

# Easy Targets



## The Persecution of Muslims in Burma

Karen Human Rights Group  
May 2002

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Written and Published by the Karen Human Rights Group

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**Cover Photo:** Muslim villagers from Dooplaya District of Karen State who fled to Thailand after being systematically forced from their villages by SLORC troops in 1997.

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# Preface

*This report takes a look at the general persecution of Muslims in Burma through the eyes of Muslim villagers and townspeople. Emphasis is placed on the sizeable but mostly ignored Muslim population outside of Rakhine (Arakan) State. Muslims have lived in Burma for hundreds of years, although many arrived only after Burma's annexation by Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Racial and religious tensions have run high between Muslims and Burmans since independence in 1948. Successive Burmese regimes have encouraged or instigated violence against Muslims as a way of diverting the public's attention away from economic or political concerns. The most recent outbreak of violence occurred in cities across Burma from February to October 2001.*

*Burma's draconian citizenship law makes it impossible for many Muslims to become citizens and receive national identity cards. Without the identity cards, Muslims have a difficult time travelling, getting an education or finding a job. Religious restrictions have also been placed on Muslims. There is a prohibition on the construction of new mosques and repairs to existing ones are limited to the interiors only. Groups of more than five Muslims have been prohibited from assembling in cities and towns where anti-Muslim riots occurred. Muslim religious leaders and groups are under surveillance by the SPDC. The situation has created a climate of fear among Muslims to such an extent that many feel they are always being watched and they must live their lives and practice their religion quietly and secretly.*

*The report also examines Karen relations with the Muslim population in Karen State, particularly the persecution of Muslims by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a Karen group allied with the SPDC. The DKBA has been involved in the destruction of mosques and the forced relocation of Muslim villagers. DKBA soldiers have tried to force Muslims to worship Buddhist monks and put up Buddhist altars. Restrictions have also been placed on Muslims to force them to become vegetarian. Both the DKBA and the SPDC force Muslims in Karen State to perform forced labour for them on a regular basis.*

*There are small Muslim armed groups based in Rakhine State engaged in the struggle for human rights and federal democracy like the ethnicity-based resistance groups throughout Burma; they are not fundamentalist 'jihad' groups, nor are they part of any real or imaginary international networks like 'Al Qaeda'. Elsewhere in the country Muslims are*

*generally not politically active. Forming a small minority in many of the areas where they live and facing persecution both from the state and the local population, most Muslim communities are tightly knit but very low-key, focused mainly on the daily struggle to survive and support a family. Most Muslims realise they are easy targets for the regime and are too poor to get involved in politics. The September 2001 attacks in the United States have not had much of an impact in Burma apart from further travel restrictions placed on Muslims. While the SPDC has not yet tried to gain American support by labelling Burmese Muslims as 'international terrorists', the possibility remains that they may attempt to do so in future. The difficult conditions faced by Muslims across Burma have forced many to go to Thailand, Bangladesh or India, where they generally have no access to refugee status so they have no choice but to join the illegal migrant labour work force.*

*This report is based on interviews with Muslim refugees from Karen State and Muslim travellers and traders from central Burma and the Western border conducted by KHRG researchers between October 2001 and February 2002. All of the interviews quoted in the text are with Burmese Muslims with the exception of Interview #6 with "Moe Zaw Shwe", who is a Karen Christian. There are a higher number of examples in the text from Karen State because more of the interviews were conducted with Muslims from Karen State. Some supporting information and assistance with interviews was provided by the Muslim Information Centre of Burma (MICB). While this report focuses on Muslims, readers may want to see the following KHRG reports for further information on the treatment of Muslim communities in the areas discussed in this report: **"Refugees from the SLORC Occupation"** (KHRG #97-07, 25/5/97), **"Strengthening the Grip on Dooplaya: Developments in the SPDC Occupation of Dooplaya District"** (KHRG #98-05, 10/6/98), and **"Abuses and Relocations in Pa'an District"** (KHRG #97-08, 1/8/97). These reports are also available on the KHRG website (<http://www.khrg.org/>).*

*This report consists of several parts: this preface, an introduction, a detailed description of the situation including quotes from interviews, and an index of interviews. The full text of the interviews compiled for this report is available as a separately published annex and is available from KHRG upon approved request.*

### **Notes on the Text**

*In the interviews, all names of those interviewed have been changed and some details have been omitted where necessary to protect people from retaliation. False names are shown in double quotes. The captions under the quotes in the situation report include the interviewee's (changed) name, gender, age and village, and a reference to the interview. These numbers can be used to find the full text of the interviews. Although measures have been taken to hide the identity of people in this report, please do not pass this report in its present form to any representatives, agents or business partners of the SPDC regime.*

*The use of the terms 'Rakhine', 'Arakan' and 'Rohingya' is complex due to the political and racial significance of the terms. In this report the term 'Rohingya' is used to refer to Muslims in Rakhine State and 'Rakhine' is used to refer to the Buddhist inhabitants of Rakhine State. 'Arakanese Muslim' will be used in this report to differentiate between Muslims whose ancestors are indigenous to Rakhine State and Muslims whose ancestors arrived in Rakhine State during the British colonial period.*

*All numeric dates in this report are in **dd/mm/yy** format.*

# Terms and Abbreviations

## Military/Political

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>SPDC</b>     | State Peace and Development Council, military junta ruling Burma  |
| <b>PDC</b>      | Peace and Development Council, SPDC local-level administration  |
| <b>VPDC</b>     | Village Peace & Development Council (abbreviated 'Ya Ya Ka' in Burmese)                                       |
| <b>TPDC</b>     | Township Peace & Development Council (abbreviated 'Ma Ya Ka' in Burmese)                                      |
| <b>DPDC</b>     | District Peace & Development Council (abbreviated 'Ka Ya Ka' in Burmese)                                      |
| <b>SLORC</b>    | State Law and Order Restoration Council, former name of SPDC until Nov. 1997                                  |
| <b>Na Sa Ka</b> | Abbreviation for the SPDC's Border Security Administration  |
| <b>La Wa Ka</b> | Abbreviation for the SPDC's Immigration Department  |
| <b>IB</b>       | Infantry Battalion (SPDC), usually about 250-500 soldiers fighting strength                                   |
| <b>LIB</b>      | Light Infantry Battalion (SPDC), usually about 250-500 soldiers fighting strength                             |
| <b>LID</b>      | Light Infantry Division (SPDC); ten battalions, usually for offensive operations                              |
| <b>Company</b>  | Military unit of about 100 soldiers, though often understrength in SPDC Army                                  |
| <b>Column</b>   | Combination of Companies, assembled for operations; usually 100-300 soldiers                                  |
| <b>Camp</b>     | Army base or outpost; from remote hill posts of 10 soldiers to Battalion HQ camps of several hundred soldiers |
| <b>NCO</b>      | Non-commissioned officers; lance corporals, corporals and sergeants   |
| <b>DKBA</b>     | Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, Karen group allied with SLORC/SPDC  |
| <b>KNU</b>      | Karen National Union, main Karen opposition group   |
| <b>KNLA</b>     | Karen National Liberation Army, army of the KNU   |

## Village Terms

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b><i>Ioh ah pay</i></b>        | Voluntary labour to make merit, but used by SPDC for most forms of forced labour   |
| <b><i>set tha</i></b>           | 'Messengers'; forced labour as errand-runners, messengers, and for some odd jobs   |
| <b><i>wontan</i></b>            | 'Servant(s)', used by SPDC officers to mean forced labourers, usually porters  |
| <b><i>Ka La / Ka La Thu</i></b> | 'Indian' / 'Black Indian'; term used to refer to people of Indian extraction, especially Muslims; sometimes considered derogatory, though often used by Muslims to refer to themselves |

## Measurements and Currency

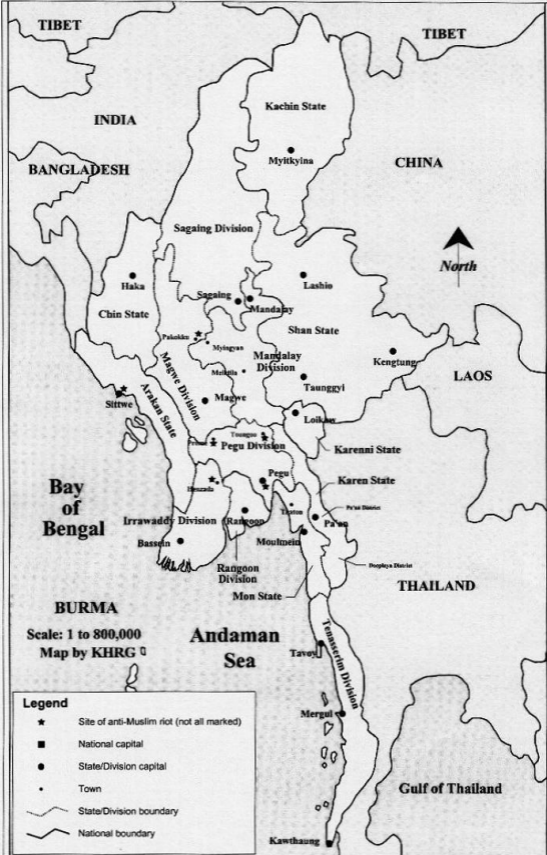
|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b><i>Viss</i></b>   | Unit of weight measure; one <i>viss</i> is 1.6 kilograms or 3.5 pounds                       |
| <b><i>Pyi</i></b>    | Volume of uncooked rice equal to 8 small condensed milk tins; about 2 kg / 4.4 lb            |
| <b><i>Bowl</i></b>   | Volume of uncooked rice same as a <i>pyi</i>   |
| <b><i>Tin</i></b>    | Also 'big tin', volume of rice or paddy of 8 <i>pyi</i> ; about 17 kg / 37 lb of husked rice |
| <b><i>Basket</i></b> | Volume of rice equal to 2 big tins; 25 kilograms or 55 pounds                                |
| <b><i>Kyat</i></b>   | Burmese currency; US\$1=6 Kyat at official rate, 700+ Kyat at current market rate            |

## Honorifics

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b><i>Saw</i></b>      | Karen personal prefix used for men                      |
| <b><i>Naw</i></b>      | Karen personal prefix used for women                    |
| <b><i>Ma</i></b>       | Burmese personal prefix used for young women            |
| <b><i>Ko/Maung</i></b> | Burmese personal prefix used for young men              |
| <b><i>U</i></b>        | Burmese personal prefix used for older men              |
| <b><i>Daw</i></b>      | Burmese personal prefix used for married or older women |

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# I. Introduction

*“Far from being the terrorists of the world, the Islamic peoples have been its victims.”*

- John Pilger

Almost every city or town in Burma has a Muslim community. There are also Muslim and mixed Muslim villages throughout Burma. Rakhine State (also known as Arakan State) in western Burma has the highest concentration of Muslim inhabitants. The families of some of the Muslim inhabitants of Rakhine State have lived there for hundreds of years, while others arrived after the annexation of this part of Burma by the British in 1824. Most of the Muslim families in the rest of Burma arrived during British colonial rule. Most of the Muslims in Burma descend at least partly from South Asians, though through the generations there has been a great deal of intermarriage so that many of today's Muslims have ancestors of various ethnicity. Despite this, in Burma non-Muslims tend to use the term 'Muslim' to indicate not only a religion but also an ethnicity, or else they refer to all Muslims as 'Indians' [*'Ka La'*], which of course they are not. Muslims usually refer to themselves as 'Muslims' when asked about their ethnicity. The vast majority of Muslims in Burma today were born there, and their ancestors have lived in Burma for generations.

Racial and religious tensions surrounding the Muslims have existed for a long time, but have become worse since Burmese independence in 1948. Much of the abuse against Muslims is similar to that encountered by other ethnic groups. Muslims also have to go for forced labour and pay extortion fees, they are subject to arbitrary arrest and torture, and are even sometimes executed. Where the discrimination against Muslims differs is in the areas of citizenship and religious freedom. Most Muslims are not considered as citizens under Burma's strict citizenship law. Based on this they are unable to obtain national identity cards. As a result they find it difficult to travel, get an education, carry on social relations and conduct business. Racial discrimination and the lack of an identity card make it difficult for Muslims to get employment with private companies. Muslims who are able to get identity cards are barred from holding high office in both the civil service and the military. The majority of them (particularly outside Rakhine State) do not own land, but work as traders or day labourers.

The sad truth is that millions of people of all ethnicities in Burma harbour racist anti-Muslim feelings, considering them vaguely and baselessly as foreigners, immigrants, job- or land-stealers, poor,

uneducated, and so the usual list goes on. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and its predecessor regimes have often exploited this in order to 'divide and rule' the civilian population. In the late 1970s and again in 1991-92, the Burmese military dictatorship launched pogroms against the Rohingya Muslims of Rakhine State in the hope that Buddhist Rakhines, many of whom are rabidly anti-Muslim, would swing over to the 'government' side - forgetting their growing anger at Burmese Army repression and redirecting it against the Muslim community. The regime could then step in with more repressive measures against both communities, while simultaneously claiming credit as a 'peacemaker' and using the communal violence to justify continued military rule. To their credit, most of the Buddhist Rakhine population refused to join in, leaving the 'government' clearly to blame. In 1991-92 alone, the pogrom displaced over 250,000 Muslims into Bangladesh. Almost all of them have now been forcibly repatriated to Burma by the Bangladeshi government in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but those who return still face persecution both from the SPDC and the Rakhine Buddhists so a small but steady exodus is continuing. UNHCR and the Bangladeshi authorities refuse to recognise any of these new or repeat refugees, so tens of thousands of them have disappeared into the illegal labour markets of Bangladesh and India in the past five years.

Like education, religion is viewed by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime in black and white: it is either a potential weapon (if it can be controlled) or a threat (if it cannot). Military control of the curriculum, the rewriting of history and the banning of non-Burman language and culture have made education into a weapon of the regime, while the closure of universities, the burning of independent village schools and the arrests of teachers have weakened the potential for education to pose a threat. In religion, the SPDC has attempted to turn Buddhism into a weapon by infiltrating the Buddhist Sangha (monks' organisation) with Military Intelligence operatives, and by engaging in massively expensive pagoda-building and offerings ceremonies to try to make the population believe that the enormous merit acquired by the Generals makes them invulnerable. Contrastingly, Islam is treated as a 'threat' involving 'foreigners', and communities are subtly encouraged

to turn against their Muslim neighbours. The SPDC has increasingly limited the religious freedoms of Muslims over the past few years. Permission must be sought to hold religious ceremonies and celebrate special occasions. The construction of new mosques is banned and the upkeep of old ones is limited to the interiors only. The activities of religious groups and religious leaders are also closely monitored, and Islamic schools are no longer allowed.

