist in our world.

A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP IN PEACE

India

Jahan Ara Begum works at the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, India where she works with Hindu/Muslim communities to promote peaceful co-existence. She has been an active member of CJPA since 2004. She shared this interview in summer 2009. For a full introduction to the conflict in India, see page 180.

What inspires you?

The need of my community for development. Being part of a voiceless community and enabling the people to develop their potential is what mostly inspires me.

Particularly interfaith dialogue and peace and justice work is very inspiring since very few of the people in my community are yet interested in this area and understand the need of JustPeace in our society.

What gives you hope?

When we observe that there are changes in the community members' attitude. When I feel that the community members do not panic or fear when they see tensions mounting in the larger society. They gear up to resolve the tensions by being united. And when women are able to voice their opinions. I really feel very highly motivated to work when these things happen.

What makes you think JustPeace is possible for your community and the world?

My own work experience: working with a community that was totally segregated on the basis of religion—Hindu and Muslim. Now after a decade of work, I see that the people are united and willing to be together and give space to each other for the ultimate progress of the community.

How does your religious faith motivate your work?

Islam promotes peace and harmony. And it gives the message of equality among men and women.

What is the end goal you are working toward that makes you try every day?

A time when people are happy, do not feel threatened about outside places, have safety and can enjoy a good night's sleep in peace.

ISLAM MEANS PEACE
India

This is a reflection on the role of Islam in peacemaking shared by Jahan Ara Begum of India at the CJPA workshop in Nepal in 2008. For a full introduction to the conflict in India, see page 140.

According to the Islamic code of ethics, the basic principle that governs inter-personal and inter-faith relations in ordinary situations and contexts should be peace. The word 'Islam' also means 'peace' and to be a 'Muslim' also means to be at peace or peaceful.

The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) stated, 'A believer is he from whose hands and tongue people are safe' (al-muslimu man saleman-nasu min lisanihi wa yadehi). He (s.a.w.) also said, 'A believer is he from whom people's life and wealth are protected' (al-mominu man aminahu an-nasu ala dimaihim wa amwalihim). This sentiment is also expressed in the Islamic greeting 'Asalamu Alaikum,' a supplication that the person one is greeting should be at peace.

War in Islam is something imposed from outside, rather than being intrinsic to its spirit. It is an exception rather than the rule. Peace-making is considered to be a noble action in the Quranic scheme of things. The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) said that a person is not a true believer whose neighbours suffer his persecution and torment. He said that the Angel Gabriel so stressed to him the importance of neighbours that he felt that they might even be included in the list of one's inheritors. And neighbours include both Muslims and non-Muslims.

One of the many good practices taught by Islam is that its followers should begin all their activities in the name of God. This principle, if consciously and earnestly followed, will necessarily yield three beneficial results.

First, one will be able to restrain oneself from many a misdeed, since the habit of pronouncing the name of God is bound to make one

wonder when about to commit some offense how such an act can be reconciled with the saying God's holy name. Second, if a person pronounces the name of God before starting good and legitimate tasks, this act will ensure that both her starting point and her mental orientation are sound. Third—and this is the most important benefit—when a person begins something by pronouncing God's name, he will enjoy God's support and succor; God will bless his efforts and protect him from the machinations and temptations of Satan. For whenever a person turns to God, God turns to her as well.

