

# MYANMAR

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST ETHNIC MINORITIES

### INTRODUCTION

In January and February 1996 Amnesty International interviewed dozens of members of the Shan, Akha, Lahu, Karen, and Mon ethnic minorities in Thailand<sup>1</sup>. The organization found compelling evidence that the Burmese army, known as the *tatmadaw*, has subjected members of ethnic minorities in the Shan and Mon States and the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Division<sup>2</sup> to extrajudicial killings, and torture and ill-treatment during arbitrary detention. Most of those refugees living in Thailand in early 1996 who were interviewed by Amnesty International are farmers and other villagers who said they have fled from their homes because their lives have been made impossible by the security forces.

The information contained in this report deals with events which took place in 1995; however, recent reports indicate that human rights violations have occurred in the last seven months as well. In the Shan State tens of thousands of people have been forcibly relocated by the military since March 1996. These relocations have reportedly been accompanied by threats from the army that those who remained would be shot on sight. Since February 1996 in the Mon State and Tanintharyi Division hundreds of people have fled from continuing human rights violations by the *tatmadaw* to areas of the Mon State controlled by the New Mon State Party (NMSP, the armed opposition group in the Mon State).

Since Myanmar became independent from the United Kingdom in 1948, members of ethnic minority groups have engaged in insurgency activities against the central Burmese government in an effort to gain greater autonomy or complete independence. When the military reasserted power in September 1988 after suppressing the pro-democracy movement, they pursued offensives against ethnic minority armed opposition groups. Myanmar's military government also adopted a policy of negotiating cease-fires individually with these groups rather than dealing with the umbrella organization which grouped them together. At the time of writing there are 15 such agreements which are still operational. These cease-fires appear to be agreed on an individual and military basis, supported by promises of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, Myanmar's military government) development assistance.

Since 1987 Amnesty International has documented the ill-treatment and killings of ethnic minorities who have been forced to act as porters carrying supplies for the *tatmadaw*. Amnesty International has also documented cases of killings and ill-treatment of members of ethnic minorities during military patrols of their villages, when soldiers have often accused villagers of having links with armed opposition groups.

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of human rights violations against the Karen ethnic minority, please see *MYANMAR: KAYIN (KAREN) STATE: THE KILLINGS CONTINUE*, (AI Index: ASA 16/10/96), April 1996.

<sup>2</sup>The Myanmar Government changed the spellings of place names in Myanmar in June 1989. The Shan State is located in the northeast of Myanmar, adjacent to Thailand. The Mon State is located in southeast Myanmar, adjacent to Thailand. The Tanintharyi Division is located just south of the Mon State, and also adjacent to Thailand.

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Civilians have been arbitrarily seized as porters from their villages by the military and held in army custody for periods ranging from a few days to a month or more. Although most civilians could avoid forced portering by paying regular fees to the *tatmadaw*, most of them could not afford to make these payments and so were required to perform porter duties. Those who were seized were usually not told how long they would be held and have expressed fear of the consequences if they refused the military's demands or protested the fact that they were being held against their will. Many of those forced to act as porters have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment as punishment if they could not carry their loads of supplies and ammunition. Types of ill-treatment includes repeated beatings with bamboo sticks or rifle butts, and deprivation of food, water, rest, and medical treatment. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*" Others who have been seized as porters have been extrajudicially killed if they attempted to escape or were unable to carry their load. Extrajudicial killings violate the most fundamental of human rights, the right to life. The right to life is guaranteed in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "*Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.*"

In at least the last five years the SLORC has increasingly used forced labour of civilians to build railway lines, airports, dams, quarries and roads throughout the country. The *tatmadaw* has forced hundreds of thousands of ethnic Burmans<sup>3</sup> and members of ethnic minorities to work as unpaid labourers on these construction projects. As is the case with forced portering, civilians can often pay fees rather than perform labour; however, most of them cannot afford such fees and so are effectively forced to work on construction projects. Conditions are often harsh, in many cases amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Labourers have been subjected to ill-treatment, including by being held in chains and by receiving inadequate food and medical care. In a recent case beginning in early April 1996, U Pa Pa Lay and U Lu Zaw, two prisoners of conscience, were forced to work with iron bars shackled across their legs at a labour camp in the Kachin State. Although subsequently they have both been transferred to prison facilities, U Pa Pa Lay is gravely ill as a result of the harsh treatment he received.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned by the practice of forced portering and forced labour in Myanmar, and over a number of years, has reported on the human rights violations that are associated with these practices. The SLORC has shown little willingness to put a stop to such violations. In addition, the practice of forced portering is inherently arbitrary as it allows military commanders to effectively detain people - usually members of ethnic minorities - for indeterminate periods of time. This practice should be abolished. As regards the practice of forced labour, until such time as the SLORC introduces measures to ensure that those who perform their required periods of labour are treated fairly and are protected against ill-treatment and abuse, the practice should also be abolished.