From February to October 2001, anti-Muslim riots broke out in cities and towns across Burma. Mosques, homes and shops were destroyed and many Muslims were killed or injured. Although the SPDC claimed Buddhist monks instigated the riots, many saw the hand of the junta behind the violence; in the past, Burma's military regimes have occasionally instigated anti-Chinese or anti-Muslim riots as a way of deflecting discontentment and turning the civilian population against itself. The riots ended in each town after a few days, but the mosques have remained closed in most of the towns. Muslims have also been prohibited from rebuilding the mosques or their homes and shops.

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in the United States have not had much of an impact in Burma. The regime suppressed news of the attacks and even declared videotapes of them illegal. As in other countries, the attacks have been used as an excuse to further tighten travel restrictions on Muslims, and religious leaders and groups have been put under increased surveillance. The communal violence, however, seems to have ended. Some Muslims ascribe this to a fear on the part of the regime that continued violence might prompt a retaliatory 'terrorist' attack in Burma.

Muslims in most of Karen State escaped the communal violence of 2001, but they have long suffered oppression from the soldiers of the Burmese Army. When forces of the Burmese regime captured central Doooplaya District from the Karen National Union in 1997, Muslims were driven *en masse* out of their villages, copies of the Koran were torn up in front of them and their mosques were dynamited and bulldozed, partly due to the individual religious hatred of some of the Burmese commanders and partly in a misguided attempt to gain support for the occupation from the Buddhist and Christian Karen villagers. The creation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in 1994-95 added more problems for Muslim villagers in several regions. Although relations with most Karen villagers and the Karen National Union (KNU) have been peaceable, many Karens have always been prejudiced against Muslims. The DKBA has given some Karens the power to vent those feelings against the Muslim communities. Muslims have been targeted for village relocations and mosques have been destroyed by DKBA soldiers. Camps and pagodas have then been

built on the sites of the mosques. Villagers also experience heavy demands for forced labour from both the DKBA and the SPDC. When gathering people for forced labour, SPDC and DKBA commanders tend to target Muslim communities first when possible, knowing that the other parts of the community will not protest. Conditions while performing forced labour are similar to those experienced by other ethnic groups, but the treatment can sometimes be harsher for Muslims due to racist feelings held by some SPDC or DKBA soldiers. Muslim villagers are finding it increasingly difficult to live in their villages as their food and money run out and they cannot find enough time to work to get more. A steady trickle of Muslims are fleeing their villages, some to the refugee camps in Thailand and others to cities and towns in other parts of Burma.

## II. Muslims in Burma

**“Q: How long has your family lived in Burma?”**

**A: It is our native land. I was born in Burma.”** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

Muslims constitute a small but very visible portion of Burma’s population. Islam first arrived in Burma via traders and travellers from India and the Middle East. It gradually took limited hold in what is today Rakhine State, while small communities of Muslim traders also established themselves at various places along the coasts. The rest of Burma remained Buddhist and Animist.

As the British progressively annexed Burma through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and afterwards, large numbers of Indian workers and migrants, especially Muslim Bengalis, crossed into Burma from the Indian subcontinent looking for work and to set up businesses. They settled in villages next to existing Muslim villages, and also became civil servants, traders, and labourers throughout colonial Burma. This large number of new migrants caused religious and ethnic tensions in the areas where they settled. Many Burmans still associate Indians with colonial rule. Communal violence erupted numerous times during British rule, especially over the activities of Indian *chettys* moneylenders. They were accused of cheating Burmese and taking their land which caused great resentment among Burmans. By the time the Japanese occupied Burma during World War II the tensions had reached such a level that more than 500,000 Indians were chased out of Burma by Aung San’s Burma Independence Army, a Burman armed group which collaborated with the Japanese occupation.

Following independence, various Muslim groups took up arms against the Rangoon government, primarily in Rakhine State. Most of the Muslims outside Rakhine State kept very low key and did not join armed groups after independence, although at least one small group was formed along the Thai-Burma border in the 1980s, and through the 1990s a small armed Muslim group fought alongside the Karen National Liberation Army in Tenasserim Division. Periodic military offensives were launched against the groups and Rakhine State gradually became heavily militarised. Buddhist settlers were brought in and given land taken from Muslims, further heightening the tensions. The repression only became worse when the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military junta took power in 1988. Military pogroms against Muslims and communal violence erupted several times in Rakhine State after the SLORC came to power. The worst pogrom was launched by the regime in 1991, and by mid-1992 over 250,000 Muslims had fled to Bangladesh. Most of them have now been forced back into Burma by the Bangladeshi authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but on return many found that their land had been given to Rakhine Buddhist settlers. They are also still subjected to human rights abuses such as forced labour, so thousands have fled back into Bangladesh and India to disappear into the illegal labour market. *[For more details see below under ‘Anti-Muslim Riots and Military Operations’.]*

Muslim villagers from Dooplaya District of Karen State who fled to Thailand after being systematically forced from their villages by SLORC troops in 1997.  
[KHRG]



Muslim communities presently exist in almost any Burmese city or town. Some cities like Rangoon and Mandalay have very large Muslim populations. There are also Muslim villages dotted about the countryside. Rakhine State has the largest Muslim population and it is where much of the anti-Muslim violence takes place. Muslims in Rakhine State are made up of those whose ancestors have lived there for hundreds of years and others whose ancestors arrived during the British colonial period. Most Muslims in Rakhine State refer to themselves as 'Rohingya' and this term is recognised internationally, but the SPDC refuses to recognise both the name and the ethnic grouping. Muslims whose ancestors have lived in Rakhine State for centuries speak Rakhine and have very similar customs to Rakhine Buddhists. Muslims who arrived in Rakhine State during the colonial administration were mainly Bengalis, and their descendants still have customs similar to the Bengalis of India and Bangladesh; many of them speak Bengali dialects as well as Burmese. Some Muslims, particularly those who live farther inside Burma from the border with Bangladesh, refuse to be called 'Rohingya', preferring instead to be identified as 'Arakanese (Rakhine) Muslims', 'Burmese Muslims' or simply 'Muslims'. Rakhine Buddhists, however, refuse to consider anyone to be Rakhine who is not Buddhist.

Most of the Muslims who live elsewhere in Burma are also descendants of migrants from various parts of what is now India and Bangladesh. Most of them speak Burmese as a first language and consider themselves to be Burmese Muslims when asked. In Karen State, many Muslims have integrated strongly into Karen village communities; they have intermarried with Karen villagers to a certain extent, speak Karen, and sometimes refer to themselves as 'Black Karens'. Most non-Muslim Karens are still prejudiced toward them, however, and though they happily accept them as part of the community many Karens refuse to concede that one can be Karen and Muslim at the same time.

***"They speak Rakhine, Rakhine nationality, but they don't like Muslim people."*** - "Than Maung" (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State, talking about the Buddhist Rakhines' dislike for Arakanese Muslims. (Interview #4, 2/02)

***"The people who call themselves Rakhine Muslim speak the Rakhine language. Their parents, grandfather and grandmother spoke Rakhine. They wear clothes and eat the same as Rakhines, but they are different in religion [most Rakhines are Buddhists]. Rohingyas don't speak the same language as them. Their culture and clothes are different. They are not the same. Rohingya people mostly wear clothes like Indian people."*** - "Thein Soe" (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

### III. Persecution of Muslims in Burma

***“In Burma, the Burmese government puts pressure on the Muslim people. We aren’t allowed to live in Burma. Let’s do a blood test. We will bleed a lot and it is just Burmese blood. Now because we are Ka La, if people order us to go to Ka La state [meaning India or Bangladesh] they will drive us out. We have to stay in Burma. Where are we going to stay? They are making pressure on the Ka La but where are we going to stay?” - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)***

Despite the lack of any large-scale Muslim armed opposition, Muslims are persecuted at least as much as other non-Burman peoples and have been the frequent targets of racist attacks in times of communal tension. Muslims interviewed for this report agreed that most of the main types of human rights abuses - such as forced labour, extortion, forced relocation, arbitrary arrest, torture, rape, and summary executions - are practiced against Muslims to a similar extent as they are against other peoples. The differences for Muslims are in religious persecution and the denial of the rights of citizenship. There are strong racist feelings among some Burmese towards Muslims. Some of this is fuelled by propaganda that Muslims are intermarrying with Buddhists and that this will result in the disappearance of the Burman race. There is also a feeling that Muslims do not belong in Burma because they are a holdover from the colonial past.

***“Our Ka La [Burmese word for ‘Indians’] are the most oppressed everywhere. I don’t know why. Everywhere we go they swear at us, ‘Nga Loh Ma Ka La’ [‘I fuck your mother, Indian’] or ‘Ma Aye Loh Ka La’ [‘Indian motherfucker’]. They leave us last for rights. They oppress us everywhere.” - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)***

***“The other ethnic groups don’t need to pay. But they do pressure the Christian people and the people who are doing religious work. The whole country pressures the Muslim people. They pressure them about religion.” - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)***

***“Q: Do they oppress the Muslims more than the other people?”***

***A: Yes, that is right. The meaning is like that.***

***Q: Which group do they oppress more, Christians or Muslims?***

***A: It is not much different. But for Christians it is a little better because they have citizenship. We are a small group so it is easy for them to oppress us.” - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)***

***“An unknown writer issued many books to block the development of the religion of Islam. The book contains writings on ‘Sa Ti Kya Thakin Ma’ [‘The Master’s Daughter’s Servant’; an attempt to link the Muslims with Aung San Suu Kyi since she is the daughter of a Thakin, as her father, Aung San, was known], how the people from India arrived in Burma [referring to their arriving***

Muslim villagers from Dooplaya District who fled their homes during the SLORC’s 1997 Offensive. [KHRG]



**during the British colonial administration] and about how the number of Indian half-castes had increased [insinuating that Muslims were marrying Burman women]. There is a warning written in the book that says, 'This book should not be given to Ka La Dain' ['Ka La Dain' is a strongly derogatory term used against Muslims]."** - report written by an independent Muslim civilian from Toungoo, Pegu Division (FR1, 9/01)

## Identity Cards

**"[T]hey don't allow Ka La and Muslims to get identity cards anymore. I don't know why. I also want to ask why they won't allow Muslims to get identity cards. We live in Burma and we have Burmese blood. All of us have real Burmese blood. Our religion is different, we are Burmese Muslims, but we are the same nationality, so why do they have to separate us?"** - "Kyaw Tun Win" (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

According to the SPDC, all Burmese who reach the age of 10 years are eligible to receive a temporary national identity card, and at the age of 18 years they can receive a permanent identity card. These cards are essential for travel, business, medical care and higher education. Burmese law says that the cards must be presented to the police or military whenever a person is requested to do so. A person who does not have one can be arrested and sent to prison. In recent years the SPDC has been short of recruits for its Army expansion programme, so those caught without identity cards are sometimes offered the choice of a long prison sentence or joining the Army.

**"They don't allow the giving of identity cards to Muslim people anymore. They don't give identity cards to Muslim people anymore. People who already have them can keep them. But the children who have reached the age to get their identity cards aren't allowed to get them anymore."** - "Kyaw Tun Win" (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

Burma's 1982 citizenship law limits the rights of citizenship to those who can prove that their ancestors were resident in Burma prior to 1823 and the first British annexation in 1824. For most ethnic groups, such as the Shans, Burmans and Karens, this requirement is not enforced because they are considered 'indigenous', but it is often used to deny citizenship to Muslims, ethnic Chinese and some other groups. Although this law does not mention Muslims or Indians specifically, it is seen by many to be directed at Muslims and Chinese whose ancestors migrated to Burma during the colonial period. The State Law and Order Restoration Council changed

the format of the national identity cards in 1990 to show the bearer's ethnicity and religion. Muslims who then applied for the new cards were denied based on the citizenship law. Foreign residents of Burma can be granted Foreign Registration Cards which allow them to legally live in the country, but Muslims are not granted these either. Denied both citizenship and legal status as a resident foreigner, most Muslims are left without any form of legal identity papers. Two exceptions to this are a small Muslim group in Rakhine State who call themselves 'Kaman' and claim to be the descendants of the court of the old Arakan kings and another small Muslim group in Tenasserim Division. Both groups are recognised by the SPDC as two of the 135 'National Races' and have been given the right of citizenship.

**"[N]ow they don't register us like that. It was different before, but now during the reign of the SPDC they don't allow us to do that anymore [to get citizenship cards]. Now they really restrict us. When General Saw Maung [first leader of the State Law and Order Restoration Council in 1988 who was replaced by Than Shwe in 1992] was in power he forbade the Muslim people from getting identity cards when they were old enough to get one made. After that I don't know if they changed the law or not, but they didn't allow us to get them like before. We could get identity cards before, but now the new students who are 18 years old are usually not given them. They can't travel freely. They have to sign in at checkpoints when they go from place to place."** - "Aung Myint" (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

**"[S]ince 1991 they have made new ones. They did it after the disturbances [the 1988-90 pro-democracy demonstrations]. People who don't have this [new] identity card can't learn."** - "Khin Kyaw Mya" (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

Muslims feel the citizenship law is unfair because they usually speak Burmese as a first language, consider themselves to be Burmese and were born in Burma, as were their parents and their grandparents and even great-grandparents. The law has also been applied to Arakanese Muslims despite the fact that their families have lived in what is now Rakhine State since before it was a part of Burma. Contrastingly, Burmese of Indian descent who have converted to Buddhism are granted identity cards. This has led some Muslims to 'convert' to Buddhism or to lie about their ethnicity in order to get an identity card. Cards are also granted to the few Muslims who have enough money to pay heavy bribes.

