



Palaung Women's Organization

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Press Release

“Poisoned Flowers”

Palaung women reveal harsh costs of failed drug policies in Burma

A new report by the Palaung Women's Organization (PWO) details how increased opium production and addiction is devastating Palaung communities in northern Shan State, exposing the failure of drug eradication programs under the military regime in Burma.

The report, *Poisoned Flowers: The Impacts of Spiraling Drug Addiction on Palaung Women in Burma*, based on interviews with eighty-eight wives and mothers of drug addicts, shows how women in Palaung areas have become increasingly vulnerable due to the rising addiction rates. Already living in dire poverty, with little access to education or health care, wives of addicts must struggle single-handedly to support as many as ten children.

Addicted husbands not only stop providing for their families, but also sell off property and possessions, commit theft, and subject their wives and children to repeated verbal and physical abuse. The report details cases of women losing eight out of eleven children to disease and of daughters being trafficked by their addicted father.

The increased addiction rates have resulted from the regime allowing drug lords to expand production into Palaung areas in recent years, in exchange for policing against resistance activity and sharing drug profits. The collapse of markets for tea and other crops has driven more and more farmers to turn to opium growing or to work as labourers in opium fields, where wages are frequently paid in opium.

The report throws into question claims by the regime and the UNODC of a dramatic reduction of opium production in Burma during the past decade, and calls on donor countries and UN agencies supporting drug eradication programs in Burma to push for genuine political reform.

“Opium eradication in Burma will only be possible under a democratic government that cares about the welfare of its citizens. It is not possible under a regime that is benefiting from the drug trade,” said **Lway Cherry** one of the authors of the report.

“We hope that the courage of these women in sharing these stories empowers all efforts to effectively curb the production of drugs,” write Malaysian MP **Teresa Kok** and Philippine Congresswoman **Loretta Ann P. Rosales** in their foreword to the report. “The drug problem in Burma is worsening and has become a threat to stability and peace in the region. The need for the UN Security Council to take immediate and appropriate action to address this is apparent.”

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