

Ashes and Tears

Interviews with Refugees from Burma on Guam

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"We live in fear with tears and sadness."
-- a Chin refugee on Guam

Introduction

During the past year, nearly a thousand refugees from Burma have arrived on the island of Guam, a United States territory in the Pacific Ocean. They are seeking asylum in the US, having fled extraordinary levels of persecution in their homeland. Most are from northern Burma, especially the Chin State. Forced repatriation of Chin refugees back from India, and lack of even the begrudging “welcome” provided by Thailand, from the countries bordering northern Burma, had apparently led these northerners to take the creative escape route of flying to Guam, which until recently allowed people from Burma to visit (for tourism) without a visa. Once there they applied for asylum in hopes of reaching the mainland US.

The Guam escape route, now shut down, was an expensive and risky option, and it appealed to a particularly desperate population, but those with access to the financial resources needed for passports, plane tickets, and other arrangements. The result is a refugee population on Guam which is not only skewed towards those from especially remote and isolated regions of Burma, but which is weighed towards what would ordinarily be the elite in those areas. The education level of the Guam asylum-seekers is conspicuously high (despite the damage done to the educational system by Burma’s regime.) Doctors, pastors, student activists, academics, and NGO workers are now found stranded on the island, as well as at least one elected Member of Parliament and a former Army/Police Lt. Colonel. Most can be characterized as political activists, who not only were targeted for mistreatment by Burma’s military because of their ethnicity, religion, or political views, but were actively engaged in a variety of ways of resisting that regime. They are risk-takers who fled only when they were one step away from arrest or worse. We are privileged that they have taken the time to share their experiences and knowledge with us in these pages.

This report consists of interviews with a small cross section of the Guam asylum seekers. It is to some extent representative of their demographics, in terms of ethnicity and gender. The interviewees have given us a great bounty of significant new information and details about recent conditions in Burma. Their interviews are presented here verbatim and in their entirety, aside from minor editing for clarity and to protect interviewees’ families and associates back in Burma. Sections where the transcripts were edited are indicated by brackets. Some of the interviewees’ names have been changed or omitted for security purposes; others have been included, particularly if their cases have already been publicized. The interviews were all conducted on Guam, from March 14 to 18, by Project Maje’s director, Edith T. Mirante. Some were conducted in English, others with translation. The word “government” was often used to specify the military regime ruling Burma, in the questions and answers; it is used for clarity only and is in no way meant to imply legitimacy for that utterly illegal dictatorship.

Numerous topics are covered in these 17 interviews. There is front-line information about the AIDS epidemic which is making its grim progress into the remote mountains of Burma, and the efforts to evade the regime’s denial about it. There is also news regarding promotion of alcohol and drugs to the indigenous people of the northwest, which is reminiscent of the tactics employed in the genocide of the Native Americans. The interviewees consistently describe the continuation of forced labor throughout the year 2000, when most of them had left Burma, in obvious contradiction of the regime’s claims to have stopped the practice. This includes the forced plantation of tea for the military’s commercial purposes, which was reportedly going on in the Chin State at the very time the International Labor Organization was sanctioning the regime for using forced labor (and the regime was insisting that it had ceased doing so.)

The regime’s attempts to humiliate the largely Christian indigenous peoples of the north are well described by the Chin and Kachin interviewees. In a campaign not unlike that waged by the Chinese occupiers against the Buddhists of Tibet, the military overlords of Burma go to great lengths to suppress the Christian faith prevalent among those northern people. The regime also desecrate cultural remnants of Animism, as in their destruction of cemeteries and confiscation of the totemic mithun cattle (for fascinating background on the mithun and Chin traditions, see “A

Ceremonial Ox of India” by Frederick Simoons, University of Wisconsin Press, 1968.) All the while, the ruling military promulgates its own travesty of the real Buddhism (to which forced conversion is a perversion and violence is anathema.) One hopes that in the future the Christians of the north will learn that Buddhism is in actuality a tolerant faith and that the two great traditions have much in common and much to share.

Since the ceasefire arrangement between the Kachin Independence Organization and the regime of Burma in the mid-1990s, little has been heard about the human rights violations ongoing in the Kachin State. This has led some to conclude that “happy days are here again” in that formerly war torn area. The Kachin interviewees, however, describe conditions which are little better than in the rest of Burma’s frontier regions. While forced portage has decreased with the down-scaling of army maneuvers, other types of infrastructure forced labor have continued, and apparently widened in scope. According to interviewees, former Kachin rebel territory was inexorably ceded to the regime’s troops, and corruption and violent purges took place within the KIO. The recent change in leadership may have important implications for the balance of power in the Kachin State, which has certainly tilted far away from the KIO during the ceasefire period.

The other ethnic army often mentioned in these pages is the Chin National Front, a small group which joined the revolution late (post 1988) and remains in the fight without a ceasefire. Its significance has long been as much as an underground information distribution and intelligence gathering organization as in its guerrilla raids. The widespread network of “secret agents” of the CNF and volunteer civilian groups has done much in recent years to expose the plight of the previously little known Chin people to the outside world (for background on the Chins, see “A Chin Compendium,” a 1996 Project Maje report on this website, and “All Quiet on the Western Front,” a 1997 report by Images Asia <images@cm.ksc.co.th>.)

Some observers feel that if the CNF was not in operation, the regime would not be harassing the population in the Chin State so severely. Nonetheless, a less than benign interest by the ruling military was probably inevitable, given the State’s natural resources. While some interviewees criticize the neglect of development in the Chin State in the past, it should be emphasized that development now in progress, including foreign extractive industries, is even more dangerous, in terms of environmental havoc, forced labor, and other exploitation, under present conditions. The past lack of roads and railways was objectionable; roads and railways built by abused slaves are worse.

Burma’s appalling destruction of forests and other natural resources is covered in several interviews. There is also commentary on mineral extraction in northern Burma, a topic which should be receiving increasing scrutiny, particularly with possible foreign investment in the Chin State’s Mwe Taung mining area (for background on mining in Burma please see “Grave Diggers” by Roger Moody <<http://miningwatch.ca>>)

Given the environmental devastation and the pattern of human rights abuse in the Chin State, particular attention should be paid to apparent plans by Unocal Corp., in association with US Vice President Dick Cheney’s Halliburton, for a possible gas pipeline from the Andaman Sea through western Burma to India. As has been seen with Unocal’s Yadana Pipeline in southern Burma, much of the damage to the northwest may be done well before the pipe dream becomes a reality, as security work and land clearing are done far in advance, with masses of troops and massive forced labor.

In addition to the Chin and Kachin interviews, there is one with a Karen from the beleaguered Pa’an area (for detailed reports about genocide in Pa’an, see the Karen Human Rights Group <<http://www.khrg.org>>) and one with a Burmese (Burman) who spent a harrowing seven+ years incarcerated in Burma’s medieval prison system. His story, compelling in itself, can also serve as a reminder of exactly what the others faced, had they not made it to Guam. It brings this report in something of a circle, as one of the first interviewees had been in charge of surveillance of those

who visited democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and that very scrutiny had prevented the jail survivor from going to see her before he fled the country.

The interviews are presented in the order in which they were conducted. Project Maje is very grateful to Zo T. Hmung and Rev. Joan Maruskin, and to all those who assisted with and participated in this report on Guam. After the refugees there escaped the horrors of Burma, many have met with a less than warm reception by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service. Several have spent time in detention facilities on Guam, and some have been denied asylum during their initial interviews. This appears to be due to communications problems, including the refugees' ingrained intimidation when facing interrogation by authority figures. While waiting for asylum, the refugees are in a stressful limbo on Guam, which has a depressed economy and high unemployment rate. They are living on church charity and other donations, but making every effort to help themselves and each other.

These are people who can be of benefit to the United States with their skills and resourcefulness, and to the international Free Burma movement as spokespersons and activists. They deserve a safe haven in which to recover from past trauma and prepare to build a sustainable and equitable future for their homeland, once Burma achieves liberation. The suffering they have endured cannot really be expressed in the mere words contained here. As one of the interviewees told about her village being burned to a heap of ashes by the regime's troops, tears began to roll slowly from her eyes. They were the tears of a witness who has seen more than we can ever know.

Project Maje
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Actions:

To learn more about helping the Guam asylum seekers, including sponsoring them for US residence, please contact:

Rev. Joan Maruskin
Church World Service and Witness Immigration and Refugee Program
110 Maryland Ave NE, Suite 108
Washington DC 20002 USA
202-544-2375
jmaruskin@nccusa.org

For more information about the Chins, on Guam and in Chin Land, contact:

Chin Freedom Coalition
3568 Brandywine St. NW
Washington DC 20008 USA
410-470-1795
CFCoalition@hotmail.org
www.chinfreedomcoalition.org

The Chin Human Rights Organization maintains a website and publishes the excellent "Rhododendron" newsletter:

50 Bell St. #2
Ottawa, ON K1R 7C2 Canada
613-234-2485
chokhlei@hotmail.com
<http://www.chro.org>

For ongoing action suggestion and updates, join the Free Burma Coalition:
202-387-8030 www.freeburmacoalition.org

For background on Unocal Corp.'s activities in Burma, see EarthRights International:
www.earthrights.org

Letters urging Unocal Corp. to not build a pipeline through Burma to India should be sent to: Mr. Charles Williamson, CEO, Unocal Corp., 2141 Rosecrans, El Segundo CA 90245 USA.

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During mid-2000, when many of the interviewees left Burma, about 350 to 400 of the Burmese currency, the kyat, would equal one dollar, on the unofficial market. The bags of rice referred to weigh about 50 lbs. A "viss" is a measurement that equals about 1.5 kilograms or 3.5 lbs.

Interviews

1. Satin Lal

Male, age 32. From: Falam, Chin State. Occupation: Pastor. Education: Bachelor of Theology. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: October 2000.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Burma?

A: The final point that made me leave the country was, I was trying to build the church and the government did not like that. We went on building the church and I was threatened to be arrested. Instead of being arrested and be put in prison, I'd rather leave the country. The main person who told me not to build it was Col. Maung Tin, the man in charge of the district.

Q: Had you had problems with the government before that?

A: Many, many. I had been in jail three times. First, 18 June, 1992. In 1988 there was a big uprising and involved in revolutions were the students. They went underground and I went also, primarily to be their pastor. Preaching to them. We went to Kachin State, Pajau [Kachin Independence Army headquarters]. Then in 1991 my father passed away and I came back to see the grave of my father and to see my mother. At that time the government said "you are one of the insurgent leaders," so they arrest me. The second arrest was in 1995, October 5th. In 1995 there was a plan for the Chins to celebrate the harvest festival. This is a national festival. We went ahead and prepared for it and then the commander of there said, "you cannot celebrate." We said, "why not, this is our Chin traditional celebration." So I went to talk to them and instead I was arrested. In 1999, September 4, we called it "the four nines," symbolic, there was a plan throughout the Burma to have activity against the government. And I met with students in Falam and was involved in that activity. And somehow the military realized what was going on and struck first. And I and my wife (who was pregnant) were then taken away by the military on September 8th, a day ahead of it.

Q: Tell about your treatment while in custody...

A: A number of methods of torture. One would be, they put a plastic around my head, to suffocate me. Another is, they stripped me naked to be eaten by mosquitoes the whole time. They gave me meals consisting of rice and sand mixed. They literally shot at my head and somehow missed it, whether intentionally or not, the first time I was in prison. They forced me to kneel on the ground, on sharp rocks for hours, put shackles on my legs.

Q: What about your wife, when she was in custody?

A: They had my wife sit in the office, just sit there. While they were torturing me. After two days she was released.

Q: In Falam, during the last two years you were there, what was the attitude towards religious practice?

A: There was a commanding officer, his name was Col. Than Aung, he told me straight to my face that "Chins are our enemies, because Western people are our enemies." Christianity is a

Western religion, Christians and probably pastors, are the number one enemy of the State. The cross that we planted on the hilltop, they cut it down, and on every hill they put up a Buddhist temple [pagoda]. Not only church buildings but anything related to religion, everything is banned, we cannot get it. When they believe that the situation is not good, they will even forbid us to worship. When we try for annual gathering, or Bible leaders' conference, we have to get permission from them. And they require a full detailed description of what is to be said, what is to be discussed, what are the subjects to be taught. If they don't approve, we don't get to.

Our association leaders, when they travel, they have to submit their itinerary to the military commander. In fact, early in the morning, we would broadcast [loudspeaker] devotionals every morning. The commander said he could not sleep, so it ended. And the other thing they do, probably to do some damage to the young people, they opened liquor stores, close by the church. So there's another tactic. And they would bring in the military trucks, military jeeps, and park them in the church compound. And they would come in and out of our church compound with their full equipment, weapons. We practiced church choir every Saturday evening, and the young people participate in it. The military often prevented them from going to church, or even after coming there, threatened them.

I was pastor in a village about four miles from Falam. When the Military Intelligence Service came there they would force the Christian community to kill chickens for them, which had been donated for church functions. So we would have to do that kind of thing without pay. In 1997, the military then took up to have built a Buddhist temple and forced, took two kyat each from every individual in Chin State. Those that were working for the government, they cut the two kyat from their salary. And they would promulgate saying that the Chins were participating in building of this temple. In the year 2000, in the month of April, the water festival in Burma, I was against that sort of thing as it's a Buddhist festival, and the government said I could no longer stay in Falam, so I moved. The main reason was that the District Commanding Officer issued an order that each house must contribute 500 kyat for this festival. I was very much against that practice because why should we Christians be forced to pay 500 kyat just to celebrate that Buddhist festival? So I and other people initiated a mass movement to oppose it. So that's why they expelled me from being allowed to stay around Falam.

There is a strong USDA [Union Solidarity Defense Association, government sponsored organization] even in Falam. So they enlisted eight theology students, they forced them to leave their school and play in the football field, even though the school was going on. And the principal said, "you should not play." And therefore the principal expelled them from school and there was lots of disturbances for three months. They could not open the school and the USDA said "behave or we will close the school altogether." So it's a very threatening situation. That was 1999.

Q: Has pressure regarding religion increased, been the same, or decreased, in the last few years?

A: I think it's more increasing.

Q: Are young people in Falam using narcotics?

A: The church and the youth groups as a whole were against using opium, but there is another substitute in tablet form, Diazepam [the generic name for Valium, an addictive sedative/tranquilizer], and many people are taking it. The tablets are being sold in stores by the government.

Q: What was the health situation in Falam?

A: There were lots of problems in regard to health. Falam has a hospital of 150 beds, but among the doctors there is not even a single Chin doctor. Burmese doctors are there. Over and above that, the assignment of medicines that should have come to the hospital were sold out by the doctors and the staff, and practically there was no medicine for the sick people in the hospital. And as a result, there were many who just could not afford to buy it, and the consequence is death.

In Falam we would have 50% malaria-stricken. The children born have lots of problems, including polio. Either for adults or children, the government does nothing to promote the health. In 1999 there was survey of the health, particularly women. In 1999 the finding is that 80% of women had some gynecological problems. Even if there are urgent needs for surgery operations, there are no surgeons in Falam. So we have to go either to Sagaing Division or even to Rangoon, spending hundreds of kyat. And many die just because they cannot afford that.

My wife was working in the hospital in charge of the TB [tuberculosis] section, but there was practically no medicine, and therefore successful treatment is impossible. And because I left the country, my wife was fired this February, no longer is receiving the salary. From the UN there is an NGO [a non-governmental organization], there was an attempt to educate people regarding the AIDS. We applied for some health assistance to MCC, which is Myanmar Council of Churches. And they sent one staff member and some training to Falam, but to get permission for treatment or survey from the government, the government did not allow. Within the year 2000, there are ten people who died of AIDS in Falam.

Q: Was the NGO information in the Chin language?

A: It was both in Burmese and Falam [Chin dialect]. In 1988 there was a military officer, Than Tin Maung, in charge of Falam township, and he was suffering with HIV disease. And he had a lax morality. As a result, most people believe he passed on the disease to many young girls. And that fact was published by the medical man in charge of Falam hospital, who said that within the next ten years, as a result of this behavior, there would be a thousand people in Falam suffering with HIV.

Q: Are there many government army units stationed in Falam?

A: One battalion. The soldiers would come to our gardens, pick up the fruits, whatever they want, vegetables, and we have no say. If we say something, they would beat us up. That's the practice. Not only vegetables and fruits, but chickens. In 1998 there was a man in Falam by the name of L. And the soldiers, probably they were drunk, and they threw stones at L.'s dogs. L. said, "why do you throw stones at my dogs?" Because of that questioning, the soldiers beat him up, so badly that he was taken to hospital. I was there, so I took care of him. At that time the military commander came and asked, "why did you ask the soldiers, 'why did you throw stones at my dogs'? You have no right to ask that question. The soldiers are the masters, they could do whatever they want. If they want to do, they can beat you up, if they want to do, they can shoot you. That's their prerogative."

Another instance, there was a young lady 15 years old, attending high school, she was taken by two soldiers for raping. And then they stripped her of all of her clothes. And at that time the other people of the village came to the house, so the two soldiers ran away, and one of them before he ran away, he threw a big stone at her and it hit her on the shoulder. I went to the military commander and told the story. He assured me that he would take action, but the civilian has no right to inquire what he did. And we have no right to punish them. In spite of his promise, nothing was done to them. They just kept them at their headquarters.