**"The other thing is about the people who have become Buddhist. If they married a native of the country they can get real identity cards, even if**

**they came from India, or even if their grandparents came from India. As for us, our parents and grandparents are natives of the country. They only speak Burmese. Yet they [SPDC] don't accept our kind of people as natives of the country. They don't accept Burmese Muslims and Rakhine [Arakanese] Muslims. ... The next thing is that they listen to the accent, whether people can speak Burmese clearly. They also look at their appearance, whether they look like Indians or Bangladeshis. It is up to that. Even though they are all Muslim, they look at their appearance and their speech and also whether they are people who have education. If people can pay money then they can get identity cards."** - "Thein Soe" (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

**"They just gave them to the people who are close to them. Even if we paid money it [the identity card] wouldn't be usable for very long. In 1995 they shut down everything. Even if you paid money, you wouldn't get one anymore. We can't do anything."** - "Khin Kyaw Mya" (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

## Restrictions on Travel

**"They don't give us identity cards. For example, after we finish high school we are supposed to go to university, but based on identity cards, we have no right to travel, so as a part of that we also don't have the right to learn anymore. We don't need to tell anything special about that anymore. When they forbid us to travel from place to place that includes education, health and social relations."** - "Aung Myint" (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #02-20-1, 2/02)

Travel for Muslims has been greatly restricted by the lack of identity cards. Identity cards are checked by military and police checkpoints set up on roads and at the entrances to cities, towns and villages throughout Burma. The checkpoints stop cars and trucks and demand identity cards from all the passengers. Muslims are especially targeted at these stops. People who do not have identity cards are detained and questioned about where they are going, why they are going there and whom they are going to visit. After being questioned they are usually sent back to where they came from. Bribes of 300-1,000 Kyat can usually be paid to get through the checkpoints, but this is expensive. Long journeys are almost impossible for most Muslims because they do not have the money to pay the bribes required at every checkpoint along the way.

**"They don't allow it. They interrogate us. If we have money we can pay a little bit and it will be okay. The amount is not exact. If we can pay them enough to satisfy them, then they are satisfied. If we can't pay them enough to satisfy them then they interrogate us. They would arrest us and send us back. They are still doing that now on the road. They do it between Myawaddy and Pa'an [in Karen State]. They always do it between Pa'an and Myawaddy."** - "Aung Myint" (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

**"We live in Rangoon and we want to come to the border [with Thailand] to work. It seems that the income is better. But it costs a lot when we want to come. We don't have identity cards so it is very difficult for us to travel. The La Wa Ka [Immigration Police] and Na Sa Ka [Border Security Administration] interrogate us. We have to pay money when they question us. When I come I have to pay some of the checkpoints 300 Kyat and some I have to pay 500 Kyat. There is one checkpoint at Thaton Naung Kala, then one at Thaton Wer Bo Daw and then another one when we enter Kawkareik. There is a checkpoint beside the big school. The next checkpoint is before we enter Myawaddy. ... [W]e have to pay, but sometimes we don't need to pay. They arrest us if we can't pay and accuse us in many ways. Their law is money. It is like that."** - "Khin Kyaw Mya" (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

Travel is difficult for Muslims throughout Burma, but it seems to be the strictest in Rakhine State or for people going to Rakhine State. This is especially so in the northern part of the state where villagers are not allowed to travel from one village tract to another. This may be partly due to ongoing armed opposition to SPDC rule by a few Muslim and Buddhist Rakhine groups operating along the Burma-Bangladesh border. Throughout the state, bribes of 200-1,000 Kyat must be paid at each checkpoint. When a person reaches his destination, he must report to the Immigration Police and the District Peace and Development Council the circumstances of the trip and pay money for a pass to return. A person must also present copies of his identity card, if he has one, to each Army camp along the way. Muslims from the state who want to travel to Rangoon must get a 10 day 'visa' from the authorities first, whether they hold identity cards or not. They are only allowed to make the trip via the road from Taunggyok to Prome in Pegu Division. People have tried to go to Rangoon without 'visas' by travelling along the coast road from Thandwe into Irrawaddy Division, but they risk being arrested and sent to prison if they are caught.

***“In the north of Rakhine State [Arakan State] people aren’t allowed to travel from township to township [village tract to village tract]. In Burma this same thing is happening in other places also. People aren’t allowed to travel from Rangoon to Rakhine State. It is strict. There are a lot of people who have been sent back. They can’t travel. The people who came from Rangoon are sent back to Rangoon. If people are from Mandalay, then they are sent back to Mandalay. They can’t travel.”*** - “Thein Soe” (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

***“When I arrived at Thannet we had to register our names with the La Wa Ka [Immigration Department] and say that we had arrived there for a visit. Then they made a note and I stayed there. The problem I had to face when I stayed there was that they gave me a ticket. It is a Hta Nay Pyan ticket [a pass to go back to his home]. Then I had to go to the La Wa Ka, Ka Ya Ka [District Peace and Development Council] and intelligence. I had to go to these three groups and pay 1,000 Kyat to each group. Just for myself alone I had to pay 1,000 Kyat to each group to go back to my own place. But we couldn’t pay easily. When I finished paying the La Wa Ka and the Ka Ya Ka I went to the intelligence and they delayed me for one month. They made me stay one more month after the time I wanted to go back. They prolonged my stay for one month so I was angry. At last I had to pay 3,000 Kyat instead of 1,000 Kyat because I couldn’t come back. I was trading so I had money and I could pay. I wanted to go quickly, but then they checked me. They asked me to copy my identity card. I had to make five or six copies. When I arrived at the Army places I had to give one sheet to each place. They also demanded 500 to 1,000 Kyat in cash. ... For the Muslim people who stay there [in Rakhine State], if they want to go to Rangoon they have to get a visa. They have to go with a visa. They have identity cards, but they have to get visas to go to Rangoon. They give ten days on the visa. They can’t get more than ten days on the visa. They restrain the Muslim people.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

Even Muslims who have identity cards are subject to extra scrutiny at checkpoints, and are often detained and interrogated by the police or soldiers at the checkpoints. Their identity cards are sometimes declared by the soldiers or police to be ‘imitations’ and confiscated. They are then told that they will have to go to the local Peace and Development Council (PDC) office to get it back. If a person has friends among the PDC officials or can pay the bribes, the identity card can often be recovered, but officials often try to avoid returning the identity cards. Meetings are set up which an

official who then says he is too busy to attend. This can go on for weeks or months until the person either gives up or pays enough in bribes to get the card back.

***“[T]hey confiscated some. They said they were going to take it for a while. After that they made an appointment with a date and time, which office to go to and who to meet with. When the people went to meet them they moved the time. They said they weren’t free yet. The reality is that they didn’t want to give the identity card back.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

***“Recently in Thaton [Mon State], and two or three months ago in Hlaing Bwe [Karen State], some people had their identity cards confiscated. They were Muslim people who are the same age as me, about 20 or 30 years old. They [SPDC] said, ‘Your identity card is an imitation.’ They confiscated them and told the people to go back home. It was at Hlaing Bwe. I saw it happen like that. They didn’t give them back, but if they could pay money they could have gotten them back. They had to pay 4,000 or 5,000 Kyat. They go to the people who they know at Na Sa Ka and ask them to give back the identity card and pay them 4,000 or 5,000 Kyat. Na Sa Ka is the border supervisory administration.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

Rich and important Muslims are able to get around the travel restrictions but most people cannot. In some places, like Rangoon, the Ward Peace and Development Councils issue letters of recommendation for 300-500 Kyat that allow people to travel. These passes are only given for visiting purposes and not for work. Muslims who have travelled the road from Moulmein in Mon State to Myawaddy in eastern Karen State say that the soldiers at the checkpoints often disregard letters of recommendation. Muslims are stopped, turned back or arrested whether they have a letter of recommendation or not. Even if they manage to get to where they are going, the law in Burma states that all visitors to a place must register their presence on arrival. Even visiting relatives must register with the local authorities when they arrive, and a person needs a national identity card to register. This draconian rule is applied to everyone in Burma, but for Muslims unable to get national identity cards it means they are unable to visit anyone, as they cannot register whether they have a letter of recommendation or not. The penalty for having unregistered houseguests is arrest and interrogation for both the guests and the hosts, followed by the possibility of a prison sentence, or being handed over to an Army unit as a forced labour porter for frontline military operations.

## Restrictions on Education

***“[W]ith the important people who want to travel, they can deal with the Thandwe township driver, drivers from Rangoon and every car owner or intelligence. These kinds of people don’t need to take identity cards, but most people can’t do this.”*** - “Thein Soe” (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

***“Even if you take a letter of recommendation and show it to them they will still interrogate you. It isn’t enough. When we show the identity cards, if they want to confiscate things they can do it. The road on this side [near the border with Thailand] is the same.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

***“We didn’t have identity cards so we had to pay money at the Ya Ya Ka office. It is the Ward Peace and Development Council. We can get a recommendation card there. They ask how long we are going to visit. We can visit, but we can’t go for work. We have to pay money. We have to pay at least 300 to 500 Kyat. ... The next thing is that when our relatives visit us we have to go and report them to guest registration, but they don’t have identity cards. It is very difficult because they don’t have identity cards. It seems like our relatives can’t visit us.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

Muslims interviewed by KHRG said that the travel restrictions have become stricter since the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks in the United States. They feel this is because the SPDC is afraid of something similar happening in Burma [for more details see the section ‘*The Impact of September 11<sup>th</sup>*’ below]. It is not clear yet whether this will continue or if it is only a temporary reaction to the terrorist attacks. While it may be caused by the SPDC’s fear of the Muslims in Burma, it is equally possible that the SPDC is simply using the September 2001 attacks as an excuse to further restrict Muslims without having to fear international censure for doing so.

***“[A]fter that [the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks] they began prohibiting. We have to go outside [to Thailand] to find jobs to get money to eat. If they do like this we can’t travel and we can’t find money to send to our families anymore. Because they have done this, people can’t travel anymore. It seems like the way has been closed.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

Muslims are permitted to study in SPDC schools in Burma until they complete high school. Discrimination against Muslims is not institutionalised in the primary and secondary schools, but Muslim students encounter racism among the teachers and students. Racist teachers have been known to teach that Muslims were brought in by the British and have only caused problems in Burma. Buddhist students sometimes exclude Muslim students from sports matches and clubs. In Burma’s corrupt school system, where to pass an exam or a school year it is often required to pay a bribe to teachers or administrators, it is likely that Muslims have to pay even more than other students. Not every village in Burma has a middle or high school; some do not even have primary schools.

***“I was a teacher and there was a classroom beside my classroom. The teacher was teaching about Burmese history. When he was teaching Burmese history he said, ‘Indian people came and acted clever in Burma [meaning that they tricked the Burmans].’ Then he said, ‘They are Indian Ka La [although used commonly to refer to Indians, it can be used derogatorily to mean foreigner or ‘slave’]. These Indian Ka La are Muslims.’ He explained it to his students like that. India and Burma were colonies under English control. So there is a history of Indian and Burmese fellowship. When the English ruled in Burma there were Indian migrant workers who moved to Burma for business.”*** - “Thein Soe” (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

***“In the beginning they could learn at the same level as other people. But what happened when we learned together? Ka La or Buddhists, everybody can play football well when they play games, but because we are Muslim they don’t let us play.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

***“Previous school textbooks mentioned King Bayinnaung’s [1550-1581] statement prohibiting the killing of big animals on the Eid day [a Muslim festival usually celebrated with feasts]. It mentioned that the religion of Islam came into Burma during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Burmese dynasty [14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries]. But the present textbooks say that Islam came to Burma from India during the reign of the British, they insinuate this [that it was new to Burma and therefore alien].”*** - report written by an independent Muslim civilian from Toungoo, Pegu Division (FR1, 9/01)

For further studies at universities and technical colleges, identity cards must be presented to sit for the entrance examinations. The prohibition on the issuance of identity cards to Muslims leaves most Muslims without any means of attending tertiary education. The restriction on travel related to the non-issuance of identity cards also means that Muslims cannot attend schools in other cities or towns. Muslims who do have identity cards are able to go to universities. Some Muslims have converted to Buddhism in order to gain access to education. A Muslim who visited Rakhine State in January 2002 reported when interviewed by KHRG that the colleges in Rakhine State were closed following the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks in the United States. KHRG has yet to receive any information on whether they have since reopened.

***“There are our Muslim people who have education in Rangoon, but that education is useless in Burma. Why? Because of the identity cards. We have to bring identity cards when we take an examination. Then they will make us a student card. But they don’t allow people without identity cards to learn. It is a waste of time. The other thing is that now they don’t allow us to get identity cards anymore. The next thing is that if a Muslim person wants to work with a private company then he needs an identity card. ... For education we are allowed to learn through high school. For further study it is like I told you before. It is up to the identity card. We don’t have identity cards so they don’t allow us to learn.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

***“They can’t go to university in Rakhine State [Arakan State]. I saw that with my own face. When I went there, there were some students who wanted to attend university. They are Muslims. This was during 2001. They came at that time with a visa [a pass to travel to town and study]. They were given visas until the schools were closed. They gave them visas, but then the schools were closed. When the World Trade Centre was destroyed they closed all the schools in Rakhine State.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

The SPDC no longer allows Islamic schools to be built. It also encourages parents to send their children to SPDC schools rather than Islamic ones. SPDC schools hold classes in Buddhism, but not Islam or Christianity. Students can and sometimes do opt out of the Buddhism classes. This does not mean that they completely avoid it, because Buddhist imagery and ideas are presented through other subjects such as Burmese language and history classes. According to the Muslim Information Centre

of Burma, SPDC teachers have forced Muslim students to study Buddhism in primary schools in Mon State since June 2000. Students were expelled from the schools if they refused to learn Buddhism. Four Muslim elders from Daing Win Gwan Blaw village were arrested in September 2000 for submitting an application to SPDC authorities requesting that Muslim students be spared from learning Buddhism. For further religious study Muslims usually have no choice but to travel abroad to India, Bangladesh or Thailand, but the restrictions on travel within Burma and the impossibility of getting a passport without an identity card makes this very difficult.

