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**Burmese Military Regime's Systematic Use of Rape  
against**

**Ethnic Shan Women**

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Shan State is the largest ethnic state of Burma. It is a mountainous region, rich in natural resources. The population is estimated at over 8 million. In the past, the Shan State enjoyed self-rule, but joined Burma to gain independence from the British in 1949. The Shans were promised the right to secede from Burma after 10 years, but this promise was never kept.

Instead, from the early 1950s, Burmese Army troops deployed in increasing numbers. First, on the pretext of driving out the Chinese Nationalists, and then, to keep under control the growing resistance movements in Shan State.

In the last ten years, the Burmese military regime has almost tripled the number of its troops in Shan State. There are now 116 Burmese Army battalions there.

Since the Burmese Army troops began coming into Shan State, they have been abusing the local populations. Women have always been easy targets, and have been vulnerable to sexual violence.

Sexual violence serves the multiple purposes of not only terrorizing local communities onto submission, but also flaunting the power of the dominant troops over the enemy's women, and thereby humiliating and demoralizing resistance forces. It also serves as a "reward" to troops for fighting.

In 1996, as part of an anti-insurgency program, the regime carried out one of the most extensive campaigns of forced relocation in Central Shan State. A population of over 300,000 Shans from over 1,400 villages in an area of 7,000 square miles were forced from their homes into military-controlled relocation sites. Villagers caught outside the relocation sites were shot on sight. Women caught outside were raped.

Unable to bear the conditions in the relocation sites, many Shans fled as refugees to Thailand. It is estimated that about 150,000 Shans have fled from Central Shan State in the last five years. Unfortunately, unlike other ethnic refugees from Burma, the Shans are not recognized as refugees and have no access to camps and humanitarian aid. The Shans arriving at the border testified to the gross abuses being committed by the Burmese Army, including rape.

As reports of rape cases continued to flow in, we, members of the Shan Women's Action Network and the Shan Human Rights Foundation, saw the urgent need to compile these cases into a report to report to expose to the international community what was really happening in Shan State.

The report "Licence to Rape" was released in June 2002. It gives detailed information of the rape of an estimated 625 women and girls in the last five years by members of the Burmese military.

Map B shows the locations of the cases of sexual violence 83% ended in the murder of the victims. Many of the girls and women were raped repeatedly for periods of up to four months. These crimes took place within military bases and in forced relocation sites. However due to the social stigma surrounding rape, it is certain that the real number of women raped is much higher.

The scale of sexual violence makes it clear that rape is being officially condoned as a 'weapon of war' against the women in Shan state, and that the Burmese military regime is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity, in the form of sexual violence, against Shan women.

Please let me tell you the story of Naang Hla, one of the cases documented in our report. She is an ethnic Shan girl from Burma.

"Naang Hla was 16 years old, and was 7 months pregnant. She lived with her husband in a small hut on their farm near a small village in Central Shan State. In August 2001 Burmese troops came into their farm. They beat, tortured and questioned her husband. They blindfolded him with a towel and tied him to a tree. After beating him, the soldiers took Naang Hla into the hut and beat her with a stick, threatening her with their guns. They pushed at her body and face with their guns until her nose bled. Then, even though she was seven months pregnant, they raped her, one after the other. All 10 soldiers raped her while others stood outside the hut, laughing when she cried and shouted. They had tied her husband near enough to the hut to hear everything happening to his wife. They treated her as though she were not a human being. They raped her from 8 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. As the nightmare went on, she lost consciousness several times. When they finished with her, they took her husband away. He never came back."

After being raped, and giving birth in the jungle, she managed to flee to Thailand. She is now an unrecognized refugee, barely able to survive as an illegal migrant laborer.

This is the true, brutal face of the military regime today in Burma. The regime repeatedly claims in international forums that it has achieved peace throughout the country and it is making progress towards democratic reform. It is using this pretext to ask for international aid and investment.

They are also using the presence of international NGOs and UN agencies in Shan State as evidence that no human rights abuses, including sexual violence, are taking place. In fact, most of the rapes took place in areas of conflict where these agencies have not been given permission and human rights monitors have not been allowed into Shan State, people have not dared testify for fear of their lives.

This is why the recent so-called investigation by the regime into the “Licence To Rape” report was a charade. People throughout Central and Southern Shan State were forced to sign that the Burmese troops had not committed any sexual violence in their areas. Also, the regime suppressed new evidence of sexual violence, which came to light during their investigation.

This investigation is just adding to the wounds of the women who have suffered sexual violence. Not only have they been raped, but now they are being called liars.

This response of the regime to the report was typical. Instead of looking at the systemic problems of their rule, they resorted simply to outright denial and personal struggle to end this violence.

We are concerned that to solve the problem of sexual violence and these abuses in the Shan State, there must be an end to the Burmese Army’s increased militarization and anti-insurgency campaigns. There must be a political solution to the issue of Burma’s ethnic peoples.

We call on all fellow activists in social movement around the world to pressure your government to stop all investment and aid to Burma while the military regime is in power. There must be pressure on the regime to implement genuine political reform.

We also urge you to boycott any companies that have investments in Burma.

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