Anyone they suspect of association with the CNF [Chin National Front] will be arrested if they are caught, and the local military passes these sentences or whatever. In 1999 there was a lady in the village, she was old, 73, she raised chickens, pigs, she lived from those. And one night five soldiers went there and took all the chickens, 17 of them, put them in gunny bags, and took them to Falam military headquarters, and handed over the whole thing to the military commander. When we inquired about what had happened, the military commander said he knew nothing about that.

The relation between the military and the people is, in a nutshell, fear. Fear of the military, and so we cannot say anything we want to say, we cannot do anything we want to do. Even worshipping at the church, we are very scared, especially at night, when we go to the church. Especially girls, their parents would not allow them to go out at night as the military soldiers would do harm to them. The relationship is based on fear.

Q: Why are the authorities concerned about the CNF in Falam, which is a city?

A: The vast majority of the people are for the CNF, they supported them, and so the military are afraid of the CNF, because the CNF can come and go at will. They are with the people. So that's why they are afraid of the CNF.

Q: In recent years, did people have to do work for the government military at all?

A: There are too many things to mention; the difficulties with the army are too many. One thing is, the military use firewood for cooking. And those firewoods, they will force the people to cut it from the forest, carry it to the military persons. If they need water, to lay pipe in the ground, they will force the people to dig the ground and lay the pipe for them. And when the military travel to patrolling areas, they force the people to carry their ammunition, their baggage. They will do the

same thing with the cars. To the car owner they will say, "stand by 24 hours, we want your car, we will take it." And they will use the car many days without payment.

There is a sub-station of a village called Tibual. There is a road between Falam and the boundary area to India. Tibual is around that road, closer to the boundary. In that sub-station there were over 30 soldiers, and the water source is [uphill from] the army station. And they would force the people to fetch water all day, every day. Without paying anything to them. And the soldiers would "cook" liquor there. The army would produce liquor, preparing it, "cooking" it, and then they would sell the liquor very cheaply to the people. Many young people got drunk. And when they had prepared it during the day, they would pour out the water at night, and they would force the people to fetch fresh water the next day. It went on and on in this cycle. It is going on even now.

Q: Was there any change in the amount of work being done for the army in 2000?

A: It was rather constant but slightly increasing, I think.

Q: Is there logging going on in that area?

A: There is a forest close by a village called Tlahmun, nearby, maybe six miles from that village there is a forest, we call it Aikon forest. It's a forest that has grown for probably hundreds of years. And the military forced the people to cut down all these trees in 1999-2000. The military had it sawed into planks for building, and they sell it and they get the money. They sold it to the public works department, which is also a government department. And they used it for bridges -- but this "hual" wood is not good for bridges, so in a year or two the wood gets rotten. The vicious cycle goes on. The military get the money for their living. And then, from last year, [a man] was forced to move the log, but they could not move that one because the log was too big, so they shot him, but he did not die.

Q: Do you know anything about an oil company in the area?

A: There is a village called Kyi Goong, close to Chin State but in Kalemmyo township now. In the British time it was part of Chin specification. But now the Burmese took it. At one time the Chin people [obtained] kerosene from it. The name of their leader was No Lian. They produced some kerosene for light. And then the military took it over, they gave contract to the Burmese guy. Then they didn't give the Chin workers money when the kerosene was produced. They did produce but they didn't share it. So it's still going on.

Q: Around the time that you left, how much did rice and cooking oil cost?

A: When I left, a bag of rice cost 3,800 kyat. Cooking oil, one viss would cost 750 kyat. Pork and beef would cost 700 kyat a viss. The prices go up and up.

Q: Regarding Chin culture...

A: [Relocation of cemeteries is going on throughout the Chin State, all the different church cemeteries, including in Falam, the military is forcing the people to move them, and in Chin culture it is very important to keep the bones in one place and not to change or lose even one bone.] We visit the cemetery once a year, at least, and we sacrifice, kill some animal and pray for the dead person, once a year, that is the custom of the Chin people. They moved those cemeteries intentionally, because they know it is valuable to the Chin people. So they want to make the Chin people feel very sad. What they are going to do is, they will persecute and they will execute all the Chin people, if we are rising up against the military. The Falam cemetery was moved by the military and the people of Falam think that they want to kill all the Burmese soldiers, because they feel very bad at that time. But we told the people, "don't be violent. Because if we use the violent way, the military will execute all the Chin people, so keep going on with your prayers."

Mwe Taung is located about ten miles away from Kalemmyo, it is situated around the border of Chin State and Sagaing Division. It was found by a German scientist in 1983; he said that from Mwe Taung we can get some metal that can build the airplanes. When the military government heard about that, they wouldn't let the German expert go around the country, they forced him to go back to his country. They closed that project because they didn't want the Chin people to get rich or have more knowledge because of that mine. After that, in 1994, the Burmese military went there and they had research around there. After they knew that the conditions were perfect, they said that they had no charcoal to use in that mine so they cannot do any project in that mine. If Mwe Taung was not located in Chin State, if it was in a Burmese place, there would be a lot of metals to build airplanes.

And there's a lot of raw materials for cement in the Chin State, located six miles from Falam. If we can produce the cement from that area, it would be enough for all over the country. Some of

the Chin experts knew about it, and they let the government know about that, but the government didn't do anything about it, saying that there's no charcoal for that project.

To produce the wood, especially the teak, the forests from Haka township, near the border between Chin State and Magwe Division, they constructed a railway to Kalemmyo. One of the things that happened was that one of the Chin people, who was from Haka, was put into jail for 12 years because he cut one wood from the forest. But the Burmese military cut all the forests and they took the teak into Mandalay and then to China. All of it arrives in the Shan State near the border of China and Burma. At the time, the military government made Gen. Thaug Zakhai in charge of that project. This teak from Chin Land, Gen. Thaug Zakhai said that this teak would be sold to China and with that money they are going to buy arms. After that, he died. He was poisoned by the military, his wife explained later on. He was one Chin person who was a general in the [government] army. That happened four or five years ago. The answer is that our Chin people cannot cut even one tree of the forest by ourselves.

There was a project to build the airfield in Surbung Tlang, Falam Township, that project is from more than 15 years ago. That is on top of a mountain that is seven miles long and three miles wide. It was ordered by Gen. Maung Aye that all the gas, including the diesel, would arrive in Falam to start the airfield. They gathered villagers from villages around Falam and forced them to work in the airfield. The project was canceled again, because they don't want the Chin people to have this kind of airfield that later on they can use to have international contact. That's why the only state in the country that doesn't have an airfield is the Chin State.

About the college and university. When the military government appeared, they said they will build a college in the Chin State. All the Chin people want to build that college in Haka, that is the capital of Chin State. But, the college that was built, was at the border between Sagaing Division and Chin State. But the military released the news internationally that they built one college in Chin State. After they released the news, they changed the name of the college to Kale College. After that, twenty of the Chin elders were arrested. Furthermore, we have two theology colleges in Chin State. That is in Falam and Haka, and the military always thinks about how to close those colleges.

How they destroyed the education system in Chin State is that with 4th standard, there is no more examination in the class. They go to school and they just step up to another standard. In those years, they learn Burmese, especially. After they finish 4th standard and they reach the middle school, they charge a lot of money for the classes. Most of the students cannot continue into middle school because they have not enough money and they have not enough foundation of education. We have one nurses' training school in Chin State. They opened that nursing school for the Chin people. Among the 150 trainees, for a year, only 30 trainees are Chin people. The remaining trainees are Burmans and they change their name as the Chins. One of the Chins, if she wants to join that nursing school, she has to pay 300,000 kyat to the authorities of the school. That amount of money cannot be gotten by a Chin even if they work for ten years.

One of the famous Chin singers, his name is Salai Sun Ceu, in his song he told that "the road of the Chin State is a 200 years' journey." That means that the roads in the Chin State will become good conditions in 200 years. Each and every year, 40 to 50 people will die because of the car accidents. Because the roads are very narrow, and the steepness of the mountains. Five years ago, the India government told the Burmese government that the India government will construct the road from Kale to the border area. But the Burmese government did not allow to construct that road. If that road were open, the CNA, the CNF would move freely and they will get stronger.

About the hydroelectric power in Chin State, there is three, that is in Tiddim, Falam and Haka. The hydroelectric power stations in Falam and Haka -- the engines were from Australia. Those machines were donated by Australia by Haka and Falam. But the military took those machines, and replaced them with China-made machines there. They took the Australian donated machines to Mogok [and Mandalay]. About the Tiddim hydroelectric power, during the construction of that hydroelectric power in Tiddim, the people were forced to work for the power plant. One of the soldiers shot with a gun one of the Chins, who died in Falam Hospital, seen by myself in 1998. The electricity power produced, they will distribute to the army camp as the first priority. And in Falam, according to the Japan Aid, we got a water supply from fourteen miles from Falam. All the water goes first to the army camp, and they use the water as they want to, and only the water that's left, the public can use. We Chins have a lot of resources to build hydroelectric power, but

we can't even do it by ourselves, because the government doesn't allow us to make that kind of electric power in the Chin State.

Our cultivation, we cut the trees first, after burning it down, we put the seeds into the soil, it is the custom of the Chin people. The military banned cutting and burning the forest, so we cannot plant our crops anymore. We have not enough food. One Chin in Thantlang township was arrested and put into jail for two years for that [cultivation]. About the livestock in Chin State. One of the unique animals that we can see in the Chin State is the mithun [a type of large domesticated wild cattle]. From one mithun we can get 200 viss of meat. About 300 kilograms. All the mithuns were bought by the military and they sold them into the foreign country. If our own Chin people sold these animals into the border area, into India, we would be arrested and put into the jail for five to six years. Because they sold those animals, those who had connection with the [government] military, sold all those mithuns to another country, now there are hardly any left, and almost extinct. Each household used to raise the mithun. It was one of the symbols of the Chin people, and one of our wealths. We killed that animal only when we celebrate a big ceremony, as in ancient times.

The orchids, a variety grows in the Chin State, the plants are very valuable in this time, so [harvest] was banned by the Forestry Department in the Chin Land. But Burmese people got the permits to buy those orchids, and they collected all those orchids from the Chin State. They carried all the orchids into Burma.

So, we Chin people have no right to use our resources, whether inside or outside of our Chin Land. There are limitations on education, transportation, and economics. We have no chance for international communications. The tourists can travel anywhere around the country, but not in the Chin State, they can arrive only up to Kalembo. That's why we never see the foreigners in Chin State.

Food production is very low in our region. We rely on the food from outside our Chin State. Sometimes they limit the rice, and when they hold up the rice for one week, in Falam we have no more rice to eat. This morning I got the information that people are not allowed to carry the rice from Kalembo, in Sagaing Division to Falam anymore. When the military wants to do something to the Chin people, first they cut off the rice to the Chin people. After that, the military thinks they can do anything they want to. In Falam and Thantlang townships, if there is no more rice for the public, for the Chin people, the Buddhist monasteries have rice. They distribute the rice to the Chin people. They "mark" the ones who get that rice from them as a "Buddhist."

There are orphanage schools, one in Falam and one in Thantlang and three in Kalembo. There are about 150 orphans in Thantlang and 70 in Falam. They became orphans because their parents died from some disease or were killed. In Falam the school is called Nazareth Orphanage. It was taken care of by one of the teachers. He feeds them by collecting donations from one household to another in that town. And he raised some goats and cows, and earned some money by selling the milk, so he can buy some food and feed those orphans. He manages to keep that orphanage school going that way. We are sorry to see those children, because their situation, the way they are poorly dressed and underfed, is in very bad condition.

In Thantlang, the orphanage school, the difficulty they encounter is the same as in Falam. In the orphanage they teach the Bible, and in the daytime they go to school. The children practice a song asking people to help them, and they go from house to house collecting donations. Sometimes they have no more food to eat, so the teachers tell them to pray while they are "fasting." There are orphans all over the Chin Land, maybe 10,000, but only a few orphanages in the Chin State. They can eat the meal with meat only once a month. They are malnourished and several have tuberculosis. I want their needs known internationally. For the orphans in Thantlang and Falam, about US\$5,000 would meet all their needs for all of them for one month. Even the orphanage school could not practice freely, and the government wants to close it. They inquire about who donates money to them. We always see those orphans in our mind.

Q: Are they the same size at each age as the other children in town?

A: Totally different. They are always malnourished and their growth is stunted.

Q: If you compare the children in general in the Chin State with the children who live here on Guam, are they the same size at each age?

A: I cannot express with words how much smaller the Chin children are! [a visitor] said that all of the villagers around Thantlang in Chin State were malnourished. Some Chin orphans were taken by the Burmese military, the number will be more than 2,000. They are brought to Pegu to one of

the schools. They teach them Buddhism and they want to make them all into Burmans. They train all of them to act like Burmans when they're grown up. That happened since three years ago.

Q: What do you know about "ethnic nationalities schools"?

A: In Sagaing they have it. Nationalities Development College. The aim of the training is to have the mind of the Burman and the mind of the military during the training, and afterwards when they serve in their region, they will have that kind of spirit. [Elsewhere in Burma] there is a place where the military took some of the Chin young men, especially those who are naughty boys, to their camp and they are taught to be a lot of bad things, and they use those youths as a special force of them. There is a degree college of nationalities in Mandalay. [They teach science, art and the policy of the military. All indigenous people. After finishing there, they become officers in the government departments.]

2. Biak To

Male, age: 50. From: Haka, Chin State. Occupation: former army and police officer (rank of Lt. Colonel.) Education: BA, Mandalay University. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Christian. Left Burma: November 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: I tried to get a passport with my name, but I could not get it. "If you want a passport, you have to wait seven years," they said. So I tried to get a passport with my nickname, and they gave me a passport. One of my friends from the police, he told me that, "if you stay here, you will be captured." My file had been sent to the MI, so I had to get ready [to leave].

Q: As a policeman, did you have some political problems?

A: In 2000, May 27th, the NLD [National League for Democracy], Aung San Suu Kyi's party, they had their celebration. Their party annual meeting. The anniversary of 11 years. The British embassy and American embassy were invited to attend their celebration. And the government said they are not allowed to attend the celebration. And I wouldn't prevent them. So they changed [the task] to Lt. Col. Aung San Oo, but he is junior to me. He prevented them.

Q: Did you have other situations with the NLD?

A: One time, before the meeting, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she tried to travel outside of Rangoon. I was in charge of inquiries about Aung San Suu Kyi, and I didn't want to prevent her, and I didn't want to inform to the officers whenever she wanted to go out or not. One time, I don't remember the date, in 1998, she was about 13 days in her car, near the road. During the NLD meeting, I was charged with preventing Aung San Suu Kyi, but I don't want to prevent, so I took leave.

Q: Why did you change from being an army officer to a police officer?

A: In 1988, September 18, the government took power. So they used the "Chin Battalion," army battalion in Taunggyi [Shan State]. So there could be something happening between the Chins and Shans. There could be fighting between the Chins and Shans. The [battalion name] said "Chin Rifles," 2nd Chin Battalion, but there was only Burmese. I felt that the name would cause enmity against the Chin people if they were used against Shan democracy demonstrators. So I did not agree for them to be used there and I protested to my superior officer. For that case they changed me from army to police.

Q: Where were you when you were in the police?

A: Firstly in the Shan State, then I am transferred to 6th Police Battalion in Rangoon. 14 July, I received dismissal from the government.

Q: What was your economic situation in 1999-2000?

A: In 1999 they gave us a pay raise of 1,200 kyat, especially the Burmese. Also in 2000 they increased the pay.

Q: Were there any difficulties regarding religion?

A: So many difficulties. In December 23, 1999, I took a Christian movie to our battalion families, this is the Jesus Christ picture. So my superior officer, they knew and summoned me again: "what about you showed this film? For the Buddhism? This is long-nose American people and British people. So we don't like you to show this movie." And another problem, one of the evangelist pastors, he was preaching in Arakan, and one of the [Buddhist] monasteries burned in a fire. So they detained the evangelist pastor. One of the pastors in Rangoon knew about it and told me. So I helped to get the evangelist released in one month. This matter was known to my superior officer, so I was summoned again and they punished me. They told me that if I did again like that,

to help a religious case, they would dismiss me from my position and they would arrest me. During my time, they did not find me guilty of any crime, but they were searching again and again.

Q: Where did your police orders come from?

A: MI is the Military Intelligence. SB2 [Special Branch] is the Police Intelligence. I was doing only security [surveillance] work. The army officers order the police officers.

Q: Who tried people arrested by the police?

A: If they army caught the civilian people, they don't go to trial. They torture them, we cannot say the exact time, any time, one day, two days, one month. The time is not equal. But if the police officer arrests the civilian people, for two weeks they are detained in lock-up. And then after two weeks or one month, they will be put on trial.

Q: Were people being taken to work for the army?

A: They forced the civilian people to do work for them outside the city. The prisoners, also, were forced, every day. The civilians were not forced every day, but sometimes.

Q: Did you know of orders issued to stop forced labor?

A: I never heard of anything like that. The Burma government says, they do not force and kill the people, but this is not true. It is only denial. They always force and kill the people.

Q: Was there corruption in the police department?

A: It may be true, but I didn't know myself. The people who did it wouldn't tell me.

Q: What was the narcotics situation?

A: My duties and obligations were only security, so I never knew a drug case or any other cases.

Q: Did you have to do any security about people from the ceasefire groups?