***“They also don’t allow us to build Muslim schools for education. They ordered us to go and learn in the schools they already have.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

***“Some of our Muslim religious students from Mandalay, Rangoon and the other big cities want to go to India for further study about religion. They want to become Malawi. It means to be trained to be a Muslim preacher. There is some education that we can’t learn inside the town [in Burma] and we have to go and learn there. We have to do it this way. They put people into jail if they [SPDC] know about it. If they know that people will go to study, they interrogate them and put them into jail or take action on them.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

## Restrictions on Ability to Work

Work opportunities for Muslims are also hampered by the lack of identity cards and the inbuilt racism of many Burmese. Muslims who want to start a business have to pay money to the local intelligence and Peace and Development Council authorities. Businesses that become prosperous are noted by the local authorities and intelligence, who then place higher taxes on the business. While some of these are actual taxes, most of it amounts to simple extortion payments. Muslims engaged in trade are unable to gain as much profit from a selling trip as non-Muslims due to all of the bribes they must pay at checkpoints along the way.

***“The next thing is that Muslims now have to worry about their possessions. If a Muslim has some money there is the intelligence and the tax department. At first the neighbours will know when the person becomes a little rich. After that the intelligence will know and then the tax department will know. So then they have to pay***

**money to the intelligence and the tax department. They have to pay the highest grade. They have to pay 20 to 25% of their profits. ... The other thing that is worse is that the people in northern Rakhine State [Arakan State] have to pay money to the intelligence if they want to open a shop to sell things. For example, if people sell vegetables they have to pay 50 Kyat and the intelligence comes every day to collect the money. After that they can open their shop. For big shops some people have to pay 3,000 Kyat, some people pay 2,000 Kyat and some people pay 1,000 Kyat. If Muslims open a shop, the intelligence comes to collect money. It is happening in the northern part of Rakhine State.” - “Thein Soe” (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)**

Burmese who want to work for private companies must have an identity card and they must give their personal history to the employer. This practice has made it very difficult to find jobs, as most Muslims do not have identity cards. Even if they do have identity cards, both the identity card and their personal history will show that they are Muslim and they are often not chosen for jobs based on that. Even educated Muslims are not hired, either because they do not have an identity card or because the company does not hire Muslims. Educated Muslims sometimes end up driving taxis or pedalling trishaws because they cannot find any other work. Others perform manual labour for daily wages, or sell food and other goods to get enough money to provide food and clothing for their families.

**“Why don’t they give us identity cards? The people who have money can pay money [to get the identity cards]. The people who can’t pay money, even if they have an education, can’t learn anymore because they can’t pay money. Some of them have finished 10<sup>th</sup> Standard [meaning they have finished high school] but they have no job to work. That is happening to Muslim people.” - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)**

**“They also ask for our personal history. We don’t have identity cards so our Muslim people lose either way. Muslim people lose if we compare them with Buddhist people. We can’t find a good job even if we have an education. It seems like even if our Muslim people have education, it is useless in Burma. ... There are many private companies in Rangoon. If we want to work for those companies, first they ask us for our personal history and our community. What community do we live in? The most important thing we need is the identity card. Even if we have education, it is useless for our Muslim people if we don’t have an identity card. ... We have to work very hard to eat, live and have**

**clothes to wear. We have no rights in Burma. I haven’t heard what is happening now because I have to work to eat and live and have clothes to wear. We can’t get a job even if we have an education. In Rangoon there are a lot of students who have finished university but are pedalling trishaws. They rent cars or taxis and drive them. Some of them can’t rent them, because they have to pay a deposit to rent them and it is about 200,000 or 300,000 Kyat. So some people who don’t have money pedal trishaws or do some kind of daily labour. Some of them sell things. Some of them sell ice. Some of them sell clothes. Some of them sell food. Some of them are doing construction.” - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)**

Muslims who simply want to find jobs in factories or as day labourers also find it difficult. They are stopped at checkpoints and turned back because of their lack of identity cards. A Muslim from Pegu Division interviewed by KHRG said that it was common for Pegu residents to travel to Rangoon for work every day, but Muslims were often turned back or were made late because they were stopped at checkpoints. The trucks are stopped and Muslims are told to get off. He said he only makes 500 Kyat per day (about 50-60 US cents) working in Rangoon and it costs 100 Kyat to take the truck, so there is not much left to pay the police and still have enough left over to buy food for his family.

**“For example, some of the people live in Pegu Division but they go to work in Rangoon. There are two checkpoints along the way. For example, I will go to Rangoon, but I don’t have an identity card. In Rangoon I get 500 Kyat per day. I don’t have a job in Pegu so I have to go and work in Rangoon. On the way I am stopped. They ask, ‘What nationality are you? If you are Ka La, get off.’ If we are Muslim they order us to get off the car. We are late getting to our jobs. I don’t have money to pay them. From Pegu to Rangoon I only have 100 Kyat for the car trip. Sometimes they order us to turn back. They order us to go back. We can pay them if we have money. We can go after we pay money. The people who don’t have money have to go back. Our families sometimes have to face the problem of not having enough food if we go back home. So that we are faced with trouble.” - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)**

The discrimination extends to the civil service and the military as well. Muslims are barred from joining the civil service or becoming a military officer without an identity card. Muslims who do get into the civil service find it very hard to get promoted. Non-Burmans are almost never promoted to the higher

ranks of the civil service or the military. Even Muslims who enter military officer training may not be selected to be officers upon completion of the course.

***“We don’t have equal rights. Why don’t we have equal rights? It is like I told you before. If we compare Burmans and Muslims it is like this. For example, they are going to choose someone for an official position, but they won’t give it to the Muslims anymore. It means that they are going to give it to their people [Burmans]. They assign the positions based on nationalities.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

***“The next thing is that they don’t assign Muslims to high rank in the government. It is not easy to get a high rank. Instead of giving it to them they assign it to a Buddhist person. So that it is not easy.”*** - “Thein Soe” (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

***“Like in officer training, some Muslims went to the training, but when it was finished, they weren’t chosen. Some people felt upset that they couldn’t be officers. They used a lot of their parent’s money when they studied, but when they finished the officer training they weren’t allowed to be officers. So they felt bad and ran away. They became deserters.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

## **Land Confiscation and Destruction of Homes**

By law, all land in Burma is owned by the state, and Muslims have often had their land seized by the SPDC and its predecessors and given to others. Forced relocations have taken place in cities, towns and villages whenever the SPDC decides it needs the land. Muslim land has often been targeted in these relocations. For example, in mid-1995 Burmese authorities wanted to establish a major base for Light Infantry Battalion #547 in Nabu village of Pa’an District, Karen State. One day they suddenly blocked off the entire Muslim portion of the village and posted signs reading “Army Land, Do Not Enter”; no compensation was paid [see ***“The Situation in Pa’an District”*** (KHRG #96-17, 5/96)]. In recent years when Burmese troops have occupied formerly Karen-controlled areas of Karen State, they sometimes evict all Muslims from an entire area and take the land for Army camps. In February 1997 when Burmese troops occupied Kyaikdon, a principal trading village on the Han Thayaw River in Karen State’s Doolaya District, they burned the Muslim school, then blew up and bulldozed the mosque.

They also tore up the copies of the Koran and scattered them in the village streets. Muslims attempting to return to the village were told to get out and “go back to your country”, that they would not be allowed there anymore. One villager claims that a signpost was erected on the outskirts of Kyaikdon reading, “No Entry for Indians” (meaning Muslims). Most of the Muslim families in this area have lived there for generations. Most speak Burmese as a first language but also speak Karen. Some even speak Karen as a first language, and some refer to themselves as “Black Karen”. One large group of about 100 Muslims was “deported” from the Kyaikdon area on bullock carts to Kwin Kalay. On arrival at Kwin Kalay, they were robbed by SLORC troops and told they could not stay there either. [For interviews on the destruction of Kyaikdon’s Muslim community see ***“Refugees from the SLORC Occupation”*** (KHRG #97-07, 5/97)]. An SPDC Army camp has now been established on the former site of the Kyaikdon mosque. In Karen State the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) has also been responsible for the destruction of Muslim homes and villages [see the section ***‘Karen Discrimination Against Muslims’*** below]. According to one Muslim villager whose home was destroyed, DKBA officers said they were acting under SPDC orders when they destroyed the mosques and Muslim houses in T’Kweh Po and Shwegun villages of Pa’an District in 2000 and drove out the Muslim villagers. This may only have been an excuse to divert the blame, as DKBA soldiers have destroyed Muslim villages in the past to gain farmland or to build military camps or pagodas.

***“It is a DKBA area. They [a DKBA column] came on that day and told the villagers who stay there that they had come to destroy the place under the orders of Khin Nyunt [Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the SPDC]. When they came to destroy the mosque they said they did it because General Khin Nyunt ordered them to do it, so they had to do it. They then did it by force.”*** - “Aye Ghaw” (M, 35), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #8, 10/01)

When land is to be confiscated for purposes such as Army camps, it is often Muslim land which is targeted first. Nothing is ever given in the way of compensation. Sometimes the SPDC allots new land to the people, but it is usually poorer land and they must then build new houses at their own expense. Forced evictions have become common in Rakhine State as a way of providing land for Buddhist Burman and Rakhine settlers. Muslims have also been evicted from their homes in central Rangoon in order to provide housing for some SPDC military officers, and to obtain land to sell to foreign corporations for factories. The Muslims were forced to move to ‘new towns’ outside Rangoon such as Hlaing Thaya, Shwe

A 'New Town' built on the outskirts of Rangoon where people have been forcibly relocated from central Rangoon. [Independent source]



Pyi Thaya and Ta Gone. They had to build their new houses with their own money, but they were not allowed to build a mosque in which to worship.

***“The other thing is that the government confiscated and used some of the land belonging to Muslim people who live in the middle of Rangoon. ... They confiscated it as though they were trespassing. After that they gave them [Muslim houses] to the people whom they wanted to stay there like the officers. ... For them there are the ‘new towns’ like Hlaing Thaya, Shwe Pyi Thaya and Ta Gone on the north and south sides. They moved them to the new towns. It is like they replaced them with others to live there. But they had to build their [new] houses with their own money. It is close to Rangoon in Toh Chaung Lay. It is in the Thingangyun area. On the other side we call it Tha Gyi village. It is outside of Rangoon. Then they don’t allow the Muslims to build a mosque. It is like in Rangoon where some of the mosques are very old and we want to repair them, but they don’t allow us to repair them.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

## Forced Labour

Muslims in both the towns and the villages are forced to perform forced labour for the SPDC. Forced labour in the towns is not as heavy as that demanded from rural villagers. Muslims from various towns interviewed for this report said they felt the amount of forced labour demanded from Muslims was the same as is demanded from other ethnic groups. They said that the bigger distinction was between rural villagers and townspeople. They also indicated that forced labour had decreased in many urban areas since the visit of the International Labour Organisation High Level Team to Burma in 2001, but that they now have to pay money instead.

***“Q: Do you have to do more labour than others because you are Muslim?”***

***A: Inside Burma it is the same. Everyone has to do the same forced labour equally. But concerning religion we get more pressure. The other things are equal. ... But it decreased later because of ILO [International Labour Organisation] pressure. Even though it has decreased there are a lot of people in the hills who don’t know much about that [the supposed SPDC order to stop forced labour]. They still use it with people who don’t know much about it very well. They always use forced labour. It is still happening until now.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

Most of the labour demanded from townspeople consists of short-term ‘loh ah pay’ like digging ditches along roads and cutting the grass in front of SPDC offices [‘loh ah pay’ is supposed to mean voluntary community work but the SPDC uses it to call for forced labour; villagers and townspeople in Burma use ‘loh ah pay’ to mean short-term ad hoc forced labour, as opposed to labour on infrastructure or military portering]. The work is done by rotation based on town sections (‘wards’ or ‘quarters’) and is

mostly done on Saturdays and Sundays. SPDC demands for porters or sentries are not common in the towns. The townspeople are usually able to pay to avoid having to go for portering or sentry duty. People who do not pay may be arrested and put into mediaeval-style leg stocks. They then have to do the work anyway and often have to pay a fine. Money is also collected for bamboo and wood to be provided to the Army. The money is collected from each house in a ward. The SPDC says they will use the money to buy the wood and bamboo, but they often simply pocket the money and force rural villagers to provide the wood and bamboo instead.

***“We had to make a road. We had to do ‘loh ah pay’ [forced labour] beside the road, fill the holes and make a dike when I went there. They didn’t have to clear the route of the road. They just had to pile the rocks alongside the road. People had to do it. It was on the road between Thandwe and Ngapali [where there is a tourist resort]. There was only that road.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

***“[T]here is ‘loh ah pay’ on Saturday and Sunday. We have to cut the grass in front of the [SPDC] office and burn it. We don’t have to make a road. Sometimes we have to dig ditches. If they have become filled with mud we have to dig ditches. We have to dig them on Saturday and Sunday. ... Before they did that, but later they didn’t demand it anymore. We have to pay for porters and for sentries. We also have to pay for an ‘iron road’. I don’t know what it is, they demand we pay for an ‘iron road’. ... We have to pay 125 Kyat for everything. Every house has to pay. Everybody has to pay. The people from the office [the township or division PDC office] will take action. There are some people whom they have taken action against. They put them into the stocks [mediaeval-style leg stocks] and order them to cut the grass in front of the office. They also have to dig the mud out from beside the road [in the ditches] and fill the holes in the road.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

***“There are townships and the division. The orders go step by step. From the quarter to the hundred houses section leader, from the hundred houses section leader to the ten houses section leader. They order the money collected step by step and the money that they collect they share out among themselves. So the people who go to cut the bamboo have to go and cut the bamboo. Some of them who don’t want to go give money. The money they get from that they also share out. What happens in the village is that the people in the villages can’t pay money, so they have to go for ‘loh ah pay’. So when***

***they have to go for ‘loh ah pay’ they have to cut bamboo and trees. They get the bamboo and they get the money, but the civilians have to suffer. They demand the money from the people in the town. But the reality is, do they pay the people [who cut the bamboo]? No, they don’t pay. The people in the mountains have to work for them for free. The people in the town have to give money because they don’t want to go [for loh ah pay]. So this is useful to them [the SPDC]. They do things like this in every place. For our people it has become normal for us.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

Muslims are subject to the same demands for forced labour as other villagers in rural areas. Muslims interviewed by KHRG from Karen State did not report being taken more often than Karen villagers. The SPDC and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) force villagers to work at digging ditches, filling holes in roads, building bunkers, fetching water, building fences and cutting the brush around Army camps. None of the work is paid. Villagers usually have to bring their own food and always have to bring their own tools. Most of the work, like road building and digging bunkers, is done by rotation until the job is complete. Other work like short-term portering and working at the Army camps is done on a constantly rotating schedule.

