

UNCHR ORAL STATEMENTS 2002

Agenda Item 12(a): Violence Against Women

Oral Intervention by Rights and Democracy

58th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights

Geneva, Switzerland

April 2002

Chair,

I am speaking on behalf of the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development. I would like to bring to your attention violence against women in and from Burma.

An extremely repressive regime rules Burma. Gross human rights violations are still continuing in Burma, especially in the ethnic nationality armed conflict areas. Professor Pinheiro, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, stated in his report to the Commission that the most serious forms of violence against women are reported in these areas. Many human rights organizations have documented incidences where military officers and soldiers rape ethnic women in conflict areas with impunity. Attempts to seek justice by survivors and their communities are either ignored, at best, or met with retaliation, at worst. Chair,

Military sexual slavery is common. Women, even pregnant women, are used as forced labor at military camps and construction sites. Some are forced to porter military supplies and are used as minesweepers. While serving as forced laborers or porters, women are often sexually abused and raped. These practices constitute a violation of the Slavery Convention to which Burma became a party to on 18 June 1927. Pregnant women often lose their unborn child due to the poor conditions and lack of access to health care.

Because of untold hardship, thousands of women have left Burma seeking better jobs in the other countries such as Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh. In Thailand alone, recent figures from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare state that it has registered nearly 200,000 women workers from Burma. The unofficial number is much higher. The jobs migrant women find are usually one of the three 'D' jobs, 'dirty, difficult and dangerous'. These women work in factories, as housemaids and waitresses. All migrant women and girls work in exploitative conditions, receive wages lower than their Thai counterparts and lower than their male migrant counterparts. Thailand has excluded domestic work from the list of registered jobs. Not only are Burmese migrant women more vulnerable to exploitation but also to abuse and rape by traffickers, the police and other authorities, and their employers.

Trafficking is a problem closely associated with undocumented migration. There are approximately 40,000 women working in the sex industry in Thailand. Thousands of Muslim Rohingya women from southwestern Burma, who live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, have reportedly been trafficked into the sex industry in Pakistan. In closed brothels debt-bonded sex-workers have no rights and therefore no control over their working conditions. Unable to refuse abusive customers, totally

dependent on the brothel owners for their food, accommodation and so-called security, they are extremely vulnerable to violence and health problems, including exposure to HIV/AIDS. Many are HIV/AIDS positive. Most of these sex workers are young; they were abducted, or trafficked into sex work without their prior knowledge, and are essentially imprisoned by their debt bondage.

Chair,

Burmese women are not only suffering from oppression by the Burmese government. On March 17, three Thai soldiers allegedly raped two Karenni refugee women, aged 20 and 15 years old, near a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. They were raped while looking for vegetables near the camp. Many young refugee women face problems in the camps along the Thai-Burma border with camp officials and soldiers nearby. There is often no redress for these crimes. I urge the Commission to ask the Thai government to take action against such perpetrators and provide adequate security in the camps for women and girls.

In conclusion, violence against women will only be resolved if we restore democracy in Burma. Women's organizations could then focus on working for their rights and increasing their participation in the political, economic, and social arenas without fear.

Thank you.

Agenda Item 13

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-eighth session

18th March - 26th April 2002

Oral intervention by Anti-Slavery International delivered on 18 April 2002

Item 13 – Rights of the Child Mr Chair,

Anti-Slavery International would like to remind the Commission that the current military regime of Burma, known as the State Peace and Development Council, acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in July 1991.

However, in Burma today, many children are denied their fundamental human rights including their right to education, to health and to life. Particularly in ethnic areas where armed conflicts are taking place, children's right to life is seriously undermined. And when life is constantly under threat, children cannot possibly enjoy other rights enshrined in the Convention.

Students in Papun District, Karen State, pointed out that children do not attend school due to interrelated factors such as food scarcity, malaria, other health problems and the instability caused by the armed conflict. UNAIDS reported last year that one in three children will be 'moderately to severely' malnourished by the time they are five.

Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have reported that large numbers of Burma's ethnic nationalities, including children, are taken from their villages by the regime and forced to work on so-called "development projects." In Karen, Karenni, Shan and Rakhine State, children are often requisitioned as porters, sentries, labourers on road construction, and even as minesweepers. Internally displaced children are most vulnerable in forced relocation sites or when hiding in the jungle.

According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Global Report 2001,] Burma is estimated to have one of the largest numbers of child soldiers of any country in the world, with up to 50,000 children serving in both government armed forces and armed opposition groups.

The girl child is particularly at risk in ethnic nationality area and conflict zones. On 7 January 2002, two Shan girls aged 16 and 17 were raped by SPDC troops in Larng Khur Township while fleeing to Thailand. On 19 February 2002, two Karen girls aged 17 and 18 were raped by a people's militia leader at a forced relocation site in Palaw Township, Tenasserim Division. Unfortunately these are not isolated incidents.

As a result of the ongoing civil war, more than one million people are internally displaced, over 130,000 have taken shelter in refugee camps in Thailand, and another million are found as migrant workers in Thailand, Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, etc. Amongst them, the majority are children.

In a society where children's fundamental rights to grow and thrive are severely deprived, what can we expect for the future of that society?

In order for children in Burma to enjoy their fundamental rights enshrined in the Convention, we urge the Commission to call on the State Peace and Development Council:

To comply with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

- To stop the use of children as forced labourers and as child soldiers;
- To address the health and education crisis of children by providing an adequate allocation of the GDP to social services to all children;
- To end the systematic forced displacement of ethnic nationalities; and
- To ensure that all reported cases of abuse, rape and/or violence against children be investigated, with appropriate judicial sanctions applied to perpetrators.

Thank you.