A: In the police department there are two kinds of police: crimes obligation officer and security department. I was always in the security department. We did not know about narcotics groups. In my battalion, we stick to 34 places for the NLD, in Rangoon city. We cannot check all them all of the time. So if we hear some news, we check. We take only security and we cut the communications. My [police] battalion, we protect Aung San Suu Kyi's residence. Lt. Col. Aung San Oo's battalion, my own battalion and Battalion 6. So, outside people, if they want to communicate with Aung San Suu Kyi, they ask and I report to the MI and SB2. If the MI and SB2 does not allow to meet and does not allow to communicate, we tell that to the person. If they allow, we allow them to go inside. Foreigners and Burmese people also.

Q: Did you also keep watch on NLD headquarters as well as Aung San Suu Kyi's house?

A: NLD headquarters is watched by Battalion 6.

Q: And what about things like telephone and letters, were they also checked?

A: That is another branch.

Q: How did you get information about news events?

A: We could not know outside conditions, but the superior office would give orders. We had no radio, we had no computer.

Q: What was the relationship between the army, police and the people?

A: In my experience, before 1988, at the time I was an army officer, it was not as bad as now. After 1988, while I was a police officer, it is very bad. Their [army] guns are used for robbery. Their rations are not sufficient, our salary is not sufficient for food. So that this is very bad and getting worse.

Q: Is the army making economic profit?

A: All the economics are held by superior officers. We are struggling for our daily food. All the economic power is held by generals, [cabinet] ministers, like those positions. We don't have any powers.

Q: Do you think there is division inside the army and police about democracy?

A: I don't know the real conditions between Maung Aye and Khin Nyunt. But I know one thing. A lot of army and a lot of police want to get democracy. Civilians also want like this. But the superior officers, they do not dare to give in to Aung San Suu Kyi's power. So that Burmese civilian groups to not dare protest for democracy, because they are afraid of arms. And we are not linked between the army and civilian people. The Burma Army and police are loyal in their obligations, they are afraid -- if they are dismissed from their position, how can they get food and salary. This is very important. Now they are very poor. They do not dare to fight for democracy.

And so, just now, the NLD and Khin Nyunt are talking with one another. But I don't believe [in] it. Because Khin Nyunt is not ever daring to hand over to Aung San Suu Kyi. Because all the time,

he asks and complains to Aung San Suu Kyi, "if I hand over to you, how can I have protection for my life?" So that he himself is not confident for his life. Now the army officers and those governing are strongly persecuting and torturing the [opposition] politicians and the civilian people. So that if they hand over to the people, they are worried like this, that they [themselves] will be tortured. They are worried about their lives. They are not confident for it. If another nation, another country, if they help us to fight, at the last moment, then they may hand over to the public.

3. Nun Uk

Male, age: 42. From: Thantlang, Chin State. Occupation: former schoolteacher, elected Member of Parliament; shopkeeper. Education: BS, Mandalay University. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Christian. Left Burma: July 2000.

Q: What were your activities in 1988?

A: In 1988, at that time the Burmese people did not look upon us [Chins] like ethnic nationalities. They looked upon us as like animals. So that I was very angry and I organized all of the Thantlang people to demonstrate for one month. I organized the university students and high school students. We addressed the crowds and preached and announced that we don't like this Burmese military regime. [They burned an effigy of Ne Win in a coffin.] We were for democracy. 1988 in September, there were two kinds of address to the people. One kind is "We don't like Ne Win and his government." The other is "Democracy is good for us and we need democracy." But one month later, the army was coming and we dispersed and we gave up these demonstrations.

Q: What were your activities during the election time?

A: September 18, 1988, the military army's coup d'etat. But they announced "we make the election, if the public desires." So that November, I went to Rangoon and advised other Chin people and established CNLD [Chin National League for Democracy]. Later, I came back to my hometown, Thantlang, so I organized Thantlang's people, so we established the Thantlang CNLD. They selected me for the candidate and I won.

Q: Did you have any difficulties with the authorities after the election?

A: After the candidacy, the police and army arrested some of the parliament and politicians. So that 5th of January, 1991, the MI officers and soldiers came and arrested me in my house. After they arrested me, they held me in the police station and put me in the dark place. And they mistreated and scared me so that I worried about everything. In a dark place, they kept me for two months. So that I worried and was afraid. And then they knew that my emotions were down, so they transferred me again to another place. Locked up, but not dark. The total period was six months. They asked me, "Do you help CNA [Chin National Army]?" "Do you participate again in CNLD?" and "Do you fight against our army?" They asked every night these three questions. Six months later, I answered them, "I will never participate in CNLD, I will never support NLD, and I will never be against the army." So, they released me. But, after I was released, every month, the MI investigated me: "what are you doing?" "where are you staying?" "where do you go this month?"

Q: Did you also have problems in later years?

A: In the night-time, 9:00 PM to 4:00 AM, was the army military curfew. And every night they shot the gunfire. Because they try to scare the people. Sometimes the MI and soldiers came to my house and made a surprise check. In the night-time they didn't allow worship service. They didn't allow us to communicate or for more than five people to sit together to pray. In this condition it was very difficult to live in my town. If we want to go, first and foremost we ask army officers for permission. If he does not allow us to go to our field, we cannot go.

In this situation, in 1997, January 3, a bomb exploded near my kitchen. This was 1:00 AM, early morning. Some of my kitchen was broken, but the people were not harmed. Immediately, the army and MI came to my house and they arrested [me and] my son and my neighbor, three persons. The MI and army took us to the police station and they tortured and persecuted us very violently. One of the MI officers hit me in the head with his pistol, here is the scar. And they beat me and kicked me. Some of my teeth were broken. [has row of metal false teeth on same side as scar] On March 13 they released me again. My son, also they tortured him. Because he was one of the university students, they said, "you were participating in demonstrations. So that this explosion, we believe that in reality it is yours." Every time he denied it. So he also was released on 13th of March, with the other person. They always tortured and persecuted us for three

months, but we always denied it, because we did not do this bomb. So they released us. After release, we heard about this bomb: the bombers were the [government] army.

The Burmese soldiers, everywhere and every time, they scare and mistreat the people. The army people never do good things for our Chin people. They force us. They never give money for us. One time, the army is forcing people to prepare the road, and one of the stones is rolling upon the man. And he is crying out. Other people try to help him. The soldiers did not allow them to help, because the soldiers said, "if he is dead, no problem for us. Go and do your duty." So his friends are very sorrowful and they are working quickly to prepare the road. All the time he is crying. At last they could help to roll away the stone, and he was not dead.

And then, in 1999, one villager traveled to come to Thantlang, and between Falam and Thantlang, one of the group of army encountered him. They asked his name. But they were looking for someone with a similar name who was serving in CHRO [Chin Human Rights Organization]. The army did not investigate the question, they shot [the villager] on the spot.

In one village, a man did not understand the Burmese language. So that the patrolling army, they asked him his name and they called him. But he didn't understand their Burmese language. So they shot him on the spot. We are troubled in our nation. Most of the Chin people, the ladies and gentlemen, they are worried about their life. So that so many people left their nation and their village and came here to ask asylum. If the army patrolling group arrives in the town or village, everybody who shows, they arrest and collect them in the town hall and force them to carry their food and their arms. Sometimes for one week, sometimes for three days, four days. They shoot and steal pigs, cows. They never give money to the villagers. My sons also so many times were taken as porters. Among these porters, some are ladies. One of the girls from one village was very beautiful. During her time as a carrying porter, they raped her. She was very angry and worried. But the Burmese officer advised her, "respond to me with 'thank you.'" It is very difficult for our sons and daughters.

Q: Would you say that in the year before you left, the army was taking people to work for them more, or less, or the same?

A: They have forced the villager to carry. Even though the villager is very small and it is very heavy for him, he cannot avoid carrying. They keep one porter between one soldier and another soldier. The porters go ahead of them, the soldier, the porter, because they [soldiers] do not dare to go bravely. If they are patrolling in our Chin land, the Burmese army are ten battalions. So every time they go out traveling and patrolling, every time we are carrying. Just before I came here, they used it all the time. Just now, I believe they are using it. Because some villages are in bad transport. They cannot drive to there, and no horses, so that they can use only porters for carrying.

Q: Is Thantlang a forest area and is there any kind of logging?

A: Our Chin land has not much forest. Because our government did not make development for the Chin people. So most of Chin people are shifting farmers, cutting all of the trees and forests. Just now, we cut all of the forests and the trees, so that our land is now bad, the climate is now also very bad. We have not enough food, because every time the army disturbs us.

Q: Were there any foreign companies around Thantlang?

A: The army government does not allow any technician persons to come to our land, or any other foreigners. If we try to contact foreigners, they will torture and persecute us.

Q: Before you left, what was the price of rice and of cooking oil?

A: In our Chin land, the government service officer gets a salary of 1,500 kyat [per month], and the worst rice, one bag is 3,000. The good condition rice is 6,000. Oil, one viss is 600 kyat. But one of the teachers' salary is 1,500.

Q: Around Thantlang, if people grew their own rice, was there a tax on it?

A: It is not like in America. They take and collect, sometimes secretly, the army collects it.

Q: In the Thantlang area in 1999-2000, what was the education situation?

A: Not only in Thantlang, but in our Chin land, it is very poor for our education. In Thantlang district there are only two high schools. And primary schools is around about 80. The teachers' salary is very few, and they are not enough, so that they cannot teach full-time. To pass examination, they collect money. If the student can give some money to the teacher, he is already passed. But in reality, the student is not understanding. The worst thing is, in our Chin land, no

human rights and equal rights. Because the Burmese people obstruct to teach our Chin language and Chin literature.

Q: Is school taught in Burmese or Chin?

A: They teach in Burmese language. But if they don't understand in Burmese language, they explain in our Chin language. But legally, they government does not allow to teach in the Chin language.

Q: Do people start their own schools?

A: They never allow private schools. If they know they make private schools, they will arrest this person.

Q: What about religious schools?

A: They wanted to teach in our Chin language. But the government never allows to teach them. Only in Sunday school can they teach concerning about Christianity. There are a few Christian orphanage schools.

Q: Are the young people using narcotics?

A: The government cannot control the school and young people. So the teenagers and other young people have...character mistakes. Most of the Chin people did not use drugs. But they use alcohol. Because the army officers allow to make most of the alcohol, to sell themselves. Their characteristics are very low.

Q: What happened before you came here?

A: In my land the condition is this: some young people do not dare to stay in our land. In our land, remaining people are only old, and the young children. When we left our Chin land, it is very hard for us, because we are missing and longing for our family. It is the best thing for us. Just now we are arrived in Guam. We enjoy it -- but in reality we are not enjoying it, because of our longing for our land.

[Villagers near the India border were told that Nun UK was being looked for to be killed; his cousin and an associate were executed by soldiers; the news of the execution was on the VOA and BBC and in a CHRO publication; he was blamed for spreading the news; friends and family warned him and he fled to Rangoon and then overseas.] I know the condition of the other CNLD [elected] Members of Parliament. One of them, Dr. Za Hlei Thang, he is already arrived to asylum in United States. And one, Kapve Tei Kual, he was in Rangoon but he had a heart attack after the army summoned him again and again. Our CNLD General Secretary, Lian Hmung is already arrived in Sweden. [another remains in Rangoon under house arrest.] So most of the CNLD leaders are going abroad, they do not dare to stay in our Chin land, because they worry about their life.

4. Esther

Female, age: 25. From: Thantlang township, Chin State. Occupation: university student. Education: 1st year, Rangoon University, Hlaing Campus. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Christian. Left Burma: July 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: When I lived in my village, my village was burnt by the Burmese military, and I wanted to bring democracy and human rights to Burma. So I helped the organization that's called the CNF, who fight for democracy and self-determination for the Chin people. That's why the Burmese military was going to charge and arrest me, so that's why I left the country.

Q: When was your village burned by them?

A: April 17, 1995. Early morning around 3:00 AM, the Burmese military hit our village with a launcher. My cousin, the poor lady, was killed by the Burmese soldiers; her daughter was only 5 months old. Our village was completely burned and we had nothing to eat. We lived without food for three days and three nights.

Q: Was there fighting in the area at the time?

A: Only near the village there was fighting.

Q: After the village was destroyed, where did the people go?

A: Near the village was a small river, so all the villagers settled there.

Q: At the time, were the government soldiers taking people to work for them at all?

A: They forced the villagers to carry as a porter, which means they carry the things of the military.

Q: Who would they ask to carry things for them?

A: Most of them are men; all the old or young men, they force them to work.

Q: In 1998 to 2000, would the army take people to work for them?

A: Yes, a lot. Most of the time they forced them to work as a porter. Sometimes they force them for construction of the roads. And they collect money from the villagers by force for the military.

Q: Just before you left, was that kind of work still going on?

A: Yes it was.

Q: Was there logging around your village?

A: Near the village, the Burmese military made a camp, and they used a lot of logs from the trees for their camp. To build the military camp, the military forced the villagers, mostly men, to build their camp most of the time. So the villagers didn't have enough time to work for their living. So near the village they have a difficulty for their living.

Q: Did the villagers speak with the government soldiers?

A: Actually they hate them, but they are afraid of the Burmese. So they have to talk with them. If they don't talk very well, the soldiers took their pigs and their cattle without paying any money. They may take the girls from the village and keep them in their camp. They look down very much on the villagers and sometimes they rape the girls. They do a lot of things.

Q: How was your education?

A: I did very well in school, I was an outstanding student, so I wanted to have the higher education, for my Chin people, so that's why I went to the university. Because my village was burned down by the military, I wanted to be educated to serve my village some day. Since 1988, the Chin people, most of the students, they fight for democracy. If we have no education, we cannot promote our Chin people.

Q: How much were you able to go to classes at Rangoon University?

A: For university life, only two months. I was at the university and the university was shut down. So I went back to my village and most of the time I helped the CNF, including the fundraising, and distribution of the magazines and pamphlets.

Q: What were some of the CNF activities?

A: We talked and preached to the villagers about what democracy is and how our Chin people didn't get their rights. Most of the time we talked about the value of democracy.

Q: Did the CNF have military activity in your area as well?

A: Yes.

Q: Was there much government military in your area in 1999-2000?

A: Yes. [several platoons]

Q: In your village area, what kinds of illnesses did people have?

A: About 70 to 80% of the women, they have the gynecological problems. And most of the people have the heart disease because most of the villagers live with anxiety, because the military chases their father, or their brother, or their sister, or their cousin. They don't have the health education, they don't have the health facilities, and it's far away from the town, so there's no health care at all. So most of the babies, when they are born, 95% become yellow with jaundice. More than 10% die [infant mortality]. They know about the tuberculosis and the HIV/AIDS. Most of the disease they have is malaria, and some tuberculosis, and some people get HIV infection because of the Burmese military.

Q: Did people have enough food in your area?

A: Previously, we had enough food, but later on, nowadays, the villagers didn't have enough food, because they have to work for the military most of the time and didn't have enough time to work for themselves. So 60% of the people are in shortage of the food, 40% have enough food.

Q: When you were there, what was the cost of rice and cooking oil?

A: One bag of rice is about 5,500 kyat and one viss [oil] costs 700 to 800 kyat. The price is always increasing, not stable, not going down.

Q: During your two months at university, was there political activity among the students?

A: Yes. I got involved in the demonstration against the government. We demanded some points to the government. To release Min Ko Naing. To release other student leaders arrested by the military. To hand over power to the elected NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. To let us form the student union. That's why I was arrested and detained for one night. I got involved in anti-government action during my student life, and then I lived in the village and I helped the CNF members to distribute the pamphlet and collecting money for funds and preaching to the people

about democracy. That's why the Burmese military knew about me, so they were going to arrest me.

5. "Ms White"

Female. From: Myitkyina, Kachin State. Education: post-graduate degree. Ethnicity: Kachin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: November 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: I had a problem with the government, the Kachin State authority. When I was working in my department, the government forced us to donate money to the Buddhist festival from our salary every month, without our consent. They deducted it every month. The most recent was the [Buddhist] festival of lights, and the government deducted money from our salary. I led my colleagues to oppose the donation, I organized them against the policy. So the MI asked us to come and see them for a few questions, interrogation. I just refused and fled.

Q: Had the government ever questioned you before?

A: In 1998 there was a government policy to do the farming, to expand the cultivation, the rice farming, so we were forced to go and farm those lands, about three persons for each acre, to a village far from Myitkyina. We would have to go there by train, by car and then walking. A remote place with forests and malaria. Virgin land that we would have to transform into farmland. To expand the rice production. We would have to sleep on night on the way, to get there. The first time, our department only asked for men, but the second time they asked for women as well. I refused to go there, since it's very difficult. That's why I was arrested and taken into custody for eight days. After eight days they released me with a warning, and I had to pay them as a penalty for defying the military orders. They warned me that if I offend any other government orders, then I will be punished strongly.

Q: Was the university in Myitkyina open or closed most of the time?

A: After 1996 it was shut until June 2000. The correspondence kind of university, "distance university" was open. All of the distance universities were controlled by Rangoon University in the past. In recent years, Mandalay University became in charge of upper Burma. The students have to attend only ten days before their exams. Before that they have a kind of correspondence. They have to attend weekend classes for about three months before they take their exams. Up to 10th grade [standard] in high school, they are taught quite properly, but after they pass their 10th grade, most of the students start to work. To attend the university or the distance learning is only to get a degree. Just for show. It won't mean anything, it won't help anything for them. They won't learn properly.

Q: Did the government give special training sessions?

A: Every employee has to attend special training by the government based on their policy, concerning unity of the ethnics in Burma and the policy of the military government, that kind of thing we had to learn. We were forced to attend the classes, that's why we went. We felt it wouldn't do anything for us, but it is necessary to attend the training.