***“The car road isn’t finished yet. They are planning to do it as a three-year project. They have a bulldozer but they just kept it there. They didn’t use it. We heard that the Naing Ngan Taw [the State] let them use it for construction. The camp is doing the construction, but they just use people in our place. They just keep the bulldozer stationary. ... We had to make the car road. They are making a car road from Ka Ma Maung to Papun and to Thaton [an existing road which they regularly have to rebuild]. They were constructing the car road there. People had to dig ditches, break rocks, carry rocks and fill holes. Then we told them that we couldn’t do it. They said, ‘If you can’t do it, you can’t stay here, go away.’ They drove us out. We couldn’t work so we came up here.”*** - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

***“They forced us to work at many things. We had to make the road. It is the road from Ka Dtaing Dtee to Papun. We had to go and carry rocks and to break rocks. We had to lay the stones on the car road. They didn’t use a car for that work. We had to carry them ourselves and fill the holes ourselves. ... We had to cut the brush and the forest. We had to work at their Army camp. We had to build toilets. If the brush beside their Army camp grew too abundant, we had to cut it for***

**them. We had to cut the grass. We had to make fences for them. We also had to build houses for them. ... There are over 50 houses. One person from each house had to go every day. Sometimes we couldn't bear it any more. We had nothing to eat. We went to ask for food [from friends]. We told them we would work for them, but they told us they didn't have any [food]. ... Ah! Whatever they forced us to do, we had to do it all. We had to dig trenches and we had to dig ditches beside the road.**" - "Soe Naing" (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

**"They have the military in the town, Ka Ma Maung. If they need water, we have to go and fill the water and carry the water for their military. The camp is far from the river and they have a well. Even though they have a well they still force us to do it. ... We had to do everything for them. The only thing we didn't have to do was to wash their anuses. We had to do everything else. Yes, we had to go and make fences for them. They stipulated the area and forced us to fence it. If they specified 10 feet then we had to do 10 feet. If they had to do 15 feet then we had to do 15 feet. That was for one family. They also stipulated the time. If they forced us to do it in two days then we had to do it in two days and if they forced us to do it in one day then we had to do it in one day."** - "Win Zaw" (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa'an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

**"They ordered us to work at many things. Sometimes we had to carry their baskets, and sometimes we had to do whatever they ordered us to do. We had to make concrete. They forced the civilians to make a road. They ordered us to make the road. They just forced civilians to work. ... [T]hey forced us to work outside. If they went, we also had to go. They forced us to work where they lived, for 'loh ah pay'. They let us come back after that. They demanded two people for 'loh ah pay' so two of us went. But when the column came to take a rest in the village, they forced us to work around them. They forced us to do whatever they needed. If they ordered us to go and send letters to another village, we had to send them to that village. If they ordered us to go and summon people, we had to go and call that person. If they ordered us to work then we had to go and work. It was like that."** - "Than Win" (M, 45), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa'an District, Karen State (Interview #12, 10/01)

Muslims are forced to do short-term portering of supplies up to SPDC camps and also to go for longer-term portering for operations at the frontline. Muslim porters and workers sometimes receive harsher treatment than Karen or Burman villagers due to the racism of some SPDC soldiers and officers. Porters

who are unable to carry their loads are beaten and killed or left beside the trail to die. A Muslim man from Papun District interviewed by KHRG described how he was repeatedly beaten on the head with a stick until he fell unconscious. He was then left beside the trail to die.

**"They hit my head and my head was split here [indicating where his head was cut]. They hit me five times with a piece of bamboo. It was as big as a torchlight. Eh! I was bleeding. I bled all over my body. The SPDC commander himself hit me. I don't know the commander's name. He was from a battalion from Division #66. It was because I couldn't carry anymore. They forced me to carry six 81mm [mortar rounds]. It was at Pa Lone village, inside Pa Lone village. They thought I had already died and they left me. They left me beside the bullock cart track. There is no car road. They thought I had already died and they left me beside the track. It was before I came here. It was in 2001. ... There were five people. They were from different villages, so I just knew one of them. His name was E'Ser May. He was from the same village as me. They beat him dead in front of me. He was younger than me, about 40 years old. It was because he couldn't carry. They helped him to stand up with his load, but when they left him alone he collapsed again. He couldn't stand up so they hit him with the butt of a gun two times. He died immediately. They didn't bury him. They threw him into the bushes."** - "Soe Naing" (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

**"We had to carry bullets and baskets of rice from Ka Ma Maung to Ka Dtaing Dtee. Sometimes they took us from Ka Dtaing Dtee to Papun. People were hit and pounded if they couldn't carry the loads. There is a lot of malaria over there. We saw a lot of dead people. It was like this, they carried and carried but when they couldn't carry anymore they apologised to the soldiers, 'A Ko [brother] please, we can't carry anymore.' They swore at us when we told them we couldn't carry anymore, 'Nga Loh Ma [I fuck your mother!]. Don't talk so much.' Then they hit them with gun butts and they died. Some of them couldn't carry anymore and they just left them like that. Some of them they killed with injections. It happened one month before I came up. It was in about April [2001]. ... People had to take turns and go every week. They told us that it was for five days, but they didn't keep their promise. Even though they said five days sometimes it became a month and sometimes it became a year. We had to bring the new column when they rotated their troops. ... They took porters when they went to the frontline and they still kept porters who take turns [he is differentiating between long-term**

**operations porters and short-term porters who go by rotation]. There are 180 houses in our village. If they demand five people then we have to give them five people every month, but it is not always five people. Once a month they come back and change the porters. If we have already paid for the porters or we have already given people for portering then we can work freely. ... There were 50 or 60 with one battalion. They were from every nationality, Muslim, Karen, Burman. They were mostly Karen people. There were two or three kinds [of Karen], but I only understand the language that they speak here [Sgaw Karen]. ... We just wore our own clothes. Sometimes they arrested us on the path and we only had a shirt and a sarong. So sometimes we only had one shirt and one sarong for 10 or 15 days. Sometimes we had to wear it for a month.” - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)**

**“We just followed their column. It was like this. They went for four or five days and came back. They took a rest for four or five days when they came back and then went again. They just go back and forth like that. ... The SPDC demanded ‘wontan’ [‘servants’] and porters. We had to go. If we had to go, then we went. They punished us in many ways when we couldn’t pay money. They used forced labour in every village. There are nine villages in our Per Tat village tract; Ku Su, La T’Weh, Kyaw Sein, K’Weh Pah, Ba Ma Sut, Kayin Sut and Per Tat Ka T’Gone [he only names seven villages]. There are nine villages in the one village tract. When they [the soldiers] came to ask [for forced labourers] they went to the chairman and demanded whatever they wanted. All the people in the village tract had to give whatever they demanded. It was like that. We had to give as a group. They fined the people who couldn’t pay. We couldn’t bear that punishment so we left and came here.” - “Than Win” (M, 45), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #12, 10/01)**

**“We had to make bunkers. We had to follow them as porters. When we were in their hands [under SPDC control] we had to do whatever they ordered us to do. We couldn’t stay without doing it. We had to follow them when they went to the frontline. Sometimes it was for 15 days and sometimes one month. Sometimes there were some people who were lost [who didn’t come back].” - “Min Sein” (M, 55), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #13, 10/01)**

Muslims who do not want to go for the forced labour must pay fees to the local Army camp or Village Tract Peace and Development Council. The amounts they must pay vary depending on the village and the Army

camp. A Muslim villager from northern Pa’an District in Karen State told KHRG his village had to pay 3,000 Kyat each month to avoid portering. Villagers who are unable to pay the fees and who do not go for the labour are put into cells or are locked in mediaeval-style leg stocks until their relatives or the village head pays for their release. SPDC and DKBA camps also demand materials such as thatch shingles, bamboo and wood from the villagers. These must usually be gathered by a specified date and sent to a nearby camp. If wood, bamboo or thatch cannot be found, the villagers must buy it and give it to the Army camp. Cattle traders are often intercepted by SPDC or DKBA patrols while walking their cattle to the border to sell in Thailand, and forced to pay large amounts in ‘taxes’ for their cows and buffaloes. Sometimes their cattle are simply stolen and then sold by the soldiers.

**“Now we have to pay more for the porters. We had to pay 3,000 Kyat per month. We have to go ourselves if we can’t pay. They put us in cells if we can’t go. The cells work like this: they put us into the cells for 10 to 15 days. If our relatives and siblings aren’t happy about this then they pay money to the police. They pay 1,000, 1,500 or 2,000 Kyat and then the police release us. It happens a lot.” - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)**

**“We can’t stay in our village anymore because we are between the [SPDC] camp and the DKBA. We also don’t have a nationality. We are the Muslim nationality, and they are oppressing us. We had to pack rice in the morning and go for ‘loh ah pay’. Sometimes they fined us if we didn’t go. They put us in the stocks [mediaeval-style leg stocks], hit us, pounded us and punched us. We sold, sold and sold what we had and worked for them. We had a bullock cart and sold it, we had cattle and we sold them. We sold them and we ate and we worked for them. Because of that we had nothing to eat anymore. If we didn’t go they put us in the stocks, hit us and punched us. Our sons and daughters were the same, we were all the same. They hit, pounded and punched everybody that they could arrest. They didn’t care whether we had food to eat or not. We had to work for them. They forced us to work. We had a bullock cart and we sold it to eat. We had cattle and sold them to eat, everything. We don’t have anything. They were oppressing us. We lived between the [SPDC] camp and the DKBA. ... Some people who have money pay money [to avoid having to go for forced labour]. People like us, who don’t have money and don’t have flat fields or hill fields, sell what they have and buy food to eat. Some people who have a little bit of money have shops and they sell goods so they can eat. ... It is 500 Kyat per day. That is for**

**one family. For example, I can't go, so I pay 500 Kyat and hire one person.**" - "Soe Naing" (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

**"Even though there wasn't any [forced labour] this year, they still demanded money. We didn't have to go, but they ordered us to pay money. The elders in the village [the village heads] demanded money. They demanded money for 'loh ah pay'."** - "Min Sein" (M, 55), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa'an District, Karen State (Interview #13, 10/01)

**"We have to send it to Daw Lan because there is an Army camp there. We send it to the elders [the village heads] and they go to send it [to the Army camp]. We have to give 20 shingles of thatch per year. If they demand 40 pieces of bamboo, then we have to give them 40 pieces of bamboo and if they demand 50 pieces of bamboo, then we have to give them 50 pieces of bamboo. The civilians buy it and give it to them. We just collect money and buy it. We just give them money."** - "Than Win" (M, 45), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa'an District, Karen State (Interview #12, 10/01)

**"When we came up with the cattle they put one of the cattle owners in handcuffs and demanded 10,000 Kyat for each cow [as a tax]. The cattle owner told them, 'We can only get 2,000 Kyat for each cow. It should be enough if we give you 500 or 1,000 Kyat for each cow. We also have to pay the people we hire so we will lose either way.' Then they [DKBA] said, 'You can't do that,' and they threw down the handcuffs. Then they ordered him to lock his hands. He told them, 'I won't put on the handcuffs.' Then they punched him two times. Our boss said, 'OK, if you want to take it [the money] then take it. If you take it [10,000 Kyat for each cow] my money will be lost.' Then he let them eat [an expression meaning to gain money through corruption]. 'It doesn't matter what you eat,' he said, 'But if you take it I swear that your whole group will be destroyed.' They put the cattle owner in the stocks [mediaeval-style leg stocks] for one night after he spoke like that. They released him early the next morning and he came here [to Thailand]. He came with me."** - "Kyi Thein" (M, 17), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa'an District, Karen State (Interview #9, 10/01)

## Religious Persecution

There is no state religion in Burma, but successive Burmese governments have identified themselves strongly with Buddhism. Muslims and Christians have come under increasing pressure in the past five years and the SPDC has been singled out in various reports by international organisations and the United States government for violating religious freedoms. Churches and mosques have been forced to close, pastors and Muslim religious figures have been harassed and Christian and Muslim villages have been forced to construct pagodas. The abuse against Muslims, however, has been more widespread and attempts have been made to rally the public behind the abuse. Some of the abuse has been official, such as the closure of mosques, while the more outward forms have been supposed 'spontaneous acts' of the populace, although with obvious signs of instigation by the regime.

Laws in Burma dictate that large gatherings are not permitted. One such law, although not always enforced, states that gatherings of five or more people are not allowed and the participants may be arrested. This law was declared following the pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 and has never been repealed. Muslims must ask for permission before celebrating major religious holidays or holding religious ceremonies. This permission must be sought at all levels, from the Township Peace and Development Council up through the State or Division Peace and Development Council and the Military Region Commander. Permission may be revoked at any point on the way up the chain. If the ceremonies or celebrations are held without permission, the Army and police may intervene, arresting the organisers who are then given long prison sentences by the SPDC-controlled courts. Since the anti-Muslim riots in 2001 [see the section '**Anti-Muslim Riots and Military Operations**' below] Muslims in the cities where they occurred have been prohibited from attending their mosques or gathering in groups to worship. Only a handful were allowed to attend the funerals of those killed in the May 2001 riots in Toungoo. Since then, many have only been able to worship quietly in their own homes. In Tamu on the border with India, Muslims have also been banned from using mosque loudspeakers to call the faithful to prayer, which is the normal and accepted practice throughout the Muslim world.

