



Palaung Women's Organization

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Press release

Opium cultivation surging under junta's control in Burma

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A new report released today by Palaung researchers reveal that opium cultivation in Burma's northern Shan State has been increasing rapidly over the past three years in areas under the control of the ruling military government.

Poisoned Hills by the Palaung Women's Organization documents that areas under opium cultivation increased up to five-fold in Mantong and Namkham townships between 2006 and 2009 to almost 4,500 hectares. This is far higher than estimates in the annual opium surveys of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

Local authorities, army battalions and pro-government militia are profiting from "taxation" of opium farmers. Official "anti-drug teams", instead of eradicating poppy fields, are extorting large sums from local farmers and leaving the crop intact. The report documents that bribes totaling at least 37 million kyat (US\$37,000) were collected in Mantong Township during the 2007-8 season.

These areas were under the control of the resistance forces of the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) which had a ceasefire with the regime until it was forced to surrender in 2005. Since then the regime has expanded its forces and pro-government militia to maintain control.

"Today more of the regime's troops and militias are everywhere. For us this has meant more drugs and more addiction" says Lway Nway Hnong, principal researcher of the report.

Community assessments found addiction rates soaring in these areas. In one village surveyed in Mantong Township, 85% of males over age 15 were addicted to either opium or heroin.

"In our area, if we don't marry a drug addict, we have no one to get married with because everyone is a drug addict. The only men who aren't using drugs are the monks who stay in the monastery" said one woman interviewed for the report.

The report emphasizes that a negotiated resolution to the political issues at the root of Burma's civil war and political reform are needed to address the drug issue.

"As long as this regime remains in power, drugs will continue to poison people in Burma and the region" said Lway Nway Hnong.

The full report can be viewed on: www.womenofburma.org,
www.palaungland.org and
www.nd-burma.org

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