Q: Did they have the USDA in Myitkyina?

A: It was not necessary to be part of the USDA but if you want to join it, you can. I didn't join it. But sometimes if they need some help they ask you to help those people. Last year they had a kind of mass meeting from every part of the country. And some of the people of USDA from [Tenasserim] Division came to Myitkyina to attend the meeting, so the local people, had to accommodate those people, so I was forced to feed two of them.

Q: Are there many government troops in Myitkyina itself?

A: Yes, I'd see them every day. There's plenty of the government soldiers since the Northern Division of the Burmese Army is based in Myitkyina. I didn't have any problems with the soldiers in the city. I wasn't involved in anything regarding them.

Q: Were there any problems regarding religious practice in Myitkyina?

A: I don't know much about this, but what I witnessed was, we Christians were not allowed to build a new church in Myitkyina. Even in the university it was not allowed to build a church or prayer room for the students so they have to worship in a small hut.

Q: Are there taxes or other ways the government asks for money in Myitkyina?

A: For every festival, high school and university students are forced to donate the money. Every student, every teacher. And from their salary the department deducts it. On top of that they have to donate by themselves as well.

Q: Did students or teachers have problems with the authorities?

A: Most did not have problems with the government. They know the outcome so they won't do it.

Q: Has the situation in Myitkyina become better or worse in the last five years?

A: I don't see that it's become better.

Q: Were people from the city asked to work for the army in 1999-2000?

A: Apart from the farming, they have to do forced labor for building bridges and building roads and for cleaning the woodlands. It's always continuous work, most of the time. Building the bridges was 1999.

Q: At the time you left, what was the cost of rice and cooking oil?

A: The regular grade, not quality and not the worst one, for a bag of rice, which is about 50 pounds, is about 5,000 kyat. The worst kind is around 3,000. Just to get the idea, before the government increased the salary, it was a starting salary of 1,300 to 1,500 kyat [per month]. So for a person who earns that kind of salary, they probably cannot afford to buy bags of rice. On top of that, a kind of additional payment of 25 kyat every year. After they increased the salary, now we earned about 5,700 kyat [per month], the current salary. And a bottle of oil, this is about 300 kyat. The prices never go down. The traders, whenever they hear that the government is going to increase the salary, the price of the foodstuffs is always increased. So there's no going down, always increased. It's always available, unless the trains have a problem, in which case the price of foodstuffs is increased. The only available transportation for it is the train.

Q: Where do the manufactured goods in the markets or shops in Myitkyina come from?

A: Some of the things are made in Burma and some from China. At the university the facilities it has, the level of the education is very, very low. Nobody had even seen computers in the past. From last year, they started to see computers in the university. There's about 20 computers in the whole university, but most people there didn't know how to use it. They were given a kind of training, but don't really know about the computers, not even what kind they were. The first were a kind of Apple, that was given by the company as a kind of present. There's no internet facilities or e-mail facilities, only word processing like a typewriter.

Q: How did you get information in Myitkyina?

A: From the radio, like BBC or VOA.

[note: The KIA (Kachin Independence Army) is the military force of the KIO (Kachin Independence Organization.)]

6. Maran Kai Ra

Female, age 28. From: Sumprabum, Kachin State. Occupation: family grocery store and distributing medicine. Education: BA, Myitkyina University. Ethnicity: Kachin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: September 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: Because of the political movement. Since 1988 I started to be involved in the student movement, and after that, when Aung San Suu Kyi came to Myitkyina, I welcomed her with flowers. After she left, I was asked to come to the MI for interrogation, and after that I had a record. I was also involved with the 1996 student movement and continuously I was involved in the political movements and organizing and distributing political pamphlets. Most recently they suspected me of involvement with Aung San Suu Kyi's party and the underground student movement. My name was on their list. One of my uncles was an elected party Member of Parliament of the NLD party and I always followed him, helping him for organizing for the party, so they recognized me.

Q: What was political organizing like as a student?

A: We had to do it as an underground movement, through the religious groups and the Kachin literature and the cultural organizations. We don't have formal organizations like student unions.

Q: How did you get information?

A: News from abroad we get from BBC, VOA and AIR, but within Burma, within the student organization we have a kind of representative or student leader from Myitkyina or Rangoon and they travel and give information to each other.

Q: How did the university teach history?

A: Most of the history that we learned was not the facts, but they rearrange history, rewrite history. About Burmese people themselves, how good they were to the people.

Q: Were many university students involved in politics?

A: About 60% of the students were interested in politics.

Q: Were students using narcotics?

A: Yes. Opium and heroin. Since the universities were closed, students started to use the drugs. At the new universities in Rangoon, there is almost free drug trading going on at the university compounds. To persuade the students not to be involved in the politics, to deal with the pressure. There's even prostitution there.

Q: What education was available in Sumprabum?

A: There's only up to 8th grade [standard] in Sumprabum. So mostly they have to go to Myitkyina or Rangoon for higher education.

Q: What were the health conditions in Sumprabum?

A: There's no proper clinic or hospital, there's not a single doctor. And there's plenty of health problems, especially malaria. The local people in Sumprabum are taught by the nurses, not by the doctors, how to avoid the diseases. As far as I know, there's no HIV positive in the area, but some TB. The people who have TB have to go to Myitkyina for treatment, there's no clinic.

Q: Are there traveling doctors in the area?

A: There's a kind of doctor who goes around checking villagers, almost once a year.

Q: What is the food situation in the Sumprabum area?

A: Mostly everything is locally grown. But salt and oil... they bring from Myitkyina. There's not enough rice. Because of the hill cultivation we cannot produce enough rice for the local people.

Q: Is there much government army in the area?

A: Yes, they have an army base there.

Q: Do they ever ask people to work for them?

A: Yes, many times. In the past, there's plenty of portering. People were forced to work as porters. But now, there's almost no more portering. But still people are forced to do forced labor to build their army camp or to build roads or such things. There's no payment. Every household has to do it one by one. If this week it's this household, next week it will be the other to help the military.

Q: When's the last time you were in Sumprabum?

A: May 2000.

Q: At that time, was the army still asking people to work for them?

A: Yes, mostly building the road.

Q: Is there logging in that area?

A: Yes, the government gives the permit to businessmen, mostly Chinese, to cut the wood, and taking the gold and cane for trading. They hire the local people and people who come from Myitkyina, not just Kachin, everyone. Because of that permission to cut the tree and do the gold mining and other stuff, most of the mountains and the hillsides have been emptied of forests. And the way of the streams, they also changed it to dig the gold. So everything's changed, and also the wildlife. In the past we heard the sound of the wildlife. But no more. They all ran away. You can hardly see any wild animals in the area anymore.

Q: What kind of animals were there before?

A: There were so many things, like tigers, monkeys, and boars. Especially monkeys, so many monkeys, but no more.

Q: What about fishing?

A: In the past the villagers, the local people only used nets for fishing. But the people from the city, when they arrived, they used the mines [explosives] for the fishing. That's why now there is almost no more fish at all.

Q: How is the water for drinking?

A: The water's very good.

Q: Besides the Chinese, were there any other foreigners coming to the area for business?
A: Apart from the Chinese there's no other foreigners, no Indians, no Westerners.
Q: In Sumprabum, in the last two years before you left, was life for the local people getting better?
A: There's not much change, but I would say slightly better because of the ceasefire between the KIA [Kachin Independence Army] and the government, since there is no fighting. So they are not forced to porter, so it's a little bit safer than before.
Q: Is the gold mining or logging improving people's economic status?
A: Slightly better, but I believe that for the long term it won't be good.
Q: Are people able to freely practice their religion there?
A: They are allowed to, if they get the permission from the military authorities. In advance they have to ask for permission. How many days the Christian festival or religious festival will take place, how many people will come to the festival. For the moment, the local people cannot afford to build a new church.
Q: Is there any effort to convert people to other religions there?
A: A Buddhist mission is there now. There is no pressure, but they offer if you become Buddhist, they will take you to Rangoon or Mandalay.
Q: How was it for you to travel between Sumprabum and Myitkyina?
A: In the past, we had to walk for about a week to get to Myitkyina from Sumprabum. But now there is car transportation, but it will take about two days, two nights. Which is about, just over 100 miles. 132 miles. It costs about 5,000-6,000 kyat, one month's salary.

7. Titus Mahkaw

Male, age 37. From: Myitkyina, Kachin State. Occupation: pastor and Bible college teacher.
Education: Bachelor of Divinity. Ethnicity: Kachin. Religion: Fundamentalist Baptist. Left Burma: October 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?
A: Because there were some religious matters, some expressions. We cannot move on our own, we cannot freely express the good news. We cannot move as we like, not free even in religious affairs. We could not finish building the men's dorm. You cannot even build a toilet or restroom. The problem is, you cannot question anything, "what is the matter," you cannot raise the question.
Q: Were you able to celebrate holidays in 1998-1999.
A: That was not a problem, to celebrate Christmas or Easter.
Q: Could you have Bible study any time?
A: Bible study was OK, but we could not go out for further study, cannot go abroad. If you are a pastor, you cannot move for study. Because we preach the freedom. What the Bible says, we have to preach. But we are not free in Burma, and when we preach it is always about freedom, so it's against the law of the military.
Q: Do you see Biblical reminders of the experience in Burma?
A: I feel like the Israelite people, when they were the slaves under the Egyptians, they were always crying to God, "save us" and then God released them from their bondage, something we are facing like that. Because we have to cry always, "God help us with the situation happening here." We cannot move as we like, that means no freedom. Of course the Bible tells us that we are free, from the bondage of sins or anything, but we feel that we are not free in Burma.
Q: Did the government military people ever come to your church?
A: Sometimes there is a guard, when they are patrolling. They will hinder in the night time, after nine o'clock, they won't allow persons on the street. That means only in the daytime we can work within the village or the area. They will stop people and whatever they like, they will do that, at night. Anything except Buddhism, all the religions are restricted. Muslim or other religions [are restricted]. Most popular are the Baptists, in our place, so we cannot move as we like. Islam, they cannot move also. What they say is, "all the Burmese should be the Buddhists. If you are not Buddhist, you do not belong to Burma." The authorities, they say that, the military junta.
Q: Did the members of your church have to give money to the authorities?
A: Of course. To the church members who have some money, a little bit rich people, they used to demand, [the authorities] will mention some case like they are repairing the bridge or the road side, "so you put in some money." All the festivals, especially for the water festival and others, they would just go, maybe a group of people would collect the money. They use the word

“donate.” If you do not give it, you will be sent to work, like farming or something. They won't come, the military directly, they will appoint some persons to come and collect it. It's happening even now, and beforehand.

Q: Did the people in Myitkyina have to work for the army?

A: Especially for the porters, carrying all those when they're traveling. And to prepare their army posts. They force the people to dig, to bring the bamboo and wood. Compulsory, each house one person should come. That work should be done.

Q: Did you or your family have to do work for them?

A: Of course, always. All the people are working. Within this day or hour, you have to finish all the labor. You don't send the children, the adults should come, so you can finish. They don't care about who is not well or something. I myself faced that, when I was coming back from the Gospel tour, [walking from Chinese border] there's one military post, so when we arrived there, they just stopped us. Including me we were seven persons that day, in September 1998. The officer of the post, he said “you just go and get ten bamboo, each one. Don't ask ‘where's a knife,’ ‘where's the bamboo,’ ‘how to get,’ ‘how to carry,’ ‘where's the bullock cart.’ You don't ask anything. Just I need each one, ten bamboo, go and carry and bring it here, just that. Go.” He said like this. It was on Sunday. I'm a pastor, so I didn't do anything. I just went and sat there under the orange tree, I had one or two oranges, while the six persons were cutting the bamboo. I also gave them the oranges. When we came back, all six persons carried the bamboo, because on Sunday I shouldn't do anything, especially for me, as I usually preach on Sunday. But the official didn't ask me anything.

Q: In Myitkyina, were there drug or alcohol problems?

A: Number 4 [heroin] narcotic, the white opium, that is popular in our place, they are using that one continuously. As long as my knowledge is concerned, all the military officers, the highest officials, they are the base of that opium, because they order people to do. Even, I was the pastor in Hpakant, jade area, the very restricted area, and the opium they just carried with trucks, big trucks. Plenty of those things. They will just sit one of the officials at the head of their cars, so no one can question it. As long as you are giving money, you can do whatever you like. There is no law in Burma. Only money. What the Burmese military want, they do. There is no law.

Q: When were you in Hpakant?

A: '88 to 2000. '94 to '96 I was in Myitkyina, then I was asked to be a pastor in Hpakant. Then they called me back to the Bible College. Then I was newly ordained, and then back to Hpakant.

Q: What was the situation of the workers at Hpakant?

A: In Hpakant, now everybody, meaning those who have the money, they own companies, so they will just apply to the government, they will give maybe 100,000 of money, so they will get permission. And another person will give 2 million, and they will again give permit. Within a year, the person who gives more money, they will just give permit. They are just raising money, so the most highest amount, again and again they will give like that. There are two kinds of laborers. Some, there's like a salary, per month maybe 10,000 or something. For others, when the jade comes, maybe one million, so the boss will get half and laborers, half. Maybe ten persons laboring there, so the boss will be the one, the boss will be there providing all the food and all the tools and things, when the jade is gotten, the boss will get half and then his labor camp, they will share.

Q: About how many people are working around the Hpakant mines?

A: I'm not sure. Many. A lot. They come from the whole of Burma. Several places. All kinds of people. Now especially even from China. The Chinese, even if they don't speak Burmese or Kachin, they will come in because they give the money when they pass through the [customs] gate.

Q: Has it changed since when you were first there?

A: Oh yeah, now it is changing. Up to '93, there was a lot of people, because people from outside cannot come in. And also there were not that much machines. But by this time, as a company, they will work with machines like a backhoe, and bulldozers, so many, many machines. And the [bosses] will come directly and they will take away, so all the labor will be not as much as before. Less people.

Q: Has the environment in that area changed since you started?

A: Yeah, because always digging the mountains, the hill areas, they will just dig down, the mountains will become flat, the way of streams will change, whatever they want. Supposing the stream is going like this, so they want to dig here, they will just [divert] it to another way.

Q: In Hpakant is there a narcotics problem?

A: Yeah, most popular in Hpakant. All kinds of people, anybody.

Q: How do they use it?

A: Injection. Smoking [opium] is not popular. The "ya ma" -- the tablet, that you burn it and breathe it in, that is the most popular now. The number 4, they just get injection. Smoking [opium] is a long time back.

Q: Do they have their own needles for injection?

A: I suppose that they have their own. And also there is maybe some center for having that injection, shop, business center.

Q: Have you heard anything about HIV/AIDS in the Hpakant area?

A: Yeah, that is very [prevalent], even in Myitkyina or Hpakant. I have had many experiences to care for that kind of sickness. We can't do anything for those who are suffering from the AIDS, we just encourage and pray for them.

Q: What is the health care in Hpakant like?

A: Of course they have hospital, clinics, many. But you have to pay much amount. If you pay in Myitkyina maybe 100, [in Hpakant] it will be 300. Even in the government hospital, it's the same as the outside clinic, you have to pay money there also. If you don't pay money, you cannot be cured. You cannot have even one injection of penicillin. By this time, I'm really surprised that even in the hospital in Myitkyina and also Hpakant, you have to pay 15 kyat to use the toilet. Even if you go to throw away the urine [bedpan] in that place, you have to pay 15 kyat.

Q: Are there prostitution or gambling problems in Hpakant?

A: Yeah. The police will come, and if they give money, the police will go away. So they can do as they like. As long as they are providing money, they can do whatever prostitutions or narcotics.

Q: Where do the prostitutes in Hpakant come from?

A: I suppose that most of them come from several places in Burma.

Q: In Hpakant, is the economic situation getting better or not?

A: I think the economic level is going down, because there are not as many people [working] as before. So everything, I think is going down. Unemployment and all the machines, and also they don't get anymore the precious [jade stones] like before.

Q: In Hpakant, were there foreigners besides those from China?

A: I didn't see Westerners, but most of the bosses were Chinese, Hong Kong. If they don't know how to speak, it doesn't matter, they will just sit down and there will be a translator, something like that, and then they can order what they want, and then they just go back, that's all.

Q: Anything else regarding religious issues?

A: Before, we were free, how to build the church, whatever the design, we could build it. Now they say, "you cannot build it in a cross design, the chapel." You cannot build anything about religion, you cannot preach about your freedom. The Gospel is to make everybody free, so they don't like the Gospel. That is the thing we are facing now. We don't have the chance to go out and study, that means that they just don't want us increasing in the knowledge of the Bible.

8. T. Hkun Li Seng

Male, age 32. From: Lashio, Shan State. Occupation: Sergeant in Kachin Independence Army. Education: 10th standard. Ethnicity: Kachin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: November 2000.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Burma?

A: Because of my involvement in the political movement, I couldn't stay any longer in Burma. I was in danger at the hands of the military.

Q: When did you join the KIA?

A: 1989.

Q: What were you doing at that time?

A: After I finished 10th standard, I went to the Hpakant jade mine area. When I was working there, the KIA [conscripted] me to join the KIA forces.

Q: Where were you stationed with the KIA?

A: I started in the 6th Battalion in Hpakant area for two years, then I was transferred to Headquarters, Pajau area. From '92 to '99 I was in Pajau {General Headquarters of the KIO/KIA}. I was one of the staffers in the regional civil office under the KIO [Kachin Independence

Organization] in Hpakant. Then I moved to Headquarters and worked for the Central Committee [of KIO]. Then I was transferred to the Construction Department.