In June 1996 the International Labour Organization (ILO) held its 83rd International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. The conference endorsed the decisions of the ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards, which deplored the "*the serious situation prevailing in Myanmar*

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<sup>3</sup>Ethnic Burmans, who reside principally in central areas of Myanmar, are the largest ethnic group.

over many years where systematically recourse was had to forced labour". The use of forced labour is in contravention of the 1930 ILO Convention Number 29, concerning forced labour, which was ratified by the government of Myanmar in 1955. An ILO press statement went on to comment:

*"In a further development, delegates to the Conference agreed to a request from the Worker Group of the ILO Governing Body to approve a special complaint procedure against Myanmar under article 16 of the ILO Constitution. Under the terms of article 26 a special Commission of Inquiry can be established to investigate non-observance of international labour standards and allegations of human rights abuses in ILO member States. The complaints against Myanmar with respect to forced labour and other grave human rights abuses are severe and of long standing. The procedures under article 26 are usually invoked only in the case of persistent grievances and disregard for the decisions of the ILO Committee."*<sup>4</sup>

This report focuses solely on human rights violations committed by the *tatmadaw*. Amnesty International is also concerned about possible abuses committed by armed opposition groups in the Tanintharyi Division and the Shan and Mon States, and has reported on abuses by armed opposition groups in the past.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ILO Press Release, 20 June 1996, ILO/96/23c.

<sup>5</sup> See *MYANMAR: "No law at all"*, (AI Index: ASA 16/11/92), October 1992 and *MYANMAR: The climate of fear continues*, (AI Index: ASA 16/06/93), October 1993.

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## THE MON STATE AND TANINTHARYI DIVISION

### Background

The SLORC and the NMSP agreed a cease-fire on 29 June 1995 after nearly 40 years of conflict. Repatriation of some 10,000 refugees still living in camps in Thailand began in December 1995 and was completed by 31 May 1996. However, 65% of Mon refugees who had previously been in camps in Thailand had already been forcibly returned across the border in Myanmar before the most recent repatriation took place.

On 5 September 1995, the Mon National Relief Committee (MNRC, part of the NMSP which deals with Mon refugees) wrote a letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bangkok requesting that UNHCR monitor the repatriation on both sides of the border to ensure that human rights violations did not take place during the process. The repatriation was not monitored by any international humanitarian or human rights organization, including the UNHCR. Although the refugees did move across the border into Myanmar, they have not returned to their home villages, but rather have remained at camps in border areas which are administered by the NMSP.

In April and May 1996 alone, over 1,000 villagers fleeing human rights violations joined these repatriated refugees at the new camps in areas in the Mon State administered by the NMSP. Others fled directly into Thailand. They have fled primarily from forced labour projects on the 100 mile-long railway between Ye in the Mon State and Dawei (Tavoy) in Tanintharyi Division. Construction of the Ye - Dawei railway began in December 1993 and tens of thousands of villagers living locally have since reportedly been required to work on the project. Eyewitnesses have told Amnesty International of the recent and extensive use of child labour along this railway.

In February 1996 Amnesty International interviewed Mon and Karen refugees who had recently arrived in Thailand from Tanintharyi Division in Myanmar. They reported that they had been subjected to or had witnessed a wide range of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment.<sup>6</sup> At that time the repatriation process had already begun. However during the month of January 1996 people were still fleeing from their homes to Pa Yaw, a Mon-administered camp in Thailand because of forced labour and portering, and because they could not afford to pay the fees the military extracted from them if they did not or could not perform such duties.

