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Myanmar: Tens of thousands facing forced labour, beatings and theft

They kicked me off of my tractor. I fell down – my arm was outstretched on the ground – and a soldier jumped on my arm and broke it. Then they just left me lying there.

A Shan farmer from Laikha township who was forced to work for the military and beaten when his tractor broke down.

The Myanmar military are subjecting tens of thousands of ethnic minority civilians to forced labour, beatings, land confiscation and destruction of their homes according to a new report issued today.

Based on interviews with more than a hundred Burmese migrants in Thailand, Amnesty International reveals an ongoing pattern of human rights violations. These have contributed to almost one in six people in Myanmar suffering from inadequate nutrition and a third of children suffering chronic malnourishment, according to United Nations data.

The report, *Myanmar: Leaving Home*, shows how the Myanmar military are exploiting the ethnic minority civilian population by confiscating their land, stealing their crops and livestock, extorting money and seizing the population, including women and children, for forced labour. Such abuses have been carried out in an effort to break imputed support for ethnic minority armed opposition groups and the situation has worsened since the authorities instituted a policy requiring the army to be self-sufficient.

"In the last decade, hundreds of thousands of workers from Myanmar have been forced to migrate to neighbouring countries as a result of the widespread denial of their economic and political rights. The forced labour, mass evictions, land and food confiscation by the military are a flagrant contravention of human rights as well as international and domestic law," said Natalie Hill, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific programme.

The report's main findings include:

- Widespread use of men, women and children as forced labour for portering, construction work and farming in contravention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention (No 29) to which the Myanmar Government acceded in 1955;
- Mass forced evictions, land confiscations and house destruction without compensation;
- Beating and killing of civilians forced to carry rice or other supplies for the military, if they are unable to keep up with the work rate;
- Regular harassment, abuse and arbitrary detention of civilians by the military;

Stealing by the military of villagers' crops, livestock, household possessions, and money leaving thousands without adequate shelter and food;
Government restrictions on the ability of UN and other agencies to assist the population by denying access to rural areas and particularly the ethnic minority border regions.

"Everything is upside down. People's properties and livelihoods are destroyed. They are so stressed, they have become like homeless beggars on the road. I am so angry about what the military is doing to our village."

A 27-year-old Tavoyan woman from Thayetchaung township, Tanintharyi Division, whose farmland was confiscated by the military in May 2001.

Amnesty International calls on the Myanmar authorities to immediately halt the practice of forced labour, which violates Myanmar's international obligations as well as its own domestic law. The organisation also demands an end to the evictions of civilians without due process and the requisition of personal property without taking into account the needs of civilians.

For a full copy of the report, *Myanmar: Leaving Home*, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa160232005>

Public Document

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