Q: Before the ceasefire, were you in combat?

A: No.

Q: Could you compare before and after the ceasefire?

A: Before the ceasefire, all the servicemen in the KIO had a kind of unity and straight mentality to fight against the military government for our own homeland. But since the ceasefire all those traits have kind of melted and we became weak, not just physically but also mentally and there was lots of disappointment and unhappiness. Most of us disagreed with the ceasefire. Because there's no benefit or advantage for the ordinary soldiers and the people.

Q: Economically were there changes after the ceasefire for the soldiers?

A: Before the ceasefire, the situation was tough for the ordinary soldiers, especially those soldiers in combat, sometimes they had to [stretch] three days' rations for five days, making soup. But since the ceasefire, the life of the ordinary soldier becomes slightly better.

Q: Did the KIO economic situation change after the ceasefire?

A: In the past, before the ceasefire, KIA or KIO had their own positions and whatever decisions they had to make, they made by themselves, and they didn't need to ask anybody about the trading. But since after the ceasefire, it might seem that the economy of the KIO may be slightly better, but in fact, whatever they want to do, they need to ask the Burmese generals for the permission. In political ways, it is more restricted than before. But I don't know deeply about the economy of the organization.

Q: In 1998-99, were there Burmese government/army people coming to Pajau?

A: Yes. And General Secretary Khin Nyunt was in Pajau, December 31, 1997. It wasn't a meeting, just to have a kind of dinner, something like that. I'm not sure what they talked about. He came by two Husky helicopters.

Q: What was the situation in Laiza [Kachin/China border-trade town south of Pajau] like in 1998-99?

A: You have to bribe the [Burma government] military officers; even the KIO or KIA as a group, they have to bribe the military authorities, if you do that, you might have a better chance of trading in this area. Doing that kind of thing is maybe slightly better than before, if you can bribe them.

Q: Would you call Laiza a KIO area or is it a Burmese government administered area?

A: KIO controlled area. There's no Burmese administrators in Laiza, but the Burmese gate, their administration office, is about nine miles away from Laiza, at a place called Laiz Jaya. If you want to go to the KIA Laiza area, you have to go through Laiz Jaya. There is a junction when you come from Myitkyina or Bhamo, there is a military post there.

Q: In '98-'99 was there still much logging in the Laiza area, much wood going to through to China?

A: There's still a few smuggling and logging of trees, but not legally now. In the past, it was legal doing that logging business. Lots of woodlands became empty, almost no more [trees].

Q: Who made it illegal?

A: The [Burmese] military government. If you have a good relationship with the generals, the military government, it's still legal. But if you don't have, it's illegal. And from the KIO side, it's the same as the Burmese. If they get a kind of tax, then they issue the permission to the trader.

Q: Has the KIO's opium-growing suppression program situation changed in recent years?

A: The KIO still suppresses planting the opium. Sometimes people from China came and planted opium on the Burma side, but when the KIO found out they made them go away, and a heavy fine, and almost death penalty.

Q: Did the government troops change their positions closer to or farther from Pajau after the ceasefire?

A: Much closer. You can even see them. You are not able to see the soldiers or the men working, but you can see their place, their buildings. It's only about two miles away from the KIO Headquarters.

Q: How did that happen?

A: After the ceasefire, the Burmese troops made their way closer to the KIA camps, not just at Pajau, as much as possible. Nobody stopped them.

Q: What did you hear about the government troops' relations with the local people in those former KIA areas?

A: After the military "Tatmadaw" [government forces] arrived in the area, they made those local people abandon their homeland, their villages, and relocated them to where the place is farther than the KIA area. To make it so they are not able to contact with the KIA or to help the KIA. Further into the Burma side area, further away from the KIA controlled area.

Q: Did those people have to work for the government army?

A: Yes. Almost every day or every week, they have to work for the military, for doing all sorts of things for those soldiers, and sometimes they need to build fencing for the military camp, then all the villagers are [told] to do that. They had mostly been under KIA control in the past, before the ceasefire, but afterwards, the Burmese soldiers they just sort of made their way to drive out the KIO or KIA

soldiers further away. In the past, those local people, Kachins, were made to be porters. Now there's no portering, but still they need to work for the military. Every village, one person or two persons have to be on standby for the military outposts.

Q: Was the KIO or KIA telling civilians to do work for them at all?

A: There was no forced by KIA or KIO, but if they want to work, the KIA paid for them. Like a job, they'd get paid.

Q: What was the relation between the KIO and KDA [ceasefired faction, Kachin Defense Army]?

A: Now the Kachin revolution groups like KDA, and NDAK [New Democratic Army, Kachin] and KIA and K3, they are trying again to be one group. In the past three years they had several meetings, but they are still separate so far.

Q: What about relations with other ceasefire groups, like the Wa and Kokang and some Shan factions?

A: Some of the Shan representatives, SSPP [Shan States Progress Party] had an office in the KIA Headquarters. They [KIA] don't have much relationship with the Kokang and Wa, but I'm not sure. As far as I know, there's no kind of good relationship with them.

Q: What is your opinion about the change in leadership that happened in Pajau recently?

A: What I believe is, under the leadership of [Brig. Gen.] Tu Jai, the organization will be better. Even though in the past it seemed that [Gen.] Zau Mai was the leader, [Tu Jai] was the leader, the one who put all the soldiers together, put the organization together. The real leader was Tu Jai. For the KIA soldiers. So I believe Tu Jai will be better than Zau Mai.

Q: When you were at Hpakant, what were the conditions for the jade miners?

A: In the past, if you paid tax to the KIO, you can have a jade mine or trade in the Hpakant area. It didn't matter who you were or where you were from. But mostly it was the Kachin people. So they could have their jade mine whenever or wherever they wanted, if that place did not belong to anybody. They had a chance... But since the ceasefire, the government announced for a kind of company. After that, most of the local businesses have lost their jade mines. In the past, between the worker and the owner, the boss, if you get jade, you'd have half and half split [of profits] but now it's become a kind of salary. That means no more workers have a chance of becoming rich men. They will stay the same. People who have the money will have more money, but people who are poor will stay the same. So the conditions become worse than before.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Pajau and then Burma?

A: I got married in Pajau, so I have a family, and I had been serving in the KIO for ten years, so I asked for a discharge. I was given an A-list discharge. Whenever they need me, I must be ready to come back and serve the KIO. B-list means if your health condition is not good, they give you the discharge. C-list means they dismiss you. I went back to Lashio through the China border. Before I was discharged I was asked to contact the [KIA] 4th Brigade in the Shan State area. So I contacted the 4th Brigade of the KIA and they asked me to provide for them the clothing and other supplies, so I helped them collect that, and I hired the transportation, arranging to get that to the 4th Brigade. The first time I could make it, but the second time my friend was arrested and the cargo was confiscated. And they also followed me. That's why I left Lashio. They came to arrest me at my house. But they didn't catch me...

9. Sinlyu Bawk Htun

Male, age 36. From: Myitkyina, Kachin State. Occupation: Lieutenant in Kachin Independence Army. Education: final year, Rangoon University. Ethnicity: Kachin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: November 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: Even though there was a ceasefire, after I left the KIA, I was arrested and put in prison. I left the KIA in 1996, and once I left the KIA I was arrested and sentenced to three years, but I didn't have to serve for three years. But even though I was released I had to report to the MI almost every week. Whatever move I made, they always followed me. Every week or every month, they called me for interrogation. I was closely monitored by the MI, that's why I no longer wanted to live in Burma.

Q: Was that in Myitkyina that you had to report to the MI?

A: Yes, because I had to report to the MI [there] I was not allowed to go to anywhere else.

Q: What work were you doing for the KIO after '96?

A: I was directly controlled by the [KIO] Headquarters. Mainly my job was to monitor smuggling of illegal Chinese people. And to [keep track of] trading problems for the KIO. I was an intelligence person for the KIO. The Chinese businessmen who had a very good relation with the [Burmese government] generals, they bring those Chinese people from China, make them work in Hpakant. I had to inform that they're supposed to go and catch them. I worked individually. Even though we arrested those Chinese illegal people, we didn't make any harm to those people. Because we didn't have power in the Myitkyina area, as it is a Burmese military controlled area. When we arrested them, we'd just ask them, "where do you live" or "where do you belong to" and just check them calmly and then just send them away to where those people belong to.

Q: Before the ceasefire time, where were you stationed?

A: 3rd Battalion [north of Pajau, due east of Myitkyina].

Q: Just before the ceasefire, in the 3rd Battalion area, was there fighting with the government troops at that time?

A: Always fighting.

Q: What was the situation at the time regarding your weapons, ammunition, supplies?

A: There was always lack of rations. Even though they said "this is for three days," sometimes we had to live on it for a week, or maybe more. Always a ration shortage there, and concerning the weapons, the arms, even though there was a war, we could not shoot whenever we wanted. So we had to be very careful with our shooting.

Q: After the ceasefire, how did the situation change?

A: What I noticed is that we had no furthering of the KIO or KIA or local people. But the Burmese troops made their way closer to the KIA place, and the life of the local people, the native people, became harder and harder for the living. So it's become worse than before. Since the Burmese troops made their way closer to the KIA troops, the local people -- officially they make more freedom, but whatever those people want to do, they have to get permission from the military authorities. There are so many restrictions and repressions, so the local people cannot do whatever they want, or whatever they used to do. So even though they said, "now is free" during the ceasefire, so the life of the local people becomes harder because they need to go through the [local] military authorities whatever they do.

Q: Did it affect their religious practice at all?

A: Yes, especially in those remote areas, the religious repression's going on, worse than before. As well as in the city, but mainly in the remote rural areas.

Q: What about [government] troops asking people to work for them, was that happening around the 3rd Brigade area?

A: Wherever there's a Burmese troop, a Burmese military outpost, the local people of that area will be forced to work for them. Especially in the remote areas, rural areas, way far away from the city.

Q: Was there still any logging going on there?

A: Up to '96-'97, there was lots and lots of logging and tree-cutting. But after '97, the amount of logging and tree-cutting was reduced, due to the availability of the trees. No more trees! Especially in the KIA area. Because the Burmese troops made the traders cut the trees in the KIA area, but there's some more left in their own area. If there's a KIA base, then the military

government send the businessmen to that KIA area, and allow them to cut the tree in the KIA area, so there's no more trees.

Q: Were there arrangements for logging with the KIO?

A: Yes, there's some arrangements, but not between the KIO and the government. If a person wants to do logging business, they have to get permission from the [Burmese] military government as well as the KIO. But the KIO do not give permission to everyone, they just decide who should be the one to do that. But the Burmese government give permission to almost everyone who can afford to give them the money.

Q: Who would do the work of actually cutting the wood?

A: All of the workers are Chinese.

Q: About the KIO opium-growing ban, after the ceasefire, did that change at all?

A: There was no opium growing, and no trading.

Q: What about in the Burmese government-controlled areas that used to be KIO?

A: The was no opium planting in Kachin State. If a person is planting it in Kachin State, he will be given death penalty by KIO. That is under KIO controlled area. But under the MDA controlled area, there might be some opium planting, even in Kachin State.

Q: Were you aware of any operations after the ceasefire period where foreign companies came in to bring out minerals besides the jade?

A: Most of the businessmen who are allowed to do mining and logging business in the Kachin State are Chinese people. The advantage is for the Chinese people, not the local people. The local people might get the temporary job or something like that, but in reality, they are not the ones who get the advantage. So, since they [Chinese] are allowed to do mineral mining business freely, that's why there's lots of the local resources being taken away. So it's not good for the country or the people of the Kachin State. Especially gold and aluminum and the other natural resource kinds of things are being taken away, including the jade.

Q: How did civilians in Myitkyina feel about the KIO?

A: Most people see the ceasefire as no good for them. Before, the Kachin people, even in the town, believed in KIO. That [the KIO] can give to the Kachin people and they can take the Kachin people out of the Burmese control. And they will be the ones who lead the nation. But since after the ceasefire, especially late 90's, '97-'98, they don't trust the KIO anymore. Even among the KIO, there's no trusting the KIO leaders. When I first entered the 3rd Battalion, there was over 800 soldiers. But when I left, there was less than 300. Most people left, because they don't trust their leaders anymore. They had no belief in the KIO anymore. People cannot but criticize the KIO leadership.

Q: What do you think of the recent change in KIO leadership?

A: I believe that the change needed to be done a long time ago. But there was no one that could lead, there was no one better than [Gen.] Zau Mai. There was no change in leader. But it should have been done a long time ago. I believe that Zau Mai wasn't a good leader. What I believe about [Brig. Gen.] Tu Jai is, he is a good leader. And he should have replace that position since a long time ago. Mostly the KIA servicemen respect him, and he is a good leader. But because under Zau Mai's leadership, many of the servicemen were killed by the Burmese soldiers -- or by Zau Mai, executed -- that's why there's not many good people left. But under the Tu Jai leadership, I believe the organization will be better. The people will be more involved in the organization.

Q: What was your own situation just before you left Burma?

A: One of my closest colleagues was arrested -- I didn't even know if he was arrested or killed, he just disappeared. And like my closest friend, many of the KIA servicemen who were discharged from the KIO had been killed by the Burmese soldiers. I had to make the weekly reports to the MI. If I didn't those people would come to my house and I'd be interrogated, arrested, tortured. My life was no longer safe in Burma. If I had stayed in Burma I don't know if I would be alive up to today or not. I could not even go back to the 3rd Brigade area, because most of the leaders there had a good relationship with the Burmese generals, so I could be sent back at any time, anywhere, so there was no safe place for me anymore.

Q: Did they make any trouble for your family as well as yourself, in Myitkyina?

A: Yes. My brother was killed in July last year. Because they wanted me, but they couldn't do it to me, so they did it to my brother. My elder brother.

10. "Mr. Green"

Male. From: Chin State. Occupation: training officer for an NGO. Education: BA, Mandalay University. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: December 2000.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Burma?

A: I was afraid I'd be chased by the Burmese military. I was told by my uncle that I was going to be arrested by the Burmese military. [because he helped to get a list of political prisoners to give to the Red Cross]

Q: Had you had problems with the authorities before?

A: Yes, I did. While I gave the training about the NGO. I showed my card from the NGO to the military, but they did not know that card or about the NGO, so they arrested me and detained me for one night. They got all my speeches with a recorder. That was in June 2000.

Q: When did you start working with the NGO?

A: I joined the NGO from 1999. My friend had told me there was a post at the NGO.

Q: What was your work with the NGO?

A: The aim of the NGO is the prevention of HIV infection. So we worked for the prevention of HIV, awareness of HIV and distribution of education about the prevention of HIV.

Q: How aware of HIV/AIDS were the people in the area?

A: In the town, we could teach the people and the people know about HIV. But it is not easy to travel around the remote areas, so the villagers did not know about HIV.

Q: How were people becoming infected by HIV?

A: It is hard to find out the mode of transmission in that area, because the government did not do any research about HIV infection. They want to cover all things up. So it's hard to find which mode of transmission is the worst thing. The government always denies about HIV, so it's very hard to find out the actual and the real situation in that region.

Q: What materials did you have in your program, and what language were they in?

A: Posters and flyers in Burmese and Chin. We didn't have enough for each and every person, but to some extent we can do. Because of the limitations of the facilities we had not enough funds.

Q: Did you have any idea of what percentage of infection was happening in that area?

A: It is hard to find the actual facts in the country, because the government wants to deny HIV infection. According to my own research, in one clinic in Kalemyo, I reviewed the blood tests, and 8 to 9 percent of those blood tests showed positive for HIV. That percent is of people who they think may have the HIV infection, the high risk group. In the Kale Hospital, the percentage was lower than that percentage.

Q: What kind of treatment could people get if they were diagnosed with HIV or if it had progressed to AIDS?

A: In that place, when people know that a person is infected with HIV/AIDS disease, the persons around that patient are afraid of him, of the threat of that disease, and they don't want to take care of the patient. Even in the hospital and the clinic, they don't want to take care of that HIV patient. The patients didn't want to stay anymore in the hospital, because they got depression, because they were outcast by society. So the patients leave the hospital and stay at home and the patients' parents take care of them.

Q: Do people advertise medicines that will cure HIV/AIDS?

A: No.

Q: Are there people who are not real doctors who give injections in the villages?

A: Yes, a lot of the illegal ones. The villagers told me about it. One person, previously he worked in mining, some other place in Burma, and later on he went to Malaysia and worked, and he came back to that area [Chin State] and he was tested HIV positive. He was tested in Rangoon. And he went back to his native village near to Kale. The people in that village thought that HIV positive is the AIDS disease. He was treated by a person who practices illegally, and he gave some IV [drip] line with some glucose, some vitamins and other things to that patient. The patient is so weak, he cannot bear that IV line, and half of the bottle was left. They don't want to discard the remaining [IV solution] so the father of that patient went to continue that IV line, because it is good for that person, it has a lot of vitamins. So the person who practices illegally, he made the IV line to the

father of that patient. And later on, the patient died. After that, then the father also died, because of the infection.

Q: In the hospital and clinics, is the equipment clean?

A: In some places, they use disposable syringes. But in some places they cannot use the disposable syringes, they just flush the syringes and other needles with hot water for one time. Just one time. The hot water that they use to flush the needles and the syringes, they use that same hot water to do that again.

Q: Did you notice the rate of tuberculosis infection?