**"We can worship. But we can't do what we want to do on special days. People can't preach or do special programs. They have been forbidden to do all these things. They don't allow us to build mosques. The Muslim people notice that they are being watched everywhere at whatever they do, so they do things secretly and quietly. They worship and do other things quietly. It means**

**that we have to do it secretly. They still allow us to worship, but if they see a lot of people they suspect something. So the people there are afraid. Whatever they do they have to do it quietly.**" - "Than Maung" (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #02-20-24, 2/02)

**"[W]e can worship, but we have to stay under their strict administration so we don't have freedom of worship. We have to ask for permission if we want to hold a religious ceremony or if we want to celebrate the days of special significance. We have to wait until we get permission and then we can do it. We can't do it if they don't give us permission. We often have to face these kinds of problems. ... Our Muslim people worship five times a day. We use a loudspeaker to gather and invite the people to worship, but they have forbidden us to use it. They don't allow us to use it. They told us, 'Why do you have to use it? You cannot use it.' So they forbade us, threatened us and took action on us. They often do things like this to us."** - "Aung Myint" (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

The SPDC has instituted a ban on the construction of new mosques and churches. Permission to build new mosques or religious schools must be received at all levels up to the Regional Command Headquarters responsible for the entire State or Division. They cannot be built without the permission of the Military Region Commander. Repairs on the interiors of the mosques are allowed, but not on the outside. Money for the upkeep of mosques does not come from the Religious Affairs ministry of the SPDC or any other branch of authority, it is donated by members of the Muslim community themselves. Despite having enough money from these donations to repair the mosques, Muslims are still usually not granted permission to make repairs to the mosque exterior. The apparent aim of this policy is to make Muslims ashamed of their faith and to create a false public impression that mosques are shabby places and Muslims are too poor or lazy to maintain them, with the longer term goal of eventually condemning the unmaintained structures and tearing them down never to be rebuilt. According to a report from the Arakan News Agency, an anti-SPDC documentation group, two mosques were destroyed in Upper Pruma village and Lower Pruma village of northern Rakhine State during the second and third weeks of April 2002. The two mosques were destroyed by a Na Sa Ka (Border Security Administration) commander who declared that the mosques had been built without permission from SPDC authorities. No such ban has been placed on the construction or maintenance of Buddhist monasteries. Instead, SPDC leaders have poured billions of Kyat in state funds into pagoda construction with the intention of making Buddhist

merit for themselves, and Christians and Muslims are often forced to contribute money to and work on the construction of new monasteries and pagodas. Monasteries and pagodas have also been built alongside or within Christian and Muslim villages, especially in Chin State and Sagaing Division in Burma's northwest and in Karen State in the southeast.

**"Even though they are allowing us to repair the mosques, they are only allowing us to repair the insides. They don't allow us to fix the outside. So we can only repair part of the mosques. We aren't allowed to repair them completely. If we build it a little high they say it is too high and order us to take it down. We can't build whatever we want to build. We look at it and it makes us depressed. We have to face that kind of problem in our area. I just want to tell you a little bit about this. We have finished fixing the insides of the mosques now. We were able to fix it with the money that people gave through donations. ... We were able to make it good and smooth inside, but we weren't allowed to do the outside of the mosque even though we had the donations to make it good. If we did it without their permission, they would take our land. We have to face a lot of problems. ... There are a lot of Christian churches [many of the Naga and Chin people in the area are Christian]. There were a lot of Christian churches which were being built but they [SPDC] have now ordered them to stop building them. They don't allow them to build anymore. The Muslim mosques are the same. But they do allow people to make Buddhist monasteries. There are no problems to do that. There are about 30-40 churches that were being built but have now been ordered to stop. ... The next thing is that right now in the border town of Tamu there are some religious buildings. The donors have already donated money to build a new building, but they aren't allowing us to build it. What we have to do is we have to report it to the township person in authority. After that we have to report it to the district. After the district we have to report it to the division. After that we have to report it to the [military] headquarters. After the headquarters gives permission, we can build it. So they don't allow us to build religious buildings. In the same way they also don't allow people to build all their Christian churches easily."** - "Aung Myint" (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

**"The next thing is that they aren't allowed to repair any of the mosques or build new ones. When the number of people in the community increases, they become a new community and they want to build a new mosque. But they aren't allowed to do it."** - "Thein Soe" (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

***“We can’t worship and we can’t open the big mosques. The Muslim groups in Hlaing Thaya new town and Shwe Pyi Thaya new town want to gather and build a mosque to worship in. If they were Christian people then they would want to build a church also. In the same way we want to build a mosque ourselves, but we can’t.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division, talking about how Muslims forcibly relocated from Rangoon to ‘new towns’ outside the city have not been allowed to build mosques in the new communities (Interview #3, 2/02)

Muslim leaders have been told by the SPDC that they are responsible for their congregations if anything happens. Religious leaders in Sagaing Division have been warned not to mix religion with politics. Some leaders have been ordered to sign copies of regulations dictating how to control their people and agreeing to do nothing against the regime or its authorities. This is a clear threat which the SPDC uses throughout Burma to ensure that its authority is not questioned. Village heads, religious leaders and other community leaders are held responsible for the actions of their people, and townspeople or villagers know that their leaders will be tortured or killed if they do anything to displease the SPDC. This is also used as a way of saying that if anything happens to Muslims it is not the SPDC’s responsibility.

***“For religion they also called the Malawi [Muslim religious teachers], showed them the regulations and ordered them to sign them to control their people, to not make problems and to do nothing against the authorities and the administration. They talked to our mosque trustees. They ordered them to take responsibility.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

The SPDC closely monitors the activities of Muslim religious groups that travel around to different towns for religious purposes. Whenever these groups travel, the authorities at all levels must be notified as to who they are, where they are going and why they have come. Muslim religious figures are usually easily recognisable by their beards and white clothing, and they have come under increased surveillance since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in the United States. Even before that, each year the SPDC has increasingly restricted the number of passports that it issues each year to Muslims to go for the Hajj to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The Hajj is an important part of Islamic life, and all Muslims try to make this pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. However, passports are difficult and expensive for most Burmese to obtain, and impossible for many Muslims because they do not have identity cards. In an attempt to create an appearance of religious freedom, each year the SPDC proclaims

internationally that it is allowing Burmese Muslims to attend the Hajj, but in reality only two or three hundred passports are issued each year for this purpose. Burmese passports are only valid for one trip outside the country, and are issued for a specific destination. The SPDC’s restrictions limit the number of Burmese Muslims who can go for the Hajj to only a rich, well connected and privileged few.

***“There are some Muslim religious groups that travel for religious purposes. They [the SPDC] administer strongly against those kinds of groups. They called a meeting with all the religious leaders there and warned the religious leaders to be careful of the religious groups who are travelling around there. They asked them [the religious leaders] not to mix politics with religion. They are making that restriction strongly. ... For example, one of the religious groups arrives. We call them the T’Pli Jer Ma group. They are the people who are active about religion. We have to report to the district office if that kind of group comes. We have to report it to the District Peace and Development Council and the Township Peace and Development Council. We have to report it to them. After that we have to report it to the township police station, the Army camp and the SB [Special Branch police]. We have to go and report to them where they are staying, the reason they came, how long they will stay, when they will go back and whether they came for political reasons or not. We have to report to every place. We have to start by reporting to the ward [towns are divided into wards, each with their own administration] and then step by step from there. The intelligence unit there is #17 [Military] Intelligence. We report to all the authorities.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

Muslim women who marry non-Muslims are denied rights to any property if they later get divorced. In order for a Muslim to marry a man or woman of a different religion, the local official must be bribed and treated well or he may disapprove of the wedding and threaten the couple if they continue with it. Marriage laws exist in Burma for each religion and there is discrimination in cases of mixed marriages. In Rakhine State a marriage tax has been levied on Muslim marriages. So far this only appears to exist in Rakhine State.

***“The other thing is that if a Muslim woman marries another nationality, what happens is that the Muslim woman’s parents have to treat the person in authority very well. If there is a problem and if the Muslim divorces, he/she can’t take anything back. That is if he marries a woman of different religion. This started in Burma before the end of democracy. The law [the Muslim Marriage Act]***

***has existed since 1954, before Ne Win [Burma's dictator from 1962-88] ruled. The law is like this. This is not the Muslim people discriminating based on religion, it is a law in Burma which separates the Muslim people. If a Muslim man wants to marry a Buddhist but their parents don't agree, and they can't leave each other, then they have to escape and run away. It is happening everywhere. Even if the Buddhist woman agrees, there may be someone in authority who doesn't agree. At that time they have to face a problem. They are threatened.***" - "Thein Soe" (M, xx), Burmese Muslim human rights researcher (Interview #5, 2/02)

## **Karen Discrimination Against Muslims**

The anti-Muslim riots of 2001 did not extend to Karen State, but there has long been ongoing repression of Muslim villagers in the area. There are Muslim communities in the major towns of Karen State: Pa'an, Myawaddy, Kawkareik, Papun, Ka Ma Maung, Hlaing Bwe and Kya In Seik Gyi. There are also majority or mixed Muslim villages throughout the State. Muslims in the towns make a living mainly through selling goods, trading or performing daily wage labour. Muslim villagers farm fields and trade in cattle, especially to Thailand. In mixed Karen/Muslim villages, it is often the Muslims who own the small shops where the villagers buy dry goods, oil and other household items.

Most of the Muslims in Karen State speak Burmese as a first language and many also speak Karen, some as a first language. Some Muslims even refer to themselves as "Black Karen" [*"K'Nyaw Thu"*]. Most of the Muslims in Karen State are descendants of migrants who arrived during the British colonial period. Though many Karens look down on Muslims, in most areas Muslim and Karen villagers have lived together peacefully for generations and the Muslim minority is accepted as part of the community. There has also been some degree of intermarriage between Karens and Muslims. Relations between the Karen National Union (KNU) and Muslim communities have been generally good and some Muslims have joined as soldiers in Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) units.

A common Karen perception held by both Buddhists and Christians is that a person cannot be a Muslim and a Karen. Children of mixed marriages are often referred to by other Karens as 'Muslim' rather than as 'Muslim-Karen' or 'Karen'. Many Karens harbour the same vague and baseless racist views of other ethnic groups; that Muslims are foreigners, poor, dirty,

talk too much and they are too 'clever' in business and take Karen money. Some of the racist feeling seems to be based on a Karen dislike for what they see as forced conversion to Islam of Karen women who marry Muslim men, a perceived loss of rights for women who marry Muslim men and a stereotype of Muslims as being abusive toward their wives. Muslims, for their part, are not unaware of these feelings and many of them feel that the Karens do not always treat them fairly.

When the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was first formed in 1994-95 and allied itself with the Burmese Army, it initially used the backing of the Burmese regime to try to make Karen State much more Buddhist, targeting both Christians and Muslims. While the persecution of Christians quickly subsided and there are even many Christians in the DKBA, some of the DKBA's persecution of Muslims still remains. Karens who have stronger racist feelings towards Muslims have been able to join the DKBA and then act on their prejudices from a position of power. The DKBA has thus earned itself a reputation for mistreating Muslim villagers. Muslim villagers have been forced out of villages while Buddhist and Christian Karen villagers have been allowed to stay. In 1995 at Ka Dtaing Dtee village in Papun District, Muslims were forced from their homes in the market area to the other side of the village, into an area where non-Muslim Karen villagers were living. The Karen villagers were then moved into the previously Muslim area. DKBA soldiers have been known to swear at Muslims and tell them to go back to their 'own country'. A Muslim from Papun District who was interviewed by KHRG said that he felt the SPDC was better because Muslims could talk to the SPDC. He felt that the DKBA do whatever they want and the SPDC does nothing to stop them.

***"I could do that [talk to the SPDC], but under them is the DKBA. The DKBA are never afraid and avoid any orders. If they want to kill, they kill. If they want to hit, they hit. The SPDC still listens to Khin Nyunt's orders a little bit, but the DKBA never listens to anything. ... [T]he SPDC doesn't say anything, even when they go to steal people's things. ... The SPDC listens to us a little bit. They understand, but the DKBA doesn't understand anything. They just do whatever they want. If they want to kill, they kill. They just kill openly. Nobody takes action. They did it in front of the SPDC. The SPDC saw what they did. They hit, they punch, they pound and they kill, but the SPDC doesn't say anything to them. ... The SPDC gives power to the DKBA. They give them full power. 'This is Karen State. You can do whatever you want to do. It doesn't concern us.' The SPDC gives them full power. 'Here is Karen State, Karen people. If you want to kill them, kill. If you want to cut them, cut. It doesn't concern us.' ...***

**Muslim and Buddhist people lived together at Ka Dtaing Dtee. The Muslim people lived beside the road in the market area. They lived there first. There are also Buddhists who live there and they lived on the other side [of the village]. When the DKBA formed [in 1994-95] they came and destroyed all the Muslim homes. After they destroyed them, they ordered the Muslims to stay on the other side, in the place where the Karen used to stay. The Karen people then went to stay in the place where our Muslim people stayed. They ordered them to move the places where they lived. I say this to show that we don't have human rights. They went to stay in the market and sent us into a corner. They destroyed the houses and took some of the houses. To build the houses again we [the Muslims] had to buy materials and build them.”** - “Soe Naing” (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

**“When we built our mosque it was 50 or 60 feet [long]. It was very large. It was very big and had two floors. They [the DKBA] destroyed it. We felt very sorry when they destroyed our big worshipping place. They carried concrete and sand when they passed us sitting in front of our houses and swore, ‘Ma Aye Loh Ka La’ [‘Indian motherfuckers’]. They swore like that. They [DKBA soldiers] didn’t put their clothes on when the [Muslim] women went to carry water from the well. They made a lot of problems. They told us, ‘You don’t have a country. You can’t stay here, go to the Ka La country.’”** - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

In 2000, DKBA #555 Brigade began evicting Muslim villagers from T’Kweh Po and Shwegun villages near Ka Ma Maung. Mosques were destroyed and Muslim houses razed to make way for an Army camp, a pagoda and a road. In Shwegun village a road was built which should only have required the clearing of a narrow swathe, but the DKBA put the road right through the Muslim section of the village and used it as an excuse to destroy all the Muslim houses along it. Villagers were pressured to convert to Buddhism. The villagers of T’Kweh Po were forced to contribute 200,000 Kyat toward a DKBA donation to a nearby monastery. Muslims were also forced to build pagodas. DKBA officers have also ordered Muslims in the area to erect Buddhist shelf altars in their homes. In T’Kweh Po village Muslims were told to leave if they did not build them.