### Testimonies of refugees

Although the cease-fire between the NMSP and the *tatmadaw* has not been broken, there are still some skirmishes between the Karen National Union (KNU, an armed group who have not yet agreed a cease-fire with the SLORC) and the *tatmadaw* in the Tanintharyi Division, where KNU

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<sup>6</sup> In order to protect refugees who may return to Myanmar, names of people interviewed by Amnesty International and most of the names of their villages have been omitted from the following material.

troops are present. On 2 December 1995 there was fighting between the two groups near Loh Thaing, a Karen village in Yebyu township in the Tanintharyi Division.

Karen villagers who had fled from Loh Thaing provided the following information to Amnesty International about what happened after the skirmish. According to their reports, on 18 December 1995 troops from Infantry Battalion 104 came to Loh Thaing and searched all the houses, looking for relatives and associates of the KNU commander involved in the fighting. Some 23 people were arrested, including two infants. The men were separated from the women and they were all taken to Kyauk Ka Din village, where the military was stationed. They were reportedly tied up in the hot sun and interrogated about the whereabouts of the KNU Commander and his family. Most of them were released after four days. However **Saw Htoo Kai**, a 42-year-old Karen farmer with six children continued to be held. He managed to escape but in the process he fell onto sharp spikes which had been planted around the army base. Although he was seriously injured, he was able to return to his village but died three days later of his wounds on 31 December 1995. Saw Htoo Kai's brothers were KNU members; although he was not in the KNU, it is alleged that he may have passed information on to his brothers. Village members from Loh Thaing were later forced to work on the Ye - Dawei railway, some of whom subsequently fled to Thailand. Amnesty International urges the SLORC to ensure that an independent and thorough investigation into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment takes place.

Amnesty International was informed about another case of torture and ill-treatment relating to the skirmish between the *tatmadaw* and the KNU on 2 December 1995. A 54-year-old Mon Christian woman provided the following information about what had happened to her, her 17-year-old granddaughter and her nephew at the beginning of December 1995. The three had been living at Pa Yaw Camp in Thailand and had returned to their village in Ye Pyu township to collect two pigs for a Christmas celebration. On their way back to the camp with the pigs they were intercepted by a group of 40 soldiers, who tied them up and took the pigs. The nephew and the woman were interrogated about the 2 December skirmish between the KNU and the *tatmadaw* and threatened with shooting by the captain if they did not tell the truth.

The granddaughter was then taken away and interrogated by the Captain, who had told her grandmother that he would stab the girl with a knife if the girl could not speak Burmese to him. The grandmother described what happened:

*“It was about 10 pm. Five minutes later, I heard a soldier’s voice and then I heard my granddaughter give a short but very loud scream and then I heard her sobbing. After about 15 minutes at most, my granddaughter returned. Her clothes were torn. Her longyi [sarong] was untied and she was holding it up... ‘Why did you scream like that?’, I asked and my granddaughter explained. The Captain had said to her, ‘How about sleeping with me one night? If you sleep with me, you’ll be released tomorrow morning.’ Then the Captain pulled her towards him and raped her. After he’d done so, he showed the girl his gun and said, ‘No one is to know this event. If you tell anyone, I’ll kill you.’ After that, we just sat there the whole night.”*

The next morning the detainees negotiated with the soldiers about the pigs, but they did not see the Captain again. The soldiers agreed to return one of the pigs and released the three, after which time they returned immediately to Pa Yaw Camp.

Refugees also told Amnesty International of their experiences of forced labour and portering. A 67-year-old man from Ye Pyu township who reported that he had been forced to act as a porter several times in 1995, described forced labour in January 1996 on the Ye - Dawei road:

*“Over 100 villagers worked with more than 10 armed soldiers watching them constantly...If someone couldn’t do the work, he or she would be beaten by the soldiers. For example if someone was ill and couldn’t carry the stones or dig the ground, the army would beat that person. I was never beaten because I am old. There were many others around 70 years old, and the youngest were between 13 and 15.”*

A 14-year-old Mon girl also from Ye Pyu township who was forced to work three times on the Ye - Dawei Railway since September 1995 reported what had happened to her:

*“The work was hard but if I wasn’t happy, what could I do?...Once we’d finished [our tasks] we could stop work and return to our hut near the road....We could not go anywhere else; that wasn’t permitted. We brought our own food. There were others my age working and one or two who I think were younger than me, maybe 12 or 13 years-old.”*

A 50-year-old Mon grandmother who left her home in Ye Pyu township in late January 1996 explained to Amnesty International why she had fled to Thailand:

*“I left because I had to do forced labour several times and could not do it any more. I had to do forced labour on the railway - digging up the soil, carrying and throwing it away, so as to make a pass through the mountains. Since the ground was stony, I had to use a pickaxe - it was very hard work as a woman. A SLORC Division civilian supervised the work...Everyone from 18 to 60 years of age in the village had to work, not just one per house.”*

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One Mon-Burmese man from another village in Ye Pyu township, Tanintharyi Division, described forced labour on the same railway line:

*“Everyone between 16 and 60 years old had to do forced labour or pay the fee [to the army]...One was expected to work on the railway for two weeks, have two weeks break, and then work again. It cost 2500 kyat<sup>7</sup> to hire a replacement to work the two weeks. Between November 1995 and January 1996 I had to pay the fee three times. The main reason why I didn’t want to do the work, besides being busy on the farm, was that I was afraid that while I worked on the railway I might be taken as a porter. It happened to some other villagers.”*

This man also reported that two Mon women from his village had been detained in October 1995 and held for one day because they could not pay porter and labour fees; after they obtained the money, they were released. One of the women was 16-years-old and was detained because her sick husband could not perform labour and portering duties.

Another man from the same village told Amnesty International that he had fled to Thailand in January 1996 because all the money he earned working on his farm was spent on labour fees and rice tax to the SLORC. He reported the following about his porter duties:

*“One man per household had to work as a porter in a rota system. I always worked as a porter, I never paid the porter fee. One had to work at least seven days, and sometimes over a month, then would have about a month’s break before ones turn came around again. The worst part about portering was having to carry boxes of machine-gun bullets up the steep mountains because I found climbing very difficult and fell down once. On the same trip I was beaten many times with a wooden stick on my backside as I was climbing, as if the soldier were driving a bullock!”*

A 60-year-old Mon man from Ye Pyu township told Amnesty International that he had fled to Thailand in late January 1996 because he could not afford to pay porter fees and could no longer work as a porter because he was too old. He recounted the following about the occasions when he was still able to perform porter duties:

*“I worked as a porter five or six times in 1995, for between seven days and one month each time before being released; how long depended on the army. I was only beaten once, when I couldn’t keep up with the other porters.”*

Amnesty International is calling on the SLORC to immediately initiate a thorough and independent investigation into these allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

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<sup>7</sup> Six Burmese kyat is officially equal to about one US dollar; however the black market rate is over 100 kyat to the dollar.

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## THE SHAN STATE

### Background

The following information about killings, ill-treatment and torture of civilians by the *tatmadaw* in the eastern Shan State relate to events which are reported to have taken place during 1995. However, Amnesty International is concerned that such human rights violations may be continuing, particularly in light of the massive forcible relocations which have occurred beginning in March 1996. In January 1996 Amnesty International interviewed dozens of members of ethnic minority groups from the Shan State who were living on the Thai border.<sup>8</sup> Those interviewed described how during 1995 the *tatmadaw* had forced them to act as unpaid porters when they had witnessed the killings of associates during forced portering. Porter duties took place in the context of armed conflict between the *tatmadaw* and the MTA.

Refugees also described forced labour and economic hardships which were inflicted on them by the *tatmadaw*. Farmers were reportedly forced to sell a certain amount of their rice crop at significantly lower than market prices to the army. Soldiers also reportedly stole livestock and other supplies from villages as they moved through them on manoeuvres. An Akha village headman from Mong Hsat township said that in April 1995 700 *tatmadaw* troops came to his village after a battle with the MTA. He described what happened as follows:

*“They took everything - 10 cows, eight buffaloes, and all our belongings, down to the tongs we use for cooking. They also burned seven houses, including my own, because we had run away. After the army had come through, we stayed one month in the village and then returned to our own village and rebuilt our houses. One month after we had returned, the army came again. This time there were 100 soldiers. They beat four villagers...Three of them were beaten while working as conscripted porters; the other while [he] was in the village. One of them had his front teeth broken. Another man was hit three times in the head and once on the back with a stick.”*

If villagers could not or did not want to perform forced labour and portering, they were required to pay regular fees to the *tatmadaw*. Forced labour often entailed building roads and railway lines, constructing army barracks and tending vegetable gardens for the army. The Minister of Rail Transport Win Sein said that civilian labour would no longer be used on the construction of railway lines, which would come into effect 31 May 1996. He made this statement at the opening ceremony of the Banyin-Phamon railway line in the Shan State, and said further that soldiers would build railway lines.<sup>9</sup> It is not known at the time of writing whether this policy has been implemented, and if it will extend to all of Myanmar.