A: I was not familiar with that.

Q: Were people using narcotics by injection?

A: Around the Kale area, Tamu border area, I found a lot of narcotic abuse in that area. In that area they used the IV method, they got that habit from the people in mining areas, where they dig for the jade.

Q: What were the conditions for the workers in the mining areas?

A: I went to Maishu in 1994 and 1995 and Mogok in early 2000. And the conditions of the workers are very poor. Most of the time they didn't find any stones or any valuable things so they have no money. They got depression because they didn't get anything from that mine, sometimes and to replace their depression they use the narcotics. Some people. The heroin is sold by somebody, and they can buy it easily, they can buy it freely. And the syringe and other things, they can buy it easily. It's available easily. They can inject it, the shot they can give by themselves or to each other, sharing.

Q: Do you know about mining in the Chin State in an area called Mwe Thaug at all?

A: I have heard the name of Mwe Thaug, before, several times, but I don't know the work there. It's near to Kalemmyo.

Q: Were you visiting the mining areas for AIDS education?

A: I visited to Maishu mining area because I wanted to know the conditions for my own personal interest, and Mogok is for my NGO job. The trip there was not very successful. The mission of the trip was to distribute the condoms to the workers of the mining and to give the health education for the workers of the mines. But that trip was not very successful because of the people in that area were very busy with their work and they couldn't take the time to hear that speech on prevention of HIV.

Q: Had the availability and affordability of condoms changed?

A: The NGO sold the condoms to the public at very cheap price. After that service, the condoms were more easily available than before. They can get them easily in the marketplace and anywhere around that area.

Q: How did you get information, news?

A: The main way we heard information is through the broadcasting services of foreign countries like the VOA, BBC and RFA, Radio Free Asia. And other democratic broadcasting services. The newspaper that's issued by the government in Burma, we're not interested about, because we couldn't get any information about politics from that newspaper. We rely on only the foreign broadcasting service.

Q: Did your office have a computer, fax, international telephone?

A: They had one computer for the office work, and one telephone for local use only. They had no [internet access].

Q: Tell about any Chin cultural problems...

A: They want to change our Chin people and other minorities to become Burman, by the government, all the time. Since the Burma Socialist Program Party time, the way they want is "one nation, one race, one religion, one country." They use this method in this time by the military more than before. Even in our Chin State, our people cannot learn Chin language in the school at this time. The Chin language is not examined in the primary level. Even if they taught it in the school they didn't cover it in the exams. The Chin language is not included on the schedule for the students. They meet only once a week [for Chin language study], only when they have extra time. In Burma, each and every state and division has the college and university. In the Chin State we have none up 'til now.

Q: Can you buy publications in the Chin language?

A: Only some books that are released by religious permission, we can get a small number of.

Other magazines and books, we cannot get it. Years ago, to teach the ABC alphabet in the Chin language, we used, "A for Aung San" and "B for Bible" but the military doesn't allow to publish that poem anymore. Because of the restriction of the military, except for the books issued by the church and the mission, there's no other books [in Chin] available. There's a lot of restrictions about cultural things, about shows, even in the ceremonies, we have to get the permits before. Because of all the restrictions, the cultural shows are less than before. In the country, there's a Ministry of Religious Affairs. In the Ministry, there's a Department of Religion. In that department there's only a branch for Buddhism. No other religions. The government opened the school for the "Hill Regions" but in that school they teach only the Buddhism. For that school, the teacher, the headmaster, must be a Buddhist. After they implemented that project, before that my friend was principal of the school, but after that policy my friend was shifted because they didn't want a Christian to be principal of that school.

So it is clear that they want our Chin people to change to Buddhism and be made Burman. In the schools in the Chin State, they forced the students to pay homage whenever the elders come in [with a "Buddhist" gesture], and say the Buddhist words. The Burmese soldiers, whenever they went in the Chin villages, they arrest people and they persecute people whenever they want to, anywhere in the Chin State. The military check each and every household in the town, with their full equipment, about the guests. Even in my house, my sister in law was back from Rangoon because of a terminal stage illness. And some relatives and friends came to the house to stay with the patient to comfort her. But the military came to the house with their uniforms and didn't listen to them, and the military threatened them and treated them rudely.

Whenever they went in the town or the village, the Burmese military opened fire in the air or somewhere, every night to alarm the people or to threaten the people. So the people, the Chins, in their heart, they have in their minds, fear and anxiety about the uniformed people who don't speak the Chin language. Most of the people have anxiety even when they hear the footstep or song of the soldiers, or bark of the dogs.

In every [government] department, the head of the department is a Burman. Most of the Chin people don't speak Burmese, so they are scolded. So they are afraid to go to the departments anymore. Even the small number of Chin people who are educated are shifted far away from the Chin State, so we don't have our Chin people to rely on.

I was in Thantlang and saw when the military government destroyed the crosses that were erected to mark the Centenary of the Christian missions in the Chin State, 1999 January. At that time, the crosses erected on the hill were destroyed by the Burmese military and the pastors in Thantlang town were arrested by the Burmese military. That's why I and other people gathered to pray in the church for the release of the pastor. Like we were making a demonstration. So the Chairman of the Chin State [military government] Col. Than Maung, came to Thantlang and ordered us to get out from the church. He didn't step down from his car. We stood out in front of the church. He said, "don't worship in the church and don't make any prayer meeting anywhere. But what you need to do is work in the road for the construction." The Burmese soldiers and police along with him forced us to scatter out. And only the pastor and the elders of the church to follow him. He told them that, "you are making the anti-government [protest]" and he was going to punish them severely. But they said they were praying in the church to make peace in the region. That's why later on he released them.

One of the female pastors was warned by that colonel that she spoke to the public about anti-government, so he was going to punish her very severely. And he told all of us not to do this kind of things in the future. Otherwise he would give us very serious punishment. Imprisonment or very serious persecution. And so there's no rights for religion or politics at all in Chin State.

The education system is also very poor, so there's no way to progress for education in Chin State. There's not enough facilities, and there's not enough teachers. Most of the schools were built by the villages on their own. In some cases, the government forces the students to wear a [military type] uniform and forces them to shout the anti Aung San Suu Kyi slogans. The military government uses that trick.

When they formed the USDA, they used some students in that association too. Most of the time the students are taken by the government to be involved in sports and a lot of activities so the students didn't have time to study in school. For example, the student festival that was held in Haka, the students practiced for the contests in sports for the whole year, so the students didn't

have time to study their subjects in school. But all the students must have examinations that year. Even though they learned nothing in school, they passed the exams.

Q: In the two or three months just before you left, at the end of 2000, was the army asking people to work for it?

A: Yes, they did, for the plantation of tea in the Chin Hills. They forced all the villagers to do the plantation. They forced the villagers to plant only tea. The military got the tea seeds from somewhere else, and the agriculture department raised the seeds, and the [seedlings] they forced them to plant. They forced them to plant it in many areas of Chin State. Most of the places were forest areas. They cleared the forests and forced them to plant the tea. They started in July and August to force them to clear the forests. They were still doing [the planting] in October, November.

I want to tell about the killing of two people during the construction of the road from Thantlang to Hriphi and Vuang Tu. The [government military] built a new camp in Vuang Tu village, that's situation on the boundary between India and Burma. They built the road from Hriphi to Vuang Tu. They forced the people to work day and night. They collected the people from each and every village around the township. They brought the oil for the lights from India, and the explosives to use for construction from India, with money they collected from the villagers. That evening I was in that village when the one was killed in the road construction. March 5, 1999. The villagers dared not to say anything about that killing. The dead body was brought by the villagers into the village.

In that road construction, the villagers including the men, women and children, worked in that work camp. Right now, the military forces the people to serve as sentries to watch over it at night time, until today. They forced the villages [each] to collect at least ten people ready in position to carry the things of the military whenever they needed.

The alcohol was previously not used in Chin State very much, but at this time, the government opens to sell the alcohol everywhere, and they even force the village headpersons to sell the alcohol to the local people. They [government] get the funds from that alcohol and they destroy the morals of the young men.

Most of the Chins in the town and the students who are Christians are forced to collect funds for the Buddhist festivals, and they are forced to work in the compounds of the pagodas for cleaning and something like that. The government employees are forced to work in the paddy fields to grow rice for the government. In Tiddim town, the public water was cut off by the military, so the water would be used for the government's tea plantations. So most of Tiddim has a shortage of water, and even in the township education office they got the water only once a week. That was my experience when I held training in Tiddim. In general they are doing all the things to destroy the morals and the character of the Chin young men and all Chin people.

11. "Mr. Blue"

Male, age 41. From: Pegu/Rangoon/Pa'an. Occupation: former government civilian department employee. Education: 10th standard. Ethnicity: Karen. Religion: Christian. Left Burma: December 1999.

Q: The part of Pa'an you were staying in, was it government controlled, or not?

A: It was known as a "brown area" [contested between government and Karen forces].

Q: Why did you leave your government work and go to the border area?

A: I left Rangoon in 1988, after the military seized the power. In September. Because I got actively involved in the demonstrations. So I fled because I was afraid of the military.

Q: What kind of work were you doing in Pa'an?

A: Farming. Peas, chilis.

Q: Did the farming situation change while you were there?

A: Sometimes we could not do our work, because of a lot of forced labor and a lot of portering. Sometimes they destroyed the farms. My cousin's farm was destroyed, the [government] military destroyed his paddy field.

Q: Did you or your family members have to do work for the military?

A: I myself did it. Mostly construction. Road construction... After six years there I fled into the KNU [Karen National Union] area.

Q: Could people pay money in order not to do the work for the military?

A: Yes. The army would ask 5,000 kyat for one time.

Q: How many people would they ask to work for them?
A: 200 to 300 at one time, one person from each household [for construction].
Q: What kind of people did they ask to work for them?
A: First they call the men, if that's not possible, the women have to serve for that work. Otherwise, they have to hire other people to work for the army.
Q: Have you heard any news of your old village in later years?
A: There's no contact at all.
Q: When you first came to Pa'an, was it a forest area?
A: Yes it was.
Q: Did that change while you were there?
A: A lot of forests were cut down in the border areas. Including some places controlled by KNU and other places. Most of the places are near the creek or the river, where they can move the trees easily. The area where the KNU controlled it was managed by the KNU. They cut the forests for their funds. And the DKBA, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, that organization also cut the forests. And most of the trees were cut by the [government] military. They cut a lot of forests around that area. The wood went to Thailand.
Q: In the Pa'an area, did you notice changes in fish or wild animals?
A: It's more rare than before. Because most of the forests are destroyed, some of the wild animals are also decreased. Some snails that were plenty before, now they cannot find anymore in that place.
Q: Were there elephants in the forest in that area?
A: I never saw them, but some people said there were a few wild elephants in the forests.
Q: Besides the labor, were there other kinds of problems with the authorities in that area?
A: I lived in fear in Pa'an because I had run away from Rangoon. The soldiers would come to the village and take the pigs and chickens, paying only small money.
Q: What was your life like in the KNU controlled area?
A: I had to shift from one place to another, mostly at the times when they had fighting with the government.
Q: Why didn't you flee to Thailand?
A: Because Thailand is not my country. I wanted to live in my country as much as I could.
Q: When you worked in the government department before 1988, how were you treated, being a Karen?
A: They treated me the same, but I didn't get any promotion because of being the only Karen and a Christian.
Q: Did other people in your department participate in the '88 uprising?
A: Yes, they did. A lot of people.
Q: In Pa'an, were there landmines in the area?
A: Yes, there were a lot of mines in that area that were planted by the [government] military and the KNU to defend themselves against each other. People got injuries to their legs. They would go to Thailand to get treatment for that.
Q: What was medical care like in the Pa'an area?
A: We relied on the herbal medicine most of the time, the indigenous medicines. It is known by the ancient Karen people. We'd find it in the jungle. Sometimes we bought medicine in the market.
Q: What did people in your area think about the boys Luther and Johnny Htoo, their group known as "God's Army"?
A: People who lived around that area said it was good for them, because [the boys] did some big things that [ordinary] people cannot do.
Q: What do you think is the future of the Karen struggle?
A: I think they [KNU] should continue to do what they do, because they represent all the Karen people.

12. Ni Thang

Male, age 29. From: Thantlang, Chin State. Occupation: helped parents with their shop. Education: Kale College and MA first year, Mandalay University. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Christian. Left Burma: Sept. 1999.

Q: About Kale College...

A: Kale College was built by the military. In Burma there are 105 colleges and universities. There's no college or university in Chin State. The Kale College is over the border from Chin State in Sagaing Division. They don't allow [many] Chin students from Chin State to study in Rangoon and Mandalay. I started my studies in Kale College in 1993. Because the schools had been shut down by the military before. When the college was opened, we the Chin students wanted to form the Chin Students' Union at Kale College, but the authorities didn't allow us to. We had two organizations, religious and cultural. They were allowed. In these two organizations I was an editor at that time. We could issue a magazine that requested the Chin people to maintain our literature and our culture. There was a lot of restriction by the military to issue that magazine. The magazine was in Chin, Burmese and English. The military government made a lot of harassment of us. I was warned by the military in charge of Kale area, not to issue that kind of magazine again in the future.

In my third year they allowed me to attend Mandalay University. There I was also an editor of a cultural committee. We issued some magazines like the "Rhododendron" Chin students' magazine at Mandalay University. For democracy, for our Chin people. I was sent a letter from the student leaders of ABSDF [All Burma Students' Democratic Front]. In that letter I was asked to make the demonstration to mark the sixth anniversary of 1988. It was known by the military. So we couldn't do anything. The Commander of Mandalay, Brig. Kyaw Than, called in all the student leaders and warned them not to do like that in the future.

In 1995 I was qualified to attend the MA [degree program]. But at then [1996] there was a student uprising started from Rangoon Institute of Technology. So the schools were closed again. So I couldn't continue my studies. But we tried to protect our Chin National Day. [Chin National Day dated from February 20, 1928, at the time of the founding of the first Chin organization, the Chin National Union, a pro-independence group.] Because on that day, the Chin people had laid down the foundation of democracy. Then the military government changed the Chin National Day to the Chin State Day. So the students demonstrated against the change. All the student leaders were arrested by the government, put into the jails and persecuted in the jail.

Q: How many were arrested?

A: Four Thantlang township students were arrested. We were detained for three days. Other students demanded that the authorities release us and so did the people. They were afraid of demonstrations all over the country so they released us.

Q: What was your treatment like during those three days?

A: Sometimes they kicked me, sometime they beat me with their gun butts. Until today I've got marks from the injuries.

Q: Did they ask you questions?

A: Yes. "Were you against the government?" and "We are the government, you should do what we want you to do."

Q: Did you have more problems with the authorities after that?

A: Not big problems, but the Military Intelligence members were going around me and watching my activities closely. What I did and where I went.

Q: Did your family have any trouble with the authorities?

A: No, only me.

Q: When you were doing the student magazines, how was it for printing those?

A: Very difficult. We would have to get the permission from the authorities before we issued the magazine. It was very difficult to get that permission. So that magazine was issued by myself without permission. Our friends printed that magazine, the printer would print it if you gave them enough money.

Q: You were studying History; what was the quality of history education?

A: There's no choice for the students in Burma, they decide for them what subjects the students will major in. There are no reference books, we learn only from the books issued by the department.

Q: Was the University library open to everybody?

A: Yes, but we couldn't find the books we wanted. There were only a few books in it.

Q: Was there computer access?

A: I had never seen that in University and College

Q: At Mandalay University were many students trying to do political activities?

A: With their minds, all the students were involved in the politics.

Q: Was there narcotics use at Mandalay University?

A: In my experience, I didn't see it around the University.

Q: What made you decide to leave Burma?

A: Because of my active involvement in politics and the student movement during my school life, and after the schools were shut down by the military in 1996, I got involved in some other movements. I got involved with ABSDF and CNF as a "secret agent" and with information for NCGUB [National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, government in exile]. Whatever happened in the Chin State, I always informed them. The Military Intelligence knew of this and they were going to arrest me and I knew about it and I left the country.

Q: How would people get news about things going on in Burma?

A: Most of the time, people get information from something issued by some organization, and the news from radio broadcasting services like BBC, VOA.

Q: How many government troops were stationed in Chin State in 1999?

A: I don't know about all of the Chin State. But in Haka is ten battalions and Thantlang is two battalions.

Q: In those areas were there problems between the government army troops and the local people?

A: A lot of problems. They forced the people to porter whenever they went to a village.

Q: Were there landmines in those areas?

A: I never experienced it, but according to the people and the CNF, there's a lot of landmines everywhere in the Chin areas, in the border areas.

Q: Were there any changes in the population in those areas?

A: Sometimes the military burned down the Chin villages. There's a lot of Chin people who fled from Chin State, Chin Land, to avoid the Burmese military. Most of them were going to be arrested by the Burmese military because they help, they support the Chin National Front. And they are fleeing into India and some other places. The amount is increasing day by day.

Q: Were other people coming into the Chin regions?

A: No one.

Q: Did the army ask people to change the kind of crops they were growing?

A: Some crops were changed by the military, they forced them to grow that crop without knowing if it's good or not. And the farmers, they plant those crops in their field and it isn't any good. Most of it is rice. Different kinds of rice. In the southern Chin State, I heard that the Burmese military forced them to grow opium instead of the rice.

Q: Were narcotics being transported through the area?

A: Yes, I heard about it. In the country most of the drugs are produced by the armed force group that has peace talks [ceasefire] with the military government, so both of them bear responsibility for that. I've heard that some material comes from India and some drugs from Burma and it is interchanged across Chin Land.

