

8 March 2003

International Women's Day

Only genuine peace in Burma can protect women from systematic rape

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UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma***

We are regional human rights organisations based in Thailand. We were encouraged to see that a significant section of your December 2002 "Report on the situation of human rights in Myanmar" was devoted to the issue of sexual violence committed by the Burmese military. In particular, we were pleased that you questioned the credibility of the investigations carried out by the junta into this issue.

We welcome your calls for an independent assessment of the allegations of sexual violence in the ethnic areas. This will commence the official process of proving that the Burmese military regime has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence against ethnic women.

However, we are seriously concerned about the increased climate of insecurity for rape survivors and their communities inside Burma at this time.

Since the publication of "*Licence to Rape*," local reports have revealed that the Burmese military has repeatedly used methods of intimidation to refute its complicity in acts of rape by military personnel.

- In August and September 2002, during their own "investigation" into the report, they forced local Shan communities to deny that their troops had committed any sexual violence.¹
- In October 2002, prior to your visit to Burma, they threatened Shan villagers in various areas not to testify against their troops. They also sent out military intelligence officers to track down and interrogate rape survivors.²
- Before the visit of the International Committee of the Red Cross to Central Shan State in December 2002, and the visit of Amnesty International to Burma in January 2003, local Shan populations were warned not to speak ill of the military.³
- Most recently, in early February, local military officers threatened to cut out the tongues and slit the throats of villagers who had dared speak out to the ICRC during their recent visit to Shan State in January 2003.⁴

While it is important to have and maintain international attention and concern over the issue of sexual violence against Shan and other ethnic women in Burma, it is clear that this is exposing the women survivors to even

¹ Licence to Rape: Rangoon scrambles for signatures
http://www.shanland.org/shan/inside%20news/2002/Sept/license_to_rape.htm

² Villagers instructed to vouch for official claim
http://www.shanland.org/shan/inside%20news/2002/Octo/villagers_instructed_to_vouch_fo.htm

³ Inside sources: Also go to www.shanland.org or www.shanworld.com

⁴ Feb 11/2203: SWAN's Press release: Military gang-rape occurs as International Red Cross visits Shan State Jan 6; 27 Feb 2003: "Honesty a bad policy, say commanders" www.shanland.org

greater danger and trauma, as no protection mechanism exists for survivors and/or witnesses who dare to testify against the military.

Therefore, it is urgently needed for the UN and other bodies to set up safe and secure mechanisms for conducting investigations inside Burma which will protect the women from further risk. This can only be in the context of genuine peace.

The report *Licence to Rape* proves how systematic sexual violence is being used as a "weapon of war" by the military regime to subjugate the ethnic peoples. The regime's very survival at this time is reliant on the continued exploitation of the natural resources of the ethnic lands. In Shan State, it relies on significant income from timber, gems and drugs, and, in the near future, hopes to benefit from the multi-billion dollar hydro-electric dam on the Salween River to be built in southern Shan State. Thus, the regime is continuing to build up its military strength in the ethnic areas, and has authorized the use of any tactics, including sexual violence, to keep the local populations under control.

The problem of systematic sexual violence is thus intrinsically linked to the question of ethnic autonomy and rights, and the need to negotiate a political solution to this issue.

If the regime wants to prove its sincerity about protecting its people against abuse of power, including sexual violence, it must immediately begin the national reconciliation process and implement democratic reform.

Thus, in order for an independent investigation into the sexual violence committed by the Burmese military regime to take place, we urge you to -

Call for the regime to:

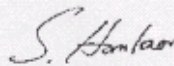
- Immediately withdraw military troops from Shan state and implement a nationwide ceasefire; and
- Begin tripartite dialogue with the Burman and non-Burman democratic opposition; and

Call for the Royal Thai government to:

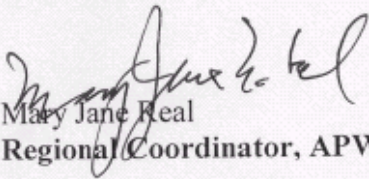
- Immediately set up camps along Thai borders for the Shan women and girls victims of sexual violence who have fled to Thailand and facilitate the provision of support services for them.



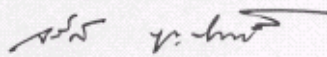
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