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<sup>8</sup>Unlike the Mon and Karen ethnic minorities, members of ethnic minorities from the Shan State are not usually staying in refugee camps in Thailand but are scattered along the Thai-Myanmar border and further inside Thailand.

<sup>9</sup>*Bangkok Post*, an English language daily newspaper published in Thailand, 5 June 1996.

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## Testimonies from refugees

A 60-year-old village elder who was a member of the Akha ethnic minority had fled from his village in Tachilek township in February 1995. He provided the following information about the reasons why he left his home. After a civilian member of the MTA had come to the village, some 800 SLORC soldiers entered the village and seized him and 10 other men as they were attempting to flee. The group was taken as porters, but subsequently escaped one-by-one during the next several weeks. One of them, **Ana**, a 25-year-old Akha man with two children, was kicked to death two weeks after he was seized. The elder described the incident as follows:

*“The Burmese tied his hands and told him to carry a mortar but he couldn’t do it. So the soldiers started kicking him. They kicked him on his arms and back, initially several soldiers, later only one. After he was already dead his body was thrown over the mountain ledge.”*

Ana’s brother, who was 45-years-old, had also been taken as a porter at the same time for nine days before he escaped. He told Amnesty International what he had witnessed:

*“The dead man was my brother. We were walking together. Before he was captured, Ana was already sick; he had malaria. So he couldn’t carry the two mortars. The soldiers then beat him with a stick on his back and kicked him until he died. The other soldiers didn’t say anything and we just had to keep on walking. I wasn’t allowed to stop and couldn’t say anything.”*

A third Akha man, aged 20, who also witnessed Ana die had himself been severely ill-treated by soldiers. He managed to escape after 25 days. He described his ill-treatment:

*“I was hit countless times on the back and the neck, and blood came out of my mouth. I am lucky to be alive. I was beaten with sticks by many soldiers, one of them saying, ‘I hate this guy’, because I couldn’t carry the mortars. I found it difficult to carry them because the mortars were too big for me and food we were given wasn’t enough.”*

A 38-year-old man, a member of the Lahu ethnic minority from another village in Tachilek township informed Amnesty International that he had left his home in April 1995 because he had been forced to porter frequently. The last time he was seized as a porter was early in 1995. He said that he had been seized as a porter from periods of two days up to two weeks, two or three times a month; the length of time depended upon when he was able to escape from army custody. He described his treatment at the hands of the *tatmadaw* as follows:

*“The most difficult part about portering is that the load is so heavy and the food so inadequate. This last time, we had to carry two mortars each, from morning to evening. We were just given parts of banana trees to eat by the army and because we were tied up we couldn’t find food for ourselves. Even if we can see water in front of us the SLORC won’t let us drink. They treat the porters like dogs and pigs.”*

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He was never beaten because he could manage to carry his load. However he reported that when he was taken in early 1995 he had witnessed the deaths of four porters. He said that he did not learn their names because they were members of the Shan ethnic minority from a different area. He described what he saw:

*“All four were killed in the same way and for the same reason - they couldn’t walk and the load was too heavy. They were kicked in the buttocks and then hit on the head with a rifle butt. They were around the same age as me. When they were killed, no one said anything except one soldier who said, ‘You’re dead. You’re free now’.”*

A 34-year-old Akha farmer from a village in Mong Hsat township reported that he was tied up and taken as a porter in April 1995, but escaped after two days when the soldier guarding him fell asleep. He described to Amnesty International what had happened to him:

*“After the soldiers tied me up, the same three soldiers interrogated me. They said, ‘You’re MTA, you’re not Akha.’ I protested but they didn’t believe me. They beat me with a big stick three times on my head and once on my back...I think they wanted to be able to take revenge because, they said, many Burmese soldiers had been killed by the MTA...They also asked me where the MTA were, and said, ‘don’t lie’, and then beat me again.”*

After the interrogation he said that he was forced to carry supplies for the army; when he could not do so, he said he was beaten about nine times with both a stick and a rifle butt. He also reported witnessing the beating of a heavily pregnant woman who was among a group of seven women taken as porters from a village which they had passed through. He described her treatment as follows:

*“She couldn’t carry the heavy things, so they beat her with a stick on her back and head, and later with the flat side of a knife on the head. She had to walk for two hours, carrying a soldier’s rucksack. When they got to a village at around 5pm, she screamed out as the labour pains were beginning. But when she did so, the soldiers said, ‘You’re lying to us. You want to go home.’ and then they slapped her face and kicked her in the buttocks. When the labour pains and her screams continued, the soldiers said ‘Okay, go in the house and we’ll see. If you try to escape, you die.’ So they put her in a house with another woman porter, locked the door and waited outside. She gave birth in the house.”*

The witness reported that the woman was subsequently released and remained in the village where she had given birth to her baby daughter.