Q: Was there mining for minerals going on in the area?

A: I have heard that in Tiddim township there is Mwe Taung and there's a mine there, valuable things. The military government has "banned" that area, not to be touched by anyone. It is a prohibited area. So no one dares go there to do something around there. Restricted area.

Q: Do you know anything about foreign companies coming to Chin Land?

A: I never heard that. The tourists are not allowed to visit Chin State and they didn't allow any foreigners to come there.

Q: In 1998-99 were there any new roads being built?

A: In Thantlang township, the [government] military camp was located in two places. In Hriphi and Vuang Tu villages. There was no road to the camp. There's around about 90 villages in Thantlang township. All the villagers were forced to dig that road down to that military camp. One of the Hriphi villagers was killed by the military because of he could not do the work that they told him to do. One of the villagers from Vuang Tu was also killed. It was heard by me, about their road construction and camp construction in 1999.

13. Julie Ngun

Female, age 27. From: Thantlang, Chin State. Occupation: shopkeeper. Education: 1st year, Mandalay University. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Christian. Left Burma: July 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: Because I had a problem with the government, because I was known by the military as I reported to the Chin National Front. I heard that my house was searched by the military.

Q: When was the last time you were able to go to University?

A: In 1996.

Q: Was there political activity there at that time?

A: Yes. Student demonstrations against the government, the military. We demanded to release the student leaders and to form the student union. And to hand over to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party what they won in the election.

Q: Did you have any problems with the authorities in Mandalay at that time?

A: I was going to be arrested, but I escaped from that. Some of the student leaders were arrested at that time. I went back to Thantlang.

Q: Did your family have any problems with the authorities?

A: Yes, they did, before I left the country. Because I helped the CNF members by distributing their magazines and pamphlets to the public, I left Thantlang, because the military was going to arrest me. And my parents had to leave their house and stay at their farm.

Q: If someone got caught with one of those publications, what would happen to them?

A: If they find it, the magazine and the pamphlet that's issued by the CNF, whenever the [government] military saw one in the hands of some people, they arrest them and put them into the jail and persecute them a lot.

Q: Were there public expressions against the government, like posters, stickers or graffiti?

A: I didn't see those.

Q: The goods in your family's shop, where were they from?

A: Most of the things come from China and Thailand. Most of the time I went to Mandalay to buy those goods. Sometimes my sister went to Mandalay to buy it. Sometimes someone would bring it to us to buy.

Q: How would you go from Thantlang to Mandalay?

A: By car mostly, if the car was possible, it took three days. Including the return, one trip, only for the transport charges for the person cost 6,000 kyat, not including the goods.

Q: Were there checkpoints on the way?

A: Three checkpoints. They check the ID [identity card] of the persons, and they check the things we brought, whether it contained some restricted material or not. We'd have to pay some kind of customs fee because we carried a lot of things. Sometimes we had to pay that to the MI and the army also, to pass the gate, which is [government] military.

Q: Was it easy or hard to get enough things to sell in your shop?

A: I could get the things I wanted to. Most of the time I went to Mandalay every two months.

Q: Were the prices staying the same or going up?

A: Most of the time it was increasing.

Q: At the time you left, what were rice and cooking oil sold for?

A: The cooking oil cost 800 to 900 per viss. One bag of rice cost 5,000 to 6,000.

Q: Just before you left, in your area, was the government army asking people to do things for them?

A: Yes, they were. Most of the work was the road construction and forced portering.

Q: Did any of your family or your friends have to do the road work for the army?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: When was that?

A: 1997-98, and up 'til I left. It's still going on.

Q: When you traveled between Thantlang and Mandalay, did you ever see people doing that kind of work for the army?

A: Yes, I did. They repaired the road. Men and women.

Q: Were children asked to do that kind of work?

A: I didn't notice children, but some would be 14, 15, 16 years old.

Q: In Thantlang, are most of the children in school?

A: Most of them, in the town. I don't know about the villages.

14. Job

Male, age 24. From: Falam, Chin State. Occupation: student, worked in a shop. Education: 1st year, Mandalay University. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: July 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: I was chased by the military, so I dared not stay in the country anymore. During 1999 I was arrested and put into jail, because I helped one of the political organizations that the government doesn't like. I was released after I signed a bond that I would not help that organization anymore in the future. And then I helped that organization again in January 2000. I gave the money to that organization, to someone who was arrested by the military and confessed about me giving them money. The organization is the CNF.

Q: In 1999, how did you get arrested?

A: I don't know in detail, but I think someone informed on me that I helped the CNF by distributing the leaflets or pamphlets to the public.

Q: Do a lot of people have access to those printed materials?

A: I'm not sure, but it reaches many people in the towns.

Q: In Falam did you ever see political stickers, posters, graffiti, in public?

A: Yes, I did. There is a letter they stick on the walls, that demands to open the schools, and hand over power to the elected NLD and leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and [says that] the people don't like the military government.

Q: How long did they keep you under arrest in 1999?

A: For seven days. They interrogated me. The question was, "did you support the CNF members?" and "did you distribute the leaflets to the public?" Most of the people who persecuted me were the MI people. Some of them were newly arrived MI or military personnel. They came from Kalembo or Mandalay or Maymyo. My hands were tied at my back, and they forced me to sit on the chair and three people beat me. Sometimes they beat me with their gun butts, and they punched my face, and they kicked me with their jungle boots. My nose and mouth were bleeding and my left eye was swollen so I couldn't see anymore. It was at the beginning. I was arrested at about 4:00 PM and in the early morning I was persecuted. I was put into a cell with five other people, and I was called into a room to be persecuted. After that I was brought back to the cell again. It was the police station. The other people in the cell were ordinary criminals.

Q: When you were let go, did your family have to pay any money?

A: Yes, my father gave a bribe to the military. 25,000 kyat.

Q: After that did you have to report to the MI?

A: I had to report once a week at their office. They don't allow me to travel anywhere.

Q: Did your family members have problems with the authorities?

A: After I was released from the jail, the military took advantage of that event, and they used to come to my two sisters and take some goods [from their shop or homes] without paying any money. And the military used our car without paying any money. Not even gas. After I fled to Rangoon and escaped from the country, because I was not in Falam at the time, the military took my father to the police station, and my father had to work for the police from morning to evening. My father had to carry water for the police. The water is rare in that area and he had to carry it manually with some container, and he had to clean the compound of the police station under the sun and the rain. He's 45 years old.

They asked him where I was, and said to inform the MI when I came home.

Q: For the family shop, did you have to pay taxes?

A: When we had to pay, for example, 5,000 kyat to the government office, we paid 10,000 to the employees of the tax office. We had to pay some money to the municipal, and the customs, and the Union Solidarity Defense Association, a donation. For their fund, we had to pay once a month, about 1% of the income of the store.

Q: Did your family have to go to any USDA events or rallies?

A: No. If they called us to go there, we didn't want to go there, so we paid money for [not going], 50 kyat. I know they made meetings sometimes. Some people who cannot pay the money, and other people go to those meetings.

Q: Could you speak with other people in Falam about politics?

A: No. If we do they are going to arrest us.
 Q: How would you find out news and information when you were in Falam?
 A: Radio news. BBC.
 Q: Did your family have a television or video?
 A: No.
 Q: Did you have any access to a computer?
 A: I never saw a computer before.
 Q: What was the narcotics use among the young people in Falam?
 A: For narcotics, the most problem is alcohol. It is locally made alcohol.
 Q: What ages use it?
 A: Around age 17, they use alcohol a lot. Mostly the boys. The economy of the town is depressed, and the morale of the young people is also depressed, and so they use the alcohol, and they can get it very easily, they can get it anywhere in the town. Because they have nothing to do.
 Q: How many months of actual university education did you have before the schools were closed?
 A: Only three months.
 Q: Were the students at Mandalay University politically active or not?
 A: Yes, they were. About half of them. Some students are afraid of arrest by the military. They knew the experience of 1988 and their parents [don't want them to participate.]
 Q: In Falam, just before you left, did the army ask people in the town to work for them?
 A: Yes, they did. They forced them to work on the road construction. They forced them to dig out the old pipeline of the Falam water supply, that came from six miles away. The government didn't have any machine to dig out that pipe, so the only instruments were shovels and hoes. In September 1999.
 Q: Was there other work like that in 2000?
 A: They forced them to work to level the football ground. In early 2000.
 Q: Did you ever see the government soldiers themselves doing that kind of work?
 A: Sometimes when their superiors, their commanders, came to visit them, sometimes they worked like that, just for a few days or a few hours. After that they force the people to work the rest of the time.
 Q: Did you hear anything about mining or oil industry development in Falam or Chin State?
 A: I don't know about that. Besides the store, my parents have a business of transport with some cars, and the government military use their cars and their trucks without paying any money, they didn't even pay for the gas.
 Q: Where do they get the cars and trucks?
 A: They're old ones, Nissan.
 Q: How much did the petrol cost?
 A: It was 500 to 600 kyat per gallon. Always increasing.
 Q: How was the electricity supply in Falam?
 A: Only when there is a lot of water, like in winter season, we have electric power every night. But in the summertime, only one out of two days, or less than that. It is hydroelectric power.

15. "Mr. Gray"

Male, age 22. From: Southern Chin State, near Mt. Victoria. Occupation: volunteer group member. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Catholic. Left Burma: December 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: The soldiers found out something about my background. They made a surprise check at my home and they found some leaflets. Anti-narcotics and anti-alcohol leaflets, AIDS education. They were from the CNF, those leaflets.

Q: Had you had problems with the authorities before?

A: Since 1996. It was when I first went back to Chin State, when I had finished my high school... At the time, a voluntary organization was forming and I joined it, and we started doing voluntary work. We went around the town and the villages, and taught some youths... and supported them in what they need, and I taught them English...[deleted comments] At that time, most of the youths were addicted to alcohol and some kind of drugs. We told them that alcohol and drugs are bad. We encouraged them to abstain from it. And we can see that some of the alcohol bars were

supported by the government. And some of the bars were selling drugs in there. They have opium and some capsules. They're chewing the capsules. And they smoke the opium. It's not well-known.

Q: Did the police or army question you about what you were doing?

A: Yes, sometimes at their office. At first, they just asked the questions and let us go home, but in 1996, October I was detained in the small district army camp. They tied our hands in back and forced us to sit in the chair and asked their questions. My friend and I. They asked, "what are you doing, going around everywhere?" "Do you have any contact with CNF?" They said they had information that our organization had contact with the CNF. We said we had no contact with the CNF. And they started to beat us. They beat my head with their gun butts. The one who punched me was a Captain in the army, and most of them come from other places. Most of our injuries were in the face. Our noses and mouths bled and our eyes were swollen. We were kicked with their boots, so we got a lot of pain all over our bodies.

Q: How long did they keep you?

A: I was chained in the camp for one and a half days only, but after that I was forced to carry things as a porter to the border area. A lot of people had to carry their things. The army came along with us with their guns, they went along by our side. We were ten people and four soldiers. They forced us to carry their equipment from their camp to another camp. Some rations and the magazines of the bullets. It was very heavy, I don't know how much. They gave me only a little bit of rice and no other things, no other food. Not even water, we had to drink water from the stream. [The porters] were three girls, one older woman about 40 years old, the others were men. I had back pain very much, continuing up to now. Even if we took a rest for a while, they punished us, they kicked us with their boots.

Q: When you reached their camp, what happened?

A: I was released as soon as I arrived at the other camp. I learned that my father had given the military officer some bribery, only when I arrived back at my home town.

Q: Do you know how much he paid them to let you go?

A: He gave 15,000 kyat to the officer.

Q: Did you have to report to the authorities' office after that?

A: I had to report to the military once a month. At the army camp. I had to tell them what I had done during the past month, and after that to sign the paper.

Q: Did they ask you to work for them again after that?

A: Yes, they forced me to work to repair the fence of the army camp, that needed a lot of bamboo and some wood.

Q: Did people in your family have to do any work for the army?

A: Sometimes my sister had to do that kind of job, during 1999.

Q: In October/November 2000 in the southern Chin State, was the army asking any local people to do work for them?

A: Yes, they had to work for them, each household has to give them one bamboo and work for building the fence for their camp. In September 2000.

Q: Where you lived, was that a forest area?

A: Yes, a lot.

Q: Was there logging going on there?

A: Yes, I knew that a lot of timber production was going on in the southern Chin State, on the border between Chin State and Magwe Division, Saw township. In Magwe. A lot of teak production. It was done by the timber corporation. It was a government organization. It was all managed by the military. Local people cut the wood. They gave them a little money, but not much money.

Q: What was the rate of cutting in the forest in the last five years?

A: They continue, they are going on to cut the forests, and some of the forests are almost empty now.

Q: Where were they bringing the wood?

A: I didn't know.

Q: When you were growing up, did people hunt for food?

A: In the previous time, they used to hunt the animals in the forest, but nowadays the government bans to hold the guns.

Q: What kind of animals were there?

A: Deer, wild pig too. Bears.

Q: In the southern area, was there any mining for minerals going on?

A: I don't know about mining, but I've heard that is gold or something that can form gold in the southern Chin State. And somebody said there are oil fields. In one place they said they can pick up that petroleum.

Q: Did you ever hear about foreigners looking for those things in that area?

A: I have heard that during the Burma Socialist Program time, there was a German scientist, geologist, he found that gold and oil in that region. After that, I don't know.

Q: In that area, if somebody had HIV/AIDS, could they get treatment?

A: Now there's three people who died from AIDS in just mu home township. I don't know about the treatment.

Q: Were people aware about the disease in that area?

A: Some people were aware of HIV infection, but not the majority. The ones who live in the town heard about it from some books or magazines, or health education.

Q: How would people react to the AIDS information you gave them?

A: Most of the people were not interested about it, because they had no knowledge about it, but then some people might be.

Q: How did people in your area react to CNF, democracy leaflets?

A: The people agreed with those CNF leaflets. They like to read those. Some were afraid, maybe.

Q: In the mountain villages, how did people get news?

A: The villagers can only know what the people of the towns tell them. And sometimes the religious members used to go to the village and tell them the political situation of the country. That's why the military government doesn't like the religious organizations or the priests.

Q: How freely could the Catholic church practice religion in your area?

A: They didn't allow the priests to conduct ceremonies. They are only allowed to have worship on Sundays only. We have to get a permit to build a church, and most of the time they don't allow. Anything we want to do for the church, we have to get the permits first.

Q: Was there any problem with the cemetery?

A: The cemetery is shifted to another place, far away. We have to move the cemetery. Up to when I left the country, it hadn't been moved. But the military ordered them to move it.

Q: Did they say why?

A: They said nothing, but the only reason they told us is that our cemetery is too near to the town. They could see our cemetery from our police station.

Q: Could you get Catholic publications?

A: Not freely.

Q: Was there any contact with foreign church members?

A: They have to go to Mandalay or Rangoon, that's the only place we can contact with foreigners. There was a cross on top of Mt. Victoria before, but it was destroyed by someone else and now they built a pagoda there, the military, the soldiers. They hired the people to build it.

Q: Is there still forest on that mountain?

A: Some places near Mt. Victoria, there is no more forest.

Q: In the rainy season or earthquakes, are there ever landslides in that area?

A: Yes. In the rainy season, we cannot travel from one place to another, because of the landslide there is no more road.

16. "Mr. Purple"

Male, fifties. From: Tiddim township, Chin State. Occupation: retired. Education: 10th standard. Ethnicity: Chin. Religion: Baptist. Left Burma: October 2000.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: Because of my brother X, all of the family members had troubles. My brother was involved in the pro-democracy movement since 1988. My brother became a wanted man by the military, and he dared not to stay in his home. The military were going to arrest him. To save the life of my brother, all the family members were very worried. Another brother was in the [government] army; he helped X to get a passport and escape from the country. So my brother in the army got in trouble with the military because of that, and he was interrogated so many times by the military.

He was demoted from his rank, and his wife died from heart disease because of her husband's troubles. Then that brother died, because of all of that interrogation, from depression and heart disease.

All of my family members were interrogated by the military because of my brother X, including my sister. She was one of the Chin elders. My sister left the country because she could not bear the interrogation anymore. A friend got her a passport and she followed X to [overseas]. I was interrogated by the Military Intelligence frequently and for a long time. I could not bear it anymore and was afraid of them. I myself and other family members and all of my relatives suffered a lot of persecution by the military in so many ways, including the political and the religious ways also.

Q: Was your family involved with political parties?

A: I helped the NLD, but I was not actually a member of that party. My relatives helped the political parties whenever they could.

Q: When was the last time the authorities questioned you?

A: In 2000. They came to my house. At last I dared not stay in my house. I lived in my relatives' and friends' houses, moving from one house to another.

Q: What kind of questions did they ask you?

A: They asked me what did I do with the NLD, and what person of the NLD did I meet.

Q: Who would question you?

A: They didn't wear any uniform and I had never seen them before. Some were Burmans and some were Chins, sometimes. They'd come to my house as a visitor and ask my wife about me. They'd come to see me about once every two weeks. Sometimes they'd come to my house as a visitor and they'd speak politely. But one time they took me to their camp and I was interrogated. My eyes were blindfolded. I was beaten, and punched and kicked. The injury from that time made me deaf in the left ear. And my back was stabbed by a bayonet or something sharp. I went unconscious. It was at the end of 1998.

Q: How long did they keep you that time?