I WILL NOT KILL ANY LIVING THING

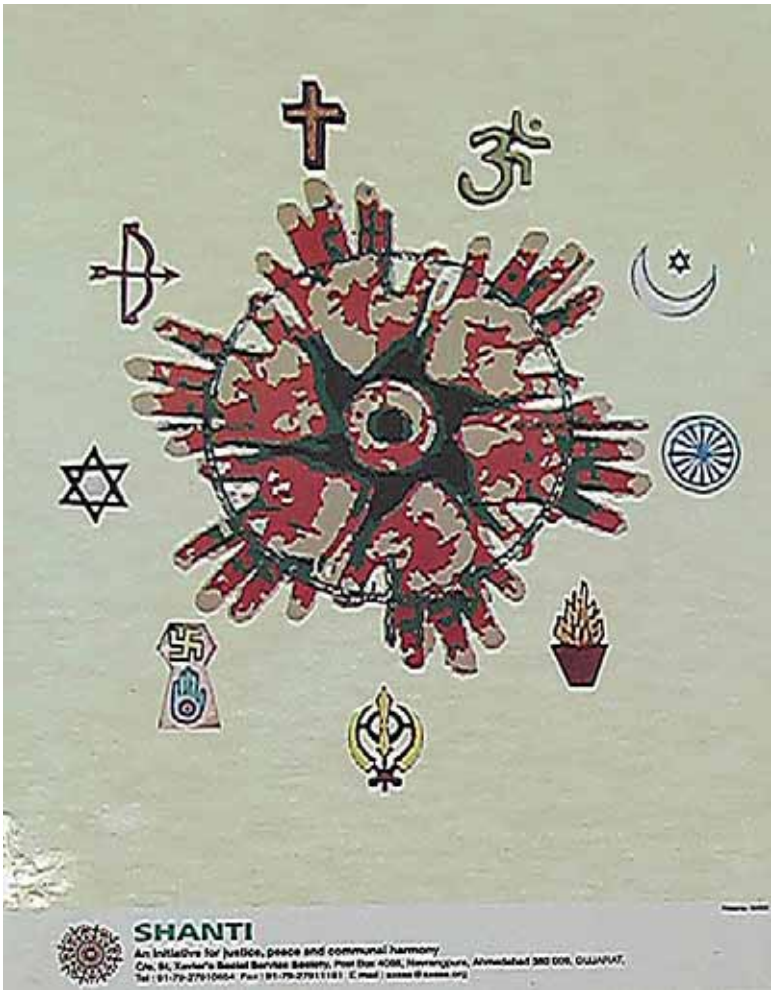
Burma

This story was told by Thaw Reh of Burma at the 2007 School of Peace in Bangalore, India. For a full introduction to the conflict in Burma, see page 3.

There is a story told of a monk along the Thai-Burma border who refused medical treatment for a curable disease. Because he would not agree to treatment, he died. While he was still living, the doctor who was caring for him asked him why he refused treatment. The monk answered, "If I take the medicine, the germs inside me that are causing my illness will die. As a monk, I made a vow that I will not kill any living thing. I choose to die and let them live."

Burma has different types of people. There are those who refuse medical treatment out of concern for those living beings that cause the disease. Then there are those who will not think twice about killing a human being. We must decide with whom we will stand.

INTERFAITH HANDS



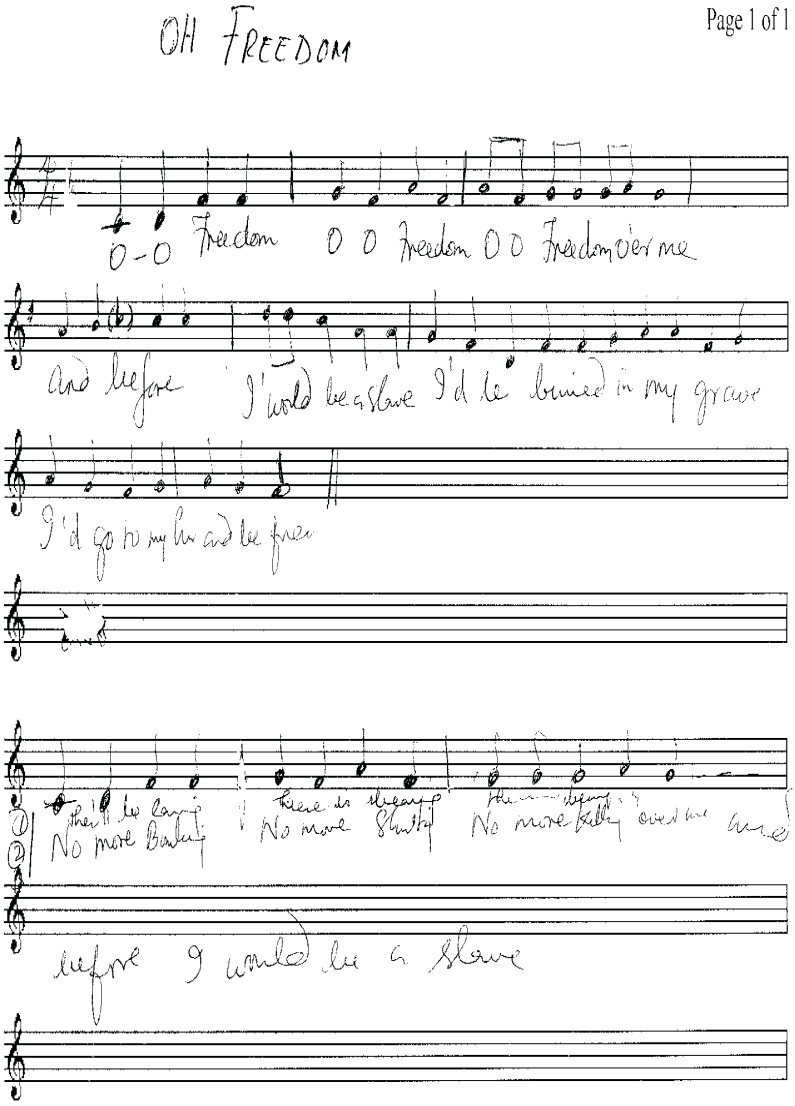
Here is a poster from the Catholic Center in Gujarat, India representing interfaith cooperation.