Other female porters in the group were not so fortunate. According to the same witness, two girls died after their village headmen had paid for their release. While they were still detained the soldiers had reportedly raped them repeatedly. The names of the two girls are **Mi Aul**, age 15 and **Mi She**, age 16. A 61-year-old Akha village headman told Amnesty International what he believed had happened:

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*“The two girls had been relatives of my wife and their village was very close to ours, so I knew them well. I interviewed them after their release. When they returned their faces and skin were yellow. They said all the women had been separated from each other and the two of them had been raped continually for six nights, by two or three men each night, including the soldiers’ commander. They’d also had to carry on as porters. After their release, the two girls didn’t sleep, didn’t eat and eventually just died. Before they had been happy, healthy girls.”*

A 42-year-old Shan woman who farmed in Mon Lein township left her village in late 1995 with her family. She told Amnesty International that the *tatmadaw* took half their rice, and so they were no longer able to make a living. Her 39-year-old husband was taken as a porter seven times for 45 days each time. She said that her husband had witnessed the beating of his nephew in April 1995 when they were both seized as porters. What follows is her description of the event:

*“He [the nephew] was already sick at the time from malaria and so couldn’t carry his load. Several soldiers surrounded him and kicked him until he became unconscious...My husband saw this happen and was afraid so he ran away. We thought [the nephew] had probably died but around three months later he turned up, very thin. When he arrived, everyone cried for joy. He explained what had happened: after he lost consciousness SLORC thought he was dead so left him. When he came to, there was no one around. He then spent seven days lost in the jungle before he finally managed to reach Mae Sai [a border town in Thailand] where he had relatives.”*

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by these reports of extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment, and urges the SLORC to immediately initiate a thorough and independent investigation into the incidents described above.

### **Recent Developments**

In January 1996 the SLORC agreed a cease-fire with the Shan Muang Tai Army (MTA), led by Khun Sa. Since the cease-fire thousands of MTA troops have surrendered their arms to the *tatmadaw*; however, others who did not agree with the cease-fire have continued to retain their weapons, along with other Shan nationalist armed opposition groups. The SLORC has reacted to continued Shan resistance by forcibly relocating tens of thousands of villagers in an apparent attempt to sever any civilian links or support for these Shan armed opposition groups. According to reliable and detailed reports, since early March 1996 the *tatmadaw* has forcibly relocated at least 450 villages, comprising some 50,000 people, in central and southern areas of Shan State. Villagers were apparently told that they had only three days to move to larger towns or areas adjacent to main roads. If they did not comply with SLORC orders, they were reportedly told that they would be shot when troops returned to burn down villages. Although it did not appear that troops physically moved people from their village to a new location, tens of thousands of villagers have fled in fear of being killed and having their homes burned. As a result of these massive displacements, thousands of refugees from the Shan State have fled into Thailand.

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ethnic minorities have historically been targeted and singled out by the *tatmadaw* for widespread and persistent repression. Amnesty International is gravely concerned by this ongoing pattern of human rights violations committed against members of ethnic minorities. The violations have continued to such an extent that Amnesty International believes that all members of ethnic minorities in border areas are at risk of arbitrary detention, forced portering, and forced labour, during which they are routinely subjected to ill-treatment.

### Recommendations

Amnesty International makes the following recommendations to the SLORC:

1. Initiate immediate, thorough, and prompt investigations into the allegations of extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment described in this report.
2. Bring those found responsible for such human rights violations to justice.
3. Abolish the practice of forced portering, as it allows the military to detain people for indeterminate lengths of time, which is inherently arbitrary.
4. As regards the practice of forced labour, until such time as the SLORC introduces measures to ensure that those who perform their required periods of labour are treated fairly and are protected against ill-treatment and abuse, the practice should also be abolished.