**“They built one pagoda in the middle of the village. They destroyed the mosque first and built a pagoda in place of the mosque. They destroyed it with a bulldozer and built a pagoda instead. They told us, ‘You have to worship our god first.’**

**Then our mosque teacher told them, ‘It doesn’t concern us.’ The religions are opposite. Then they said, ‘You can’t stay.’ ... They built a Buddhist pagoda. That pagoda wasn’t our affair, but they forced us to carry bricks and sand for it. They made offerings to the Buddha and they ordered us to go and build it ourselves. We then told them that it did not concern us Muslims. They said, ‘No, you can’t stay.’ Then they asked for money for a donation at that very hour and second [immediately]. ... They asked for 200,000 Kyat at four o’clock. They were going to kill us if we didn’t give it. There was one monk who said he had a sword, and that if he took it out he couldn’t put it back until he had killed someone. We were afraid of that. The village is a poor people’s village. We asked around here and there to find enough money until we got 200,000 Kyat, and we sent it to them.”** - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

**“On Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2000, in the evening, there were 500 Muslim houses in T’Kweh Po village to the east of the Salween River. It is to the east and south of Myaing Gyi Ngu [DKBA headquarters]. There is a DKBA camp beside it. They stay there. ... They drove the religious scholars out of the mosque. They ploughed and destroyed the mosque with a big bulldozer. A lot of men, women and children were really upset and crying at that time. Then the DKBA leader Lieutenant Pya pointed a gun at the villagers’ heads and said, ‘Tomorrow you have to leave this village. I don’t want to see your faces here tomorrow. This place is not Ka La [Indian] country. The Ka La can’t stay here. The God that you worship is in my hand. You should learn that I am the God that you worship.’ They also ordered the villagers to be vegetarian and to make worship shelves [Buddhist home altars]. The last thing they said was, ‘Are you going to make worship shelves or will you leave this village?’ They demanded for the last time, ‘If you don’t want to leave this village and if you want to stay in this village you have to make a worship shelf and eat as vegetarians.’ They forced them like that. The villagers couldn’t abandon their religion, so they left the village and went to stay in another place. ... They forced the Muslims from that village to build a pagoda. They forced them to carry sand and rocks and other things. They only forced the Muslims to do it. After they finished they asked, ‘Are you going to stay in this village and make offerings to the Buddha and eat as vegetarians?’ They asked them to do that. Then the villagers pleaded, ‘Don’t make us do that kind of thing and don’t make us worship like that.’ Then they [the DKBA officer] said, ‘You have requested to worship your religion freely**

***so your religion is in my hands. You should know that your Allah is just me.’ So the villagers felt upset and left the village.***” - “Aye Ghaw” (M, 35), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #8, 10/01)

***“There is nothing in our village. The [DKBA] Army has built a barracks and an Army camp. They built their monastery. They took the land and the flat fields and now they work them for food. We had land and a flat field. We didn’t even have time to go and take the sugar cane and the paddy. They took it all. ... There is a mosque in Shwegun village. The mosque is in front of the monastery. There are about 100 Muslim houses in front of the mosque. Those 100 houses were destroyed by a bulldozer. They couldn’t take all of their things. They couldn’t even take their pots and cups. They [DKBA] built a road there after they destroyed the houses. They hit and punched the people who went to go and take their pots and cups. They destroyed all the houses, pots and cups with a bulldozer and made their road. There were two Muslim schools which were also destroyed. ... They could have made the road 100 feet wide, but they ploughed down everything, made the road in the middle and now they keep the area around it clear. They don’t allow people to make houses beside the road. They only did that to the place where the Muslim people live. They didn’t do it in any other places. This was in Shwegun at a place where there was no road. ... Now they have to stay in other people’s houses. Some of them have made tents to stay in behind the road. They moved there and stay there. They went to stay beside other people’s houses. Some people who had money went to buy land outside [the village]. Some of them moved to Pa’an. The people without money just stayed like that. If they had relatives they just shared their rooms and lived with each other.”*** - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

***“They [DKBA] asked to destroy it [the mosque in his village] once before. ... Some of them [mosques] were destroyed when they asked before. It was before I came here, in 2001. They had already destroyed the upstairs. I haven’t heard about what happened later on. They don’t destroy them anymore.”*** - “Soe Naing” (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

The DKBA is trying to force Muslims in northern Pa’an District and southern Papun District to become vegetarian. They are fined 5,000 Kyat if they are caught eating meat, and 10,000 or 50,000 Kyat for each goat or cow they are caught slaughtering. They have been forbidden in some areas from even raising animals. Muslims are also fined for fishing. In one

instance a Muslim man from T’Kweh Po village was fined by a monk who caught him fishing and then forced to worship the monk. Although the DKBA claims that its members are vegetarian, villagers and DKBA deserters have consistently told KHRG that outside of the DKBA headquarters at Myaing Gyi Ngu most DKBA soldiers and officers eat meat. Christian villagers in the area have not been forced to become vegetarian. This seems to be an attempt by DKBA commanders in the area to make conditions so difficult for the Muslims that they will simply leave.

***“We couldn’t find and catch fish in the river. We couldn’t breed chickens. We couldn’t raise animals. The DKBA forbade us. We couldn’t breed anything, chickens, ducks, pigs. We could only raise cows. It was because they [the DKBA] are vegetarian. For example, we went around to find fish in the nighttime and caught some fish. Their monk also went around by himself and if he could catch us he would hit us, punch us and order us to worship him. He didn’t look whether it was a man or a woman. He hit us and punched us and ordered us to worship him. We told him we are not his concern, our religion is Islam. Our Islam says that even if they hit us and kill us, we will worship only Islam. They hit us. For example, if we go and find fish and they catch us with one fish, they fine us 5,000 Kyat. We have to give it. They would have killed us if we didn’t give it. We couldn’t bear this anymore so we came to this side [to the refugee camp].”*** - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

***“The other thing was that they forced the Muslims who stayed there [T’Kweh Po village] to become vegetarian. Since that time [in 2000], if they saw any people eating animals or if they saw anyone kill a cow, they fined them 100,000 Kyat. They fined anyone who killed a goat 50,000 Kyat. They threatened us. They are going to fine the Muslim people for every animal they eat. There are some villagers who face that kind of problem. There was one Muslim man who went to find fish. A monk arrested him and ordered him to worship him. He was fined 30,000 Kyat because he wouldn’t worship the monk.”*** - “Aye Ghaw” (M, 35), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #8, 10/01)

***“They fined us when we ate animals. For example, if they saw us eating animals they demanded 5,000 Kyat and we had to pay 5,000 Kyat. If they demanded 10,000 Kyat, we had to pay 10,000 Kyat. We couldn’t stay if we didn’t pay. We had to pay. If we didn’t have the money we had to sell whatever we had, like chickens and pigs. We had to sell them and pay.”*** - “Soe Naing” (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

## IV. Anti-Muslim Riots and Military Operations

Racial or religious riots, primarily against ethnic Chinese or Burmese Muslims, have occurred periodically ever since Burma became independent in 1948, and especially during the period of military rule from 1962 to the present. When they occur on a large scale, it almost always happens to be at a time of growing public outrage at the military regime due to political or military repression, economic problems, food crises and other issues. And almost every time they occur, witnesses testify that the Army, police, or state authorities were the actual instigators. Racial and religious tensions are exploited to inflame Buddhists to attack Muslim communities. Often a simple incident such as a fight or the elopement of a Buddhist woman with a Muslim man is seized upon and embellished. At other times rumours are spread to bring the tensions to the boiling point; mass-produced and anonymous pamphlets of hate literature suddenly flood the towns. The SPDC tried to give the violence a more religious bent when in 1997 it coerced Buddhist monks to incite and commit the violence. This was repeated in 2001. In cases when the civilians and monks refuse to be incited to violence, or where the target population is too large as in the case of the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, the Army takes action openly and directly.

In 1978, the Burmese Army launched Operation 'Naga Min' (Dragon King) against Muslim communities in Rakhine State, driving Muslims out of their villages and toward the border, and raping and killing many of them; over 200,000 Muslim villagers fled across the border into Bangladesh. Many of them later returned. Over a decade later in 1991-92, the SLORC regime faced increasing domestic resentment over its refusal to honour the 1990 election, people were protesting increasing military repression, a massive military offensive in Karen State was bogged down and failing to meet the SLORC's over-optimistic proclamations that it was about to capture the Karen headquarters at Manerplaw, and the Rakhine and Muslim armed groups in Rakhine State were beginning to regroup. The regime's response was to repeat its 1978 operation against Muslim Rohingyas in Rakhine State, simultaneously promising Buddhist Rakhines that they could have the land of the Muslims in the hope that they would join in. Most Buddhists did not join in, but the Army proceeded nonetheless and Muslim Rohingyas were driven out of their villages *en masse* once again, pressed into forced labour or forced toward the border, raped and killed, many of their children murdered. Over 250,000 fled to refugee

camps in Bangladesh, while others crossed the borders into Bangladesh and India and disappeared.

The Bangladeshi government called for help from the international community, and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and several international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) arrived to administer the refugee camps and deliver aid. UNHCR promptly negotiated a deal with the Bangladeshi and Burmese authorities whereby all Rohingyas holding Burmese identity cards would be sent back to Burma, with or without their consent. UNHCR was granted a presence in Rakhine State to 'monitor' the repatriation but assigned only a few protection officers to the project, who spent much of their time in Rangoon, while in Maungdaw, the main repatriation area in northern Rakhine State, they set up their 'protection' office directly across the road from a post of the SLORC's dreaded Na Sa Ka border force which had conducted much of the pogrom to begin with. Since then, with various stops and starts due to the resistance of the refugees and international doubts, all but about 20,000 of the refugees in the camps in Bangladesh have been sent back. An independent survey conducted by Medecins Sans Frontieres to rigid statistical specifications showed that over 60% of those sent back were forced to go against their will. Many were tricked into signing forms to repatriate by being told they were forms to register for food supplies. Others had their ration cards taken away when they refused to go back, forcing their families to starve until they agreed to repatriate. Others were simply beaten by the Bangladeshi security forces and forced to sign the documents. Eventually, only 50,000 were left in the camps, comprised of families where at least one family member had been rejected by the SLORC for unspecified reasons. UNHCR and Bangladeshi authorities then began forcibly dividing these families, sending back all of those except the specific people whom the SLORC had rejected. Now approximately 20,000 remain in the camps.

Back in Rakhine State, human rights abuses against the returnees have been somewhat mitigated by the presence of UNHCR and international NGOs, but many of the promises to return their land to them have not been kept, they are still used for forced labour, most of them are prohibited from obtaining full citizenship cards, and their movements are tightly restricted. Unable to survive under these circumstances and facing continued physical abuse

and arbitrary arrests, tens of thousands have fled back to Bangladesh or are fleeing there for the first time. Unwilling to admit that their repatriation programme has failed, the UNHCR in Bangladesh categorically rejects those who approach them as having 'false claims' or as 'economic migrants'. Knowing that if they approach UNHCR they will be rejected and deported back to Burma, almost all of the new refugees now simply disappear into the illegal labour market and pretend to be Bengali. Ironically, UNHCR in Bangladesh uses the fact that no new refugee claimants are approaching them any more as proof that there are no new refugees, just a small trickle of 'economic migrants'.

In 1997, the SLORC regime was engaged in major military offensives in Karen State and Tenasserim Division; the advancing Burmese troops were burning villages, using thousands of townspeople and villagers as porters, and driving tens of thousands of displaced and fleeing villagers ahead of them. At about the same time the Meh Tha Raw Hta agreement was signed by opposition groups and even some groups which had agreed to ceasefire deals with the regime, calling for unity among all the ethnic and democratic resistance. In early 1997 Buddhist monks in Mandalay also began accusing the SLORC regime of pillaging several Buddhist

Karen offensives and the Meh Tha Raw Hta agreement. Suddenly Buddhist monks appeared in Mandalay claiming that it was Muslims who had looted the pagodas for the sacred rubies, and on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1997 in Mandalay a large group of monks went on the rampage in Mandalay, burning mosques and Muslim shops and terrorising Muslims. Though witnesses believed the marches were led by Military Intelligence men in monks' robes, the communal violence quickly spread to several other cities including Rangoon, Moulmein, Monywa and Kyaukpyu. Both Buddhists and Muslims were killed, and after 'putting down' the violence the regime used it as an excuse to implement further repressive measures against both Muslims and Buddhists.

***"The reason is political. For politics they can't turn on Daw Suu [Aung San Suu Kyi] anymore so they have turned to the Ka La and are pressuring them. All of the Muslim people are suffering. They destroyed the Muslim mosques."***  
 - "Kyaw Tun Win" (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

The anti-Muslim violence in 2001 was the most widespread since 1997. The riots in 2001 may have been intended to draw the public's attention away from the plummeting value of the Kyat coupled with

spiralling inflation, food shortages, and the lack of progress in the SPDC's talks with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. They took place in various cities at different times from February until October 2001; first in Sittwe town of Rakhine State in early February, then Toungoo (Pegu Division) in March and again on May 15-17, Kyaukpyu (Rakhine State) on May 14<sup>th</sup>, then Prome (also known as Pyi, in Pegu Division), Pakokku (Magwe Division), Pegu (Pegu Division), Henzada (Irrawaddy Division) and other towns throughout October. There were also reports of orchestrated anti-Muslim violence in Tantabin, Zayat Gyi, Oak Twin, Pyu, Yedashi, Sein Ywa, and Kyauk T'Ga (all near the Nyaunglebin-



Muslim villagers who fled to Thailand following the SLORC's 1997 Offensive in Dooplaya District. [KHRG]

temples in search of sacred rubies which are believed to give whoever holds them the power to defeat any enemy. The public was outraged, and the SLORC wanted to deflect public anger as well as to divert domestic and international attention away from the

Toungoo-Yedashi main road in Pegu Division), and various places in Rakhine State. In some cases the cause was unclear, while in others the rioting was sparked by specific incidents: in Pegu, a fight in a bicycle shop between a Buddhist monk and a Muslim

worker; in Toungoo, the burning of a mosque by a large group of monks who wanted the land for their temple. In several of the cases it is unlikely that the violence would have spread without being fanned and encouraged by someone in the monasteries. It is widely alleged that most larger monasteries in Burma have at least some monks who are in reality Military Intelligence operatives, whose main function is to watch for anti-SPDC activity among the other monks, but who can also be used to encourage the other monks toward communal violence. In each case the violence spread, and Muslim mosques, homes and shops were destroyed. It is unclear exactly how many people were killed or injured in the riots. In some of the places Muslims fought back and battles with sticks, knives, slingshots and rocks broke out. Muslim townspeople were hit with rocks, slashed by machetes and beaten with sticks. Estimates from Toungoo, where the violence was perhaps the worst, are that between 20 and 40 people, both Muslim and Buddhist, were killed and many more injured. In Toungoo on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2001, a Muslim mosque teacher had his eyes cut out after he refused to worship the monks. He later died. On the same day a family burned to death when their house was set on fire by the mob. Throughout most of the violence the Army and police, usually so quick to crush any public activity, either stood by or held back the Muslims but not the Buddhists.

