

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear for Safety / Arbitrary Detention

22 March 1995

Myanmar 4 men and 6 women from Tachilek  
(formerly Burma) 6 other men

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Amnesty International fears for the safety of a number of people recently rounded up by the Myanmar army to serve as porters during the army's on-going offensive in the Shan state against the Mong Tai Army (MTA).

On 12 March 1995 the Myanmar Army (the Tatmadaw) entered the Akha village of Ban Gor Tai, and took six men as porters. A further four girls and one man from the village are still missing. The other residents have since fled to the Thai border to escape the Tatmadaw.

On 21 March the Tatmadaw rounded up porters from the town of Tachilek. The army ordered the headman of each "quarter" (district) of Tachilek to provide eight porters. Porters were taken from the quarters of Bong Tun, Ta Law, Wan Kong, Mak Ka Ho Kam, Wan Seng Sai, Wan Ma Khaw, Long Luk, Fang Min, Mong Ko and Mong Pong amongst others. In addition, other residents of Tachilek were picked up at random by the Tatmadaw on the evening of 21 March, also to serve as porters for the army. Up to 500 porters are being used by the Tatmadaw in the fighting around Tachilek and another 500 have been detained to act as porters around Mong Hsat.

On 20 March four young Shan women and six young Shan men were detained at the Shan border town of Tachilek in connection with the MTA attack on Tatmadaw positions in Tachilek that day. They are being held in the Military Intelligence (MI) office in Tachilek. It is believed that these young people are innocent civilians who are not involved with the MTA.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over 100 people remain as refugees in the Tam Pha Chom temple in the Thai town of Mai Sai, just over the border from Tachilek. Their houses were destroyed by the Tatmadaw during the fighting with the MTA on 20 March. The army are now claiming ownership of the land on which the houses stood and telling the owners they will have to relocate. The refugees fear that if they return to Tachilek they will be taken as porters by the Tatmadaw.

In mid-March the army of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) government of Myanmar launched an offensive against the MTA in the Shan state in north east Myanmar. The MTA are calling for an independent Shan state. On Monday 20 March the MTA launched an attack on army barracks and army guest houses in the town of Tachilek; the MTA withdrew after an hour. Following this attack at least five civilians were killed and 36 were injured by the Tatmadaw as they destroyed houses and shot civilians while looking for remaining members of the MTA. One man, who with his wife and baby daughter had been shot by the army, stated "Burmese soldiers stormed my house to search for MTA soldiers and shot everyone".

The MTA are one of the many ethnic groups who have been fighting for independence from Myanmar for nearly 50 years. The MTA are one of the few ethnic groups who have not signed a peace accord with the SLORC within the last two years.

In January the SLORC captured the headquarters of the Karen nationalist Karen National Union (KNU) at Mannerplaw, which also served as a base for other anti-SLORC groups.

There have been widespread reports of the Tatmadaw forcibly taking porters from towns and villages close to areas where they are fighting ethnic insurgent groups. Porters are made to carry heavy loads for the soldiers, often without adequate food, water or medical attention. They are sometimes beaten or killed by the army and if they collapse from exhaustion they are often left to die. Female porters have also been raped by members of the Tatmadaw.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:**

- calling on the Myanmar authorities to immediately release any person being held as a porter for the Myanmar armed forces and to end the practice of forcing civilians to act as porters for the Tatmadaw;

- urging the Myanmar authorities to allow the refugees remaining in Tachilek to return without fear of coming to any physical harm;

- urging the Myanmar authorities to release the four women and six men detained in Tachilek on 20 March or charge them with a recognisable offense. Ensure that they are not ill-treated in any way during their detention.

**APPEALS TO**

General Than Shwe, Chairman  
State Law and Order Restoration Council  
c/o Ministry of Defence  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar

**Telegrams : General Than Shwe, Yangon Myanmar**

**Telexes: 21316**

**Salutation: Dear General**

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1  
State Law and Order Restoration Council  
c/o Ministry of Defence  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar

**Telegrams: Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Yangon, Myanmar**

**Fax: +95 12 29 50**

**Salutation: Dear General**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

diplomatic representatives of Myanmar accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 May 1995.