A: Four days. After I got the injury, they let me go back home.

Q: Did anyone have to pay for your release?

A: Yes, my family member paid some bribe, but I don't know how much it was.

Q: In the Tiddim area, in 1999-2000, did the army ask people to do work for them?

A: A lot of such things. Most of the time, they forced people to carry their equipment as a porter, and forced them to work for construction of the road.

Q: When you were in Tiddim in 1999, did you hear about the USDA?

A: One of my [relatives] was in the USDA. He had to work for... activities of the USDA. That organization was formed by the government, so they had to work for the government.

Q: Did the authorities ask your family for fees for special purposes?

A: Yes, many payments to the government or other organizations. Some Chin people have companies or big stores, and the government forces them to donate money to build a pagoda or something like that. For example, U ---, he is not a Chin but he is a Christian; they forced him to donate about a million kyat for the building of a pagoda, but he refused it for the pagoda because he was a Christian and he told the government to use the money instead for a hospital or to help needy people. That was in Rangoon.

Q: How did you get news and information about politics?

A: I heard about those things from other people.

Q: Did your family have a television or video, in Chin State?

A: Yes.

Q: Where there Chin programs on television?

A: There was only one channel, Myanmar Television, it was broadcast in Burmese. No Chin language, no Chin programs.

Q: Could you buy or see Chin videos?

A: I never heard about Chin videotapes. Maybe published secretly. You could not buy them in the shops.

Q: Could people in Tiddim get underground publications such as leaflets?

A: I heard that the people got and read those leaflets, but I never experienced it because I was afraid of the military, because I was interrogated so much.

Q: In Tiddim did you ever see pro-democracy things like stickers, posters, or graffiti?

A: I have heard that this kind of sticker happened in Tiddim, but I never saw it.

Q: Did your family in Tiddim have a car?

A: Yes. But sometimes the military used the truck to carry their supplies, without paying. My cousin had to drive for them. They didn't pay for the truck, but sometimes left a small amount of gas in it.

Q: Did you know anything about any mining or oil business in the Tiddim area?

A: No, I don't know.

17. "Mr. Orange"

Male, thirties. From: Rangoon. Occupation: student activist. Education: final year (1988), Rangoon University. Ethnicity: Burman. Religion: Buddhist. Left Burma: September 2000.

Q: Tell about the first time you were detained...

A: In 1988, September. For the first time, only two days, that's it. I tried to go to the border area, but we could not get there, we met with the [government] army troops. They called to me, "where do you want to go?" They knew already that many students wanted to go to the border area. So they arrested me and my friends. "You should go back to Rangoon," they told me.

Q: And after that?

A: After that, two of my friends, they fled from Burma and they stayed in the border camp. I would communicate with my friends and send the information about the political situation in Rangoon. One is the grandson of former Prime Minister U Nu, I stayed in U Nu's house, and collected the information and sent it to my friend. Then I got the assignment to go to Bangkok and bring some letters, some information. I got a passport that time to go abroad. In August, I went to Bangkok and delivered the case. I don't know what was inside, I never opened it. He took it, and I came back to Burma, to try it again. And later, in maybe three months, the Military Intelligence came by. I was at [my place of business], and the Military Intelligence came in, four or five of them, not in uniform, in mufti. I think there was a Captain and two Sergeants. They said, "Oh, excuse me, I want to know about yourself. Only a little, half an hour, come with me." I said, "wait a minute, I want to take my bag, or my towel." "No need! Only just a little, one hour or so." So I went with him. They waited with the jeep. Many people were around, they knew already that someone would be arrested. So many children and old people watched. The MI don't like it, they told them to go away. I prepared my shirt and longyi and went outside. They blindfolded me with something.

Q: When was this?

A: ...1989 in Mandalay.

Q: I could not sit on the chair of the car. I had to be down where everybody could not see. They went, I don't know where, for maybe 30 minutes. To the old palace. From there they contacted the Rangoon military agents, who wanted to meet me. Immediately they put me, handcuffed each hand to a Sergeant, onto the express train. I arrived in Rangoon, and I was taken to, I think, MI6 [Military Intelligence unit 6], detained me. He asked me about many things. First I had to fill out my biography from one year old on. Many details. Many times, five times, six times, and then OK, they certified it. They checked and they blocked round about 1988 period. "You have to write in detail."

I was very thirsty. One day and a half I could not get a drink. I could not see the hall. The room was ten feet by ten feet. One table, one chair. A military officer, maybe Sergeant or Captain, and me in the handcuffs. No restroom or anything. And the air-con was turned on, very well. I tried to turn it off, no switch. It's one of the kinds of torture. Very cold. And no water. I told the officer, "I want to drink." "OK, OK, you wait." I tried again, knocking on the door. Somebody coming, "What do you want?" "I want to drink." "OK, OK." And all day I cannot get it.

They told me to do my biography many times. They wanted to know about the suitcase that I brought to my friend. "Do you know what's inside?" "It was not my business. My business was to carry it and give it to my friend. I was not inquisitive about this." They don't like it. I had to explain about what was inside. They didn't believe me. They told me, "You have two times, the first time was 1988, you tried to go outside." They told me I had a record. '88 September after the coup was the first time, now was the second time, and I would be arrested. And I would be staying many years, more than ten years, so I need to explain the real case. "No, I cannot explain about it. Because I don't know about what was inside the case." They don't like it.

After two days, midnight, they gave me some water, and some very hard rice and fried fish. I tried to eat but my jaws could not chew the rice. I could not sleep for two days. One person came and interviewed me, then in another two hours another man was coming. I could not sleep the whole night. Many times I had to write my biography, maybe fifteen times. It's one of the ways they torture people, mentally. Then maybe three or four days, they don't want to ask anymore. So like this, "OK, you need to sign, initial this." So my biography I signed, signed. They sent me to another room, very dark. I could not see the sunlight or any light. Because they don't like my biography or some expression, they gave me some more torture, in the dark room. Through one very small hole, the guard soldier watched me every fifteen minutes. If it's day or night, I don't know. Only one time I can go, maybe 7:00 in the morning, a chance to go to the restroom for five minutes. The whole day they gave me the same food for lunch and dinner.

After 21 days, they moved me from the MI6 Interrogation Department, to the Insein Jail. I was a 10A. If they want to arrest somebody in their house, like Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, it's a 10B. In the jail, it's a 10A. They gave me a hood over my head and handcuffs. I didn't know where I was, on the floor of the car. They met with the jail authorities and they were talking with each other. With my warrant, with their remarks. The Military Intelligence went back, and I was brought by the jail authorities to the separate cell. I could not remove my hood. "OK, you can live there," the jail authorities took off my hood. I could see the iron bars on the door, in a small room, maybe ten by twelve. I was the only one. In the morning I could get some rice, with the bean soup, only like water, no beans. And very dirty fish sauce. In the night time, they gave me the rice and the soup, that's water and leaves, that's it. No restroom, only two plates, no cover, very smelly, in the corner of the room.

I was detained with 10A, the maximum is ten years. In the penal code, for 10A, the penalty is three years imprisonment, it can take away all of the rights of one person. According to the other codes, one person cannot be detained [without trial] more than 65 days. In other codes, the person can meet with his family, but in 10A, the person is not allowed to meet with other people anymore. It pulls all the rights of that person. According to 10A, it can detain the person up to three years without any charge. And [in addition] the charges, penalty can be seven years. The three years don't count for that.

So there were many people like me, on 10A, maybe 40. Most of them were NLD Youth, around when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was detained in her house, many of her bodyguards, students, maybe ten or twelve were also detained by 10A. So I was detained for three years that way. After four months, six months, I had a room-mate. I saw many NLD members, such as Dr. Tin Myo Win, who was Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's physician, I met him in the jail.

Sometimes Insein Jail was very congested, they arrested many people, so they could not give the separate rooms. We have to stay, with my room-mate, sometime six people in the very small room. When many people are congested, the jail transfers to other jails far away from Rangoon. So then there would be very few in jail. And then, later, new people coming in.

After 26 months, 1992, I was sentenced by the military court. I could not defend anything. I didn't know anybody. A Lt. Colonel was the chairman of the court. It's a special court. They sentenced me to seven years with hard labor in the prison. So seven years started then.

Q: What was the "hard labor"?

A: It was only on paper. They cannot do it, because if I had labor in the jail, I could go somewhere and we could communicate with each other. They don't like it. They want to detain me in a small place, and paralyze, and lose my brain, and have many diseases come inside my body, they like it. They don't like good health for it. So, I was sentenced in '92, and to '95 in Insein Prison, and after I think when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released, in 1995, me and my friend, we were shifted to the Myingyan Jail, in upper Burma. The third oldest in Burma. Very bad. The worst in Burma! Heavy torture. Near Mandalay, beside the Irrawaddy River, around 50 miles south of Mandalay. Me and another 29 people, political prisoners were brought up there. I think that two or three of them may have been the Members of Parliament. They were detained and sentenced to 35 years.

I want to explain about Myingyan Prison. In Insein Jail we were managed directly by the jail authorities. But in Myingyan Jail we were put together with the murderers and all the criminals. Most of the time we were oppressed by those criminals. So whatever happened, the authorities gave their responsibilities to them. When we first arrived in the Myingyan Jail, those criminals

were waiting with the sticks. We were blindfolded with some blankets and the criminals started beating us. It was so we would be afraid at that jail. No complaint. They don't like complaint. No requests.

Q: Did you have the same food as before?

A: The same kind, but it was far away from the central authorities, so they only give very small amounts. At Insein Jail we could get enough food, but we could not at Myingyan Jail. Sometimes the rice was very bad, sometimes mixed with sand. In Insein Prison, we can request, we can complain about "the rice is no good, please change for me." The authorities sometimes change. In Myingyan, when I complained about the rice, they beat me many times.

Q: When you were in Insein, was your family allowed to visit you?

A: After my sentencing, after three years, they came to meet me. I got a chance twice a month [at Insein]. They could give me some food, some drinks, only ten minutes, that's it.

Q: What about visits at Myingyan?

A: At Myingyan, only once a month. But my parents, they cannot meet me, because it's very far from Rangoon. Every two months, sometimes every six months. It's very hard to go there. Nearly 500 miles from Rangoon. Most of the people, their parents cannot see them there, only five percent can.

Q: Did you do work there?

A: No, they don't like me to do work. If I got a chance to work, I might reduce my stress in my brain. When they gave me some work like cleaning the yard, I was happy. To go outside from the small room. But when I'm happy they don't like it. When I feel bored they like it.

The criminal prisoners were outside my room. They gave many tortures. They were around and they guard me, they watch me. When I was in Myingyan Jail

I was in iron shackles and chains for six months. I complained to the authorities, "why did you do like that?" They gave me the reason I don't believe, that I would escape from the jail. "When can I remove this?" They don't know. No time limit. So my legs became very black, because the iron was toxic. I could not walk straight to the bathroom or anywhere. But they didn't like the sound [the clanking noise] so the [criminal prisoners] beat me many times. In the room, sometimes somebody was sleeping, change position, so the chains make a sound, the jail guards come in -- "you try to go outside?" so the next day I was beaten many times.

In front of my room there were three steps, made with mud. I had to re-make them every day. In Myingyan it was raining three or four times a day in the rainy season. I made small pieces of glass as a tool for the steps. When the rain came, it was damaged. So the staff's coming, "why don't you finish? You are sleeping!" So they beat me many times. I needed to polish the steps. It was stupid work. I made them nice, and the rain would come. I had to make them three or four times a day. I needed to clean my floor. The cement was very bad, many bumps and many holes. I haven't a broom, they gave only the torn clothes to clean like that. [they would check it, and if there was sand, there would be more beatings.] They had give me a broken pot to urinate in; if in the night time, I would get up to use it, they would say, "you try to go outside, you damage the fence, you will be beaten tomorrow, you made a mistake, you broke the jail rule."

I had to stay in the jail position [crouched] and they beat me many times with rods, 30 times, 40 times. I cannot walk [normally] in the jail, I have to go around [hunched in humility posture]. If one of the prisoners "acts in an unwanted manner" around the jail authorities, it is one of the crimes. They give another penalty. There is no definition of the "unwanted manner," it is up to the authorities.

Q: How long were you in Myingyan?

A: '95 to '97. I finished my sentence there. There was a reduction of the date. But totally I was in jail for seven and a half years. We political prisoners, when we are to be released from the jail, the jail authorities have to inform the Military Intelligence about our case. If the MI Service member doesn't want them released from the jail, the jail will detain them as "unlimited." There's a lot of prisoners that they have that kind of continued detention because of the MI. I knew some who had it.

Q: Is that the case with Min Ko Naing?

A: Yes.

Q: After you were finished, where could you go?

A: I could not go freely. I had to inform the authorities of my township. I could not sleep at my

friends' house. I went to my parents. I needed to inform to the authorities, to sign it that I was not involved in the political movement or with the political friends, like that. I needed to guarantee that, and for two years after I was released, they watched me. I had to sign that every month.

Q: Did they give you back your identity card after jail?

A: My card was left at my home while I was in jail. [At the time of my arrest] my house was searched completely by the military and my parents were severely warned about me. It was very hard for them to go far away [to visit me while I was in Myingyan] and the transportation charge was very high. Buying the food [to bring] was very expensive. Because my parents are not rich. They also forced my father and mother to retire. My sister was detained three days in a military interrogation camp, and then she was released.

I wasn't allowed to continue my final year studies at the university, they don't like me studying on the university campus. They don't like talking to me. I tried many times [requesting] to the registrar. I had no work. I could not try, people don't like to work together with me, because of me they may get some trouble. I cannot get a police clearance.

Q: During the year 2000 just before you left, what was your impression of the human rights situation?

A: There's no political rights at all in the country. As for me, I was released from the jail and I had no right to meet with other people, other old friends who came out from jail.

Q: How did people find out information about politics?

A: Most of the news, we get from the broadcasting service like BBC, VOA or RFA. And in Rangoon, some of the news we can get from the news release from the NLD party.

Q: Did you ever see public political things like stickers, posters or graffiti?

A: Very rare. Because many people are very scared of the government. You cannot believe your friends because most people are informers, they inform to the military agents because they want to get opportunity. So if you're thinking about like that, and discuss with my friend, "Oh, I want to sticker something to protest the government," he is an informer and I will be arrested. It is very rare, but many students of the next generation try it, many times. But they cannot make assembly, [gather] many people. Because the government has a very high investment in the informers. Very hard.

Q: What about 9/9/99?

A: Four nines, many people tried it. But not too much. The NLD supported many students. But...

Q: What is your impression about recent events within the SPDC?

A: I don't think [it is changing] because all of those soldiers are the same. One person's gone, another person comes. In my country, the military authorities, they don't like the democracy, because they don't like complaints. If Gen. Khin Nyunt is gone, another person comes the same like that. They can't change it.

I think that in America, if a person goes to jail it is a problem, but not such a big problem. But in Burma, if a person gets in the jail, his life is worse than the death. Here you can get enough food, personal hygiene. In Burma you cannot. I felt the nightmare during prison life, up to today, even though it was three years ago, I have these nightmares even now. Sometimes when I sleep I get a very bad dream. The reason why I was detained in jail. Then I wake up and I am free, I am on Guam. This happened so many times. It's maybe broken my brain while I was in jail. I tried to fix my brain while I was in jail. I know about Min Ko Naing, I think he's suffered. Because very isolated. More than me. I know that place where he was detained. Very isolated. You cannot hear the human voice. Nothing. Very silent. Only he can speak with his friend once a month. His parents are very poor and he has no relatives, so he cannot see his parents or family. No more than maybe once every four or five months.

When I was detained in Myingyan for three months [without seeing my parents] then I could hardly speak with them when they arrived, as if I don't know how to speak in the Burmese language, my mother language. Because in the small cell I was singing or muttering something, so the staff would beat me for talking in the room. So I cannot make voice, so I became silent all the time. So I could not speak when I saw my parents. Oh, my father was very sad to see me, with my shackles like a slave. After they removed my shackles, for three or four months I could not walk straightly. The black came off after one month, then the skin became recovered.

I had to sleep on the cement, no mat, only blanket. They gave me only two blankets, very thin. I requested to the jail authorities, if I can get some blankets from my parents, but they don't allow it,

because you can try to escape with the blankets, to make a rope. So I slept on the cement floor, six, seven years, so now I have pains in the joints, when the weather is cold I feel very bad. I feel like I am old. I didn't get the medical care in jail, nothing. But I am lucky. The injections they gave me only once. Many people they line up like that [for mass injections]. They had records in the jail that maybe ten or fifteen people already had the HIV or AIDS, they first inject the AIDS persons and then the political prisoners.

One of the prisoners who was an elected Member of Parliament, U Hla Than, he died of tuberculosis and the governor [of the prison] released the news that he had died of AIDS. I think he got the HIV because of those injections -- for tuberculosis -- in the jail. They gave him a lot of injections. But they claimed that he got the HIV infection from prostitutes or someplace.

The military ordered the jail authorities that prisoners are not allowed to die in the jail, because they don't want the international pressure. They ordered the jail authorities to bring those prisoners to the hospital. They want to release the news that the prisoners died despite them giving them the good, proper treatment in the hospital. They release the news like this. But it's a bad reason.

After jail, I wanted to see Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. But if I went to see her, they would take at least five to six photographs of me. So if I went to her, I was sure to be arrested. And as there is no law, they wouldn't release me soon. The first time, it took seven years. She wants to meet all political prisoners, ex-prisoners, but I could not go to see her.

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