***“The violations occurred [in Toungoo] in March 1997, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 and May 2001. From May 16<sup>th</sup> [2001] it began happening in the daytime. The previous incidents prove that the monks and the people were testing whether the government and the Muslim community were going to take action. When they knew that no one would take action against what they were doing, they dared to do it in the daytime.”*** - report written by an independent Muslim civilian from Toungoo, Pegu Division (FR1, 9/01)

***“There were four mosques in Pegu that were destroyed. They were Panleit Mosque, Thenerka Mosque, Kayberla Mosque and 1<sup>st</sup> Road Mosque. They didn’t destroy them all at the same time. They destroyed them on separate days. It was four months ago, in about October 2001. ... They destroyed everything that we had inside the mosques. They took the Koran outside the mosques and stepped on it. They also destroyed some of the buildings in front of the mosques. They broke them. Some of them were only partially destroyed.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

***“The majority of the Ka La live in the town because they sell things. They live in the middle of the town. They mostly live in town. If I have to say it, they mostly live in the best places in the town. A***

***lot of them died when it happened, so the others were afraid and left their homes and went to stay outside the town. At that time the government and the people who have responsibility arranged a place for them and let them stay outside the town. Some of them have relatives and they have gone to stay with their relatives. Some of them went to other places.”*** - “Moe Zaw Shwe” (M, 32), Karen Christian villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #6, 12/01)

Following several of the riots the SPDC released strongly worded statements that there should be no more unrest. This was probably just to make it look as though they were doing something about the problem. It is more likely that the intention was to let the violence continue as long as it served the SPDC’s purpose, then stop it before it went beyond their control. No real crackdowns were made against monks or civilians helping the monks during or after the riots, whereas Muslims were arrested during and after the riots. In many cases they were blamed for causing the unrest.

***“The monks. They came in the daytime and entered the mosques and destroyed them. But the people [Muslims] there didn’t do anything against them to make them do it. We felt hurt. We felt hurt by the government. Why? Because the government is the administration, so why can’t they control this kind of problem? They should control this problem because they are the government. The problem of the mosques has made all the Muslim people feel a hurt like there is a fire burning in our hearts. ... They stayed there for about five or six days and then the government drove them out by force. The government drove out the group of monks. We heard it like that. After that they dispersed to different places.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

***“[In Toungoo town] There were times when the incidents could have been stopped during the night in March and on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 so it would not happen again. The authorities had enough time to stop the incidents. But even though the township declared Article #144 [a curfew order] on the evening of May 16<sup>th</sup>, it happened again on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Despite Article #144 being issued again on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the same thing occurred again on the 18<sup>th</sup>. This shows that there was a higher authority behind the authorities who were declaring Article #144 [higher authorities were directing the activities of the monks over the heads of the local authorities]. ... Although killings and burnings were happening in the evening of May 16<sup>th</sup>, only a curfew order was made. The curfew order prohibited people from walking on the streets from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. If***

**the order was violated, the person would be shot by the guards. On that night the Kya Ni Ga Mosque, U Tin Ngway's sawmill and U Thaing Htun and Ma Baby's dry goods and drug store were destroyed, but there were no arrests [for curfew violation] or shootings. ... They were instructed to lock all the mosques again on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2001. The Ya Ya Ka [local Peace and Development Council] then locked all the mosques again. Nobody has been able to enter the mosques anymore since the soldiers went back. They have not been allowed to enter the mosques up to September 12<sup>th</sup> 2001. They have shut down all the mosques. They still have sign boards at all the places where the houses were burned which say, 'Prohibited place, do not enter.' ... After the disturbance there were orders from the monks: the Ka La [Indians, i.e. Muslims] cannot sell things, do not go and buy things from the Ka La shops, do not marry Ka La and do not be friendly with the Ka La. They stuck these orders up all around town. No one tore them down." - report written by an independent Muslim civilian from Toungoo, Pegu Division (FR1, 9/01)**

Permission has not yet been granted in many of the cities like Toungoo and Prome (Pyi) to rebuild the mosques. Muslims have also not been allowed to rebuild their homes and shops. Signs have been put up by the SPDC forbidding people to enter the areas. The sites of the destroyed mosques and homes have been walled up and soldiers and police have also been posted around the mosques. Many Muslims have been forced to stay with relatives or have built houses on land outside the city. In Pegu town, however, the SPDC ordered that the mosques must be repaired. According to one report by a civilian in Toungoo, on the first Friday after the May disturbances people were allowed to worship at the mosques, but immediately after that decrees were made barring more than 5 people from worshipping, and only 30 people were allowed to attend funerals for the Muslims killed in the riots. This effectively shuts down the mosques in Toungoo, and this restriction reportedly remains in place even though there is no similar restriction on Buddhist or Christian ceremonies, or on other public activities such as sporting events.

**"The place [the area of the destroyed Muslim homes in Toungoo] is still closed now. There is no one who has gone to stay there. They [the authorities] wrote, 'It is [your] duty. Do not enter.' They can't go back. People have already confiscated [the land]. They have closed it now, but I don't know what they are going to do in the future." - "Moe Zaw Shwe" (M, 32), Karen Christian villager from xxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #6, 12/01)**

**"The mosques [in Pegu] that they destroyed have been repaired again. When the mosque was rebuilt again the government said, 'You already destroyed the mosque. We won't allow you to destroy anything anymore.' If the monks continued to do it, the SPDC were going to shoot them. The government was going to shoot. The government declared like that. They went around and made the declaration by car [a loudspeaker mounted on a car or truck]. If they continued to do it people would think the government is no good, so the government made that declaration." - "Kyaw Tun Win" (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)**

**"They allowed the people to go to the mosque on the first Friday after the disturbances [in May 2001 in Toungoo], but in the evening of that day they started to make prohibitions. They said, 'More than five people can't worship at one time and you can't have many imams [Muslim teachers] staying inside the mosque.' Even though they allow video shows and football competitions, they are still prohibiting people from going to the mosque. They did not allow more than 30 people to attend the funeral services [for people killed in the disturbances]." - report written by an independent Muslim civilian from Toungoo, Pegu Division (FR1, 9/01)**

The SPDC claims that the violence is 'spontaneous' and committed by monks, but the hand of the regime can be seen in the disturbances. There have been accusations by Muslim individuals who were present and documentation groups such as the Muslim Information Centre of Burma (MICB) that SPDC intelligence, military, police and civilian personnel were involved in the violence. Many of the leaders among the monks participating in the riots are alleged to be intelligence agents, members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA, the SPDC's mass-membership political organisation), or soldiers in disguise placed there to stir up the people. Certainly in every location the police and military stood by while mobs of monks and civilians destroyed mosques and the homes and shops of Muslims. In some places, like Toungoo, this happened for several days before the Army stepped in. One Muslim interviewed by KHRG said the only reason the Army stepped in was so people would not lose all confidence in the government to guarantee their security. Another indicator is that none of the monks or Buddhist civilians were arrested and sent to prison for the riots, whereas Muslims were arrested and sent to prison for fighting back. This is at odds with the usual response of Burmese regimes to large public gatherings or disturbances. Small demonstrations by students since 1990, notably in December 1996, have been met quickly by masses of police and soldiers who soon moved in with water cannons and batons. Although repressions of

demonstrations have been far less bloody than in 1988-90, those participating in them have been arrested and imprisoned for long periods as a result. The SPDC has also displayed no qualms in the past about arresting Buddhist monks for participating in protests and public demonstrations, if those demonstrations are in any way against the regime.

***“From what I heard they were not Burmese soldiers. Some of the monks were real monks and some of them were not real monks. We don’t know where the impostor monks came from. We don’t know which group they belong to. But when it happened it was said that the Saw Thaw [monks] did it. ... If it happens the Saw Thaw go first and the ordinary people follow. Not all of them are Saw Thaw. Only some of them are Saw Thaw, they are mostly civilians. When the Saw Thaw commit violations against the Muslims, the civilians stand up and help them.”*** - “Moe Zaw Shwe” (M, 32), Karen Christian villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #6, 12/01)

***“U Ba Wa Tee’s shop was burned down in the morning of May 17<sup>th</sup> 2001. U Aye Star’s shop was then set on fire at the same time that a military truck was on No. 6 Road [where U Aye Star’s shop also was] and the police were standing on Kaun Thee Gyi Road [in sight of U Aye Star’s shop] and watching. The military truck only made an announcement to not break the law, but no action was taken. ... On May 19<sup>th</sup> 2001, six battalions from Sa Ka Ka [Military Operations Command] #6 in Pyinmana arrived in Toungoo and camped in the city. They camped in all the mosques around Shwe Sandaw Pagoda and in the Tha Thee Na building near Mya Si Gone, on Major Po Kone Road, in the preaching hall and in the playing hall. None of the military stayed in the Railway Mosque. Those soldiers patrolled around at every hour. Since then they have worked against the Muslims more than the***

***Buddhists and put them in jail for a longer time. ... They arrested all the men around Ka Ka Mosque. In some of the houses all of the men and the students [schoolboys] were arrested. There were five men from the G’Ba Paing family in Tine Neh Gone who were arrested. A high school student [one of the G’Ba Paing family] had to go to jail for less time than the others. He had to go to jail for 14 years because he is student. The prison sentences for the other four are more than 100 years in total.”*** - report written by an independent Muslim civilian from Toungoo, Pegu Division (FR1, 9/01)

***“The monks. They wore monk clothes when they destroyed them [the mosques]. All the Muslim people all over the world felt a pain in their soul about this. People don’t think that real religious monks would do this. The Muslim people think that when they [SPDC] have a political problem they just do something to other people. Muslim people think like that. We don’t want to put the blame on them [the Buddhists]. We just put the blame on the government. The government is the authority so why can’t they control this? We just blame the government. ... It looked like one of them wanted to do it and the other one stood by and looked on. It seemed like that. It was just like in Toungoo and Pegu. They [the authorities] had to declare a curfew.”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division, talking about the violence in Prome/Pyi (Interview #2, 2/02)

***“The situation inside Burma now is that five people can’t gather together. If five of us gather and talk, the intelligence and police will arrive. But when the monks gathered and destroyed things, they just stayed put as though they knew nothing.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

## V. The Impact of September 11<sup>th</sup>

Since the hijackings and air strikes against the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, not only Arabs but Muslims of all nationalities have been systematically targeted for discrimination in most parts of the world, but the impact of the attacks in Burma has been limited. The attacks were never announced within Burma on the state-controlled radio or television, or written about in newspapers. The SPDC did not even send a message of condolence until many days after the attack, leading to some speculation that the regime was quietly happy to see attacks against a country which has been so persistently critical of its rule. People did learn of the attacks from shortwave radio broadcasts by the British Broadcasting Company, Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. Videos began to be sold of the attack, but these were quickly suppressed by the SPDC and the sellers arrested. The SPDC is probably worried that these events may inspire Muslim or other groups inside the country to carry out attacks against the authorities.

***“I think a lot of people don’t know. They will know about it later. Why? Because what Bin Laden did to the World Trade Centre has never been shown on television yet. It was never written about in the newspaper. I know about it because I read it in a journal from outside [a magazine published outside Burma]. They never make announcements legally on the radio. They shut information out. Most people don’t know, but later on they will know of it little by little. In the beginning there were a lot of people who didn’t know.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

Despite a lack of any evidence linking Osama bin Laden to the attacks, international speculation quickly focused on him and some observers were quick to speculate on links between Muslim opposition groups in Burma and Osama bin Laden’s alleged Al Qaeda network. Burma was on a list published by Jane’s Intelligence Review of countries with supposed Al Qaeda cells. While it is possible that some groups may have had very loose contact with the Al Qaeda network in the past and there are reports that Burmese have fought in Afghanistan, it is extremely unlikely that any of the Muslim opposition groups in Burma will start launching suicide bombings of targets in Rangoon or Mandalay. Burma’s only armed Muslim groups are focused on fighting the SPDC to obtain a federal democracy, not on establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state, and they have no history of armed attacks on civilian populations (unlike the SPDC). Facing as much racial and religious

persecution as they do, most Muslims in Burma stay well clear of politics and focus on the daily struggle to survive. Interviews with Muslims for this report indicated that many Muslims probably do not know who Osama bin Laden is, or if they do he has not had much of an impact on them.

***“I think that the use of violence is no good. I don’t know if what Bin Laden did is right or wrong, but because of that they have put more pressure on the Muslim people. Muslims don’t think about doing bad things. They don’t think about doing bad things because they don’t have strength. It is like fighting between one person and ten people. It is impossible. If people have brains they wouldn’t do like that. We are living under other people’s pressure.”*** - “Than Maung” (M, 23), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Mon State (Interview #4, 2/02)

Muslims have long been involved in armed struggle in Burma, but the groups have always been small and have not been able to extend their power very far. Muslims were present in the Burmese Communist Party and there have been various Muslim armed opposition groups along the Burma-Bangladesh border. There was also a Muslim armed group, the Kawthoolei Muslim Liberation Front, established on the Burma-Thai border in the mid-1980’s, which mainly fought alongside the Karen National Liberation Army. Burmese Muslims have never been able to rally much support internationally for their cause, even among Muslim nations. Islam as practiced in Burma is not fundamentalist, and the Muslim armed groups are generally seeking a federal democracy, not a worldwide *jihad*. While the SPDC and its predecessors have used terrorist bombings against Muslim villages, the Muslim armed