BUI CHI's PEACE DOVE

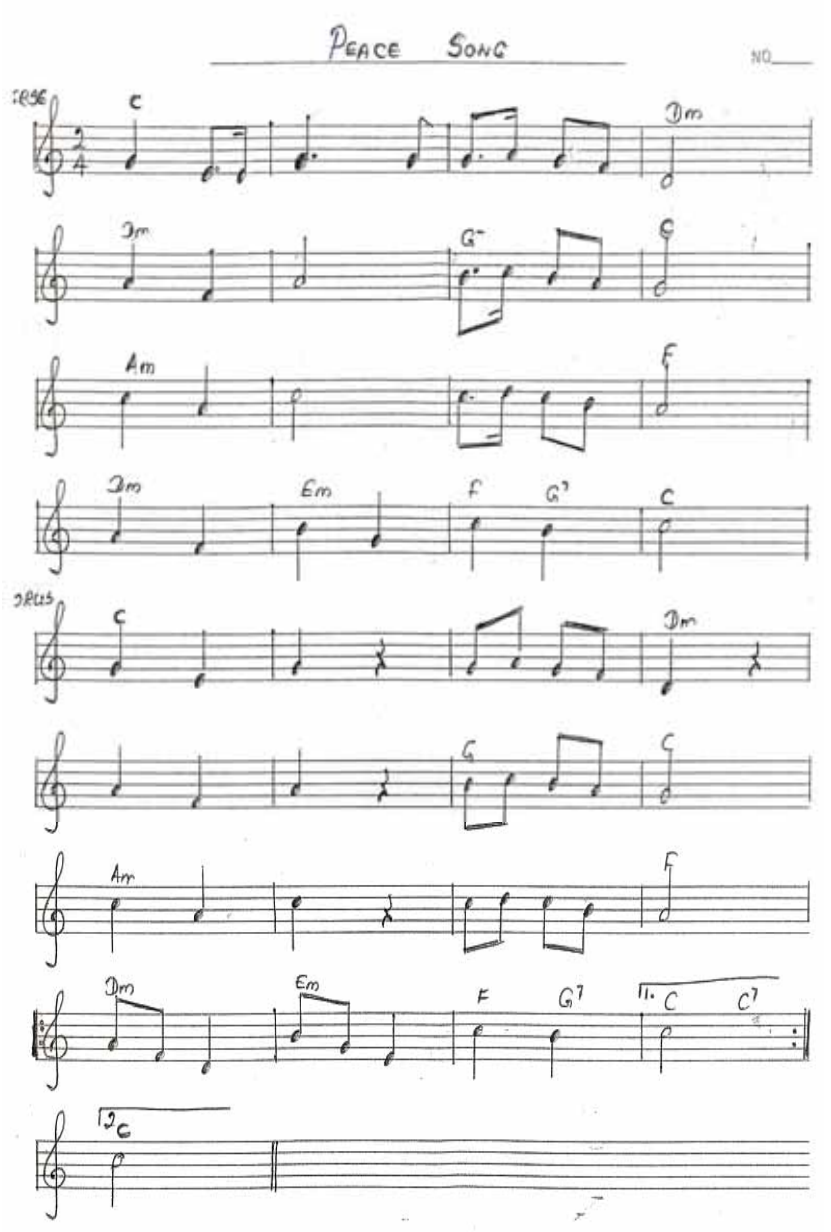
This picture is by Bui Chi (1948-2002), a well known Vietnamese artist from the central Vietnamese city of Hue. It was created while Bui Chi was held captive in Chi Hoa prison between 1964 and 1969 for refusing military service. For more information on Chi Hoa and his work, see the beginning of Chapter 2.

Appendix

OH FREEDOM
See accompanying lyrics on page 124



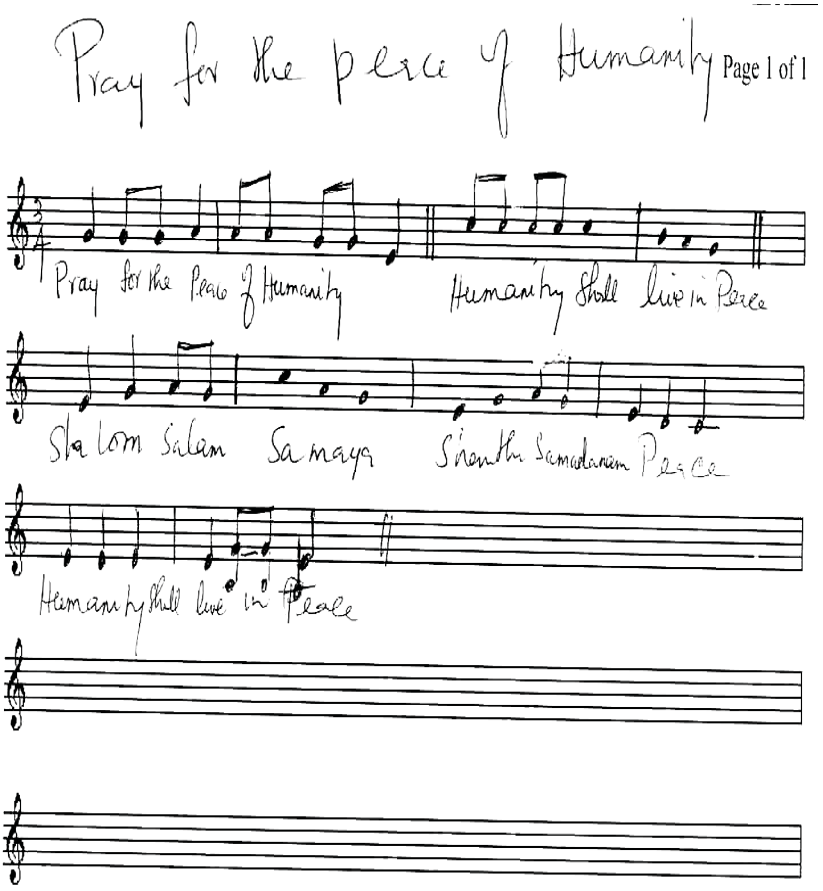
PEACE SONG
Sri Lanka
See accompanying lyrics on page 130



PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF HUMANITY

Sri Lanka

See accompanying lyrics on page 205



ACRONYMS

AFP – Armed Forces of the Philippines
ALTSEAN – Alternative Network on ASEAN
ARMM – Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASG – Abu Sayaaf Group (Mindanao)
BSPP – Burmese Socialist Program Party
CBO – Community-based Organization
CDC-SS – Constitution Drafting Commission of Shan State
CJPA – Center for JustPeace in Asia
DKBA – Democratic Kayan Buddhist Army (Burma)
DSI – Department of Special Investigation (Thailand)
ENC – Ethnic Nationality Council (Burma)
GAM – Aceh Freedom Movement
INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM – International Organization for Migration
ISOC – Internal Security Operations Command (Thailand)
KFI – Kadtuntaya Foundation Inc. (Mindanao)
KNU – Karen National Union (Burma)
KNLA – Karen National Liberation Army (Burma)
KRC – Karen Refugee Council (Burma)
KWO – Karen Women's Organization (Burma)
NEP – New Economic Policy (India)
NGO – Mon-Governmental Organization
NLD – National League for Democracy (Burma)
OPE – Overseas Processing Entity
PLO – Palestinian Liberation Organization
PSA – Programme for Social Action (India)
RTG – Royal Thai Government
SAP – Structural Adjustment Program
SDPC – State Peace and Development Council (Burma)
SLORC – State Law and Order Restoration Council (Burma)
SORA – State of the Regional Address (Mindanao)
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNYPHIL – United Youth of the Philippines
VAVA – Association of Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange
WGEID – United Nations Working Group of Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances
WGJP – Working Group on Justice for Peace (Thailand)

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“I am a human and I was born a free man, but boundaries and laws have withheld justice from me. When I reflect on my life, I see that there are many people in the world like me. They are also hungry for freedom, and struggle for true liberty and justice that respect human dignity. I understand that freedom is not available to everyone, and that it cannot be easily attained while selfish, egotistical people perpetuate stereotypes and are inhumane in their treatment of others. I know that I have to work at stopping injustice, exploitation and oppression. This means not seeking revenge against those who discriminate and oppress, but sticking with the system of love, justice, and peace. So my story begins…”

—from *Identity and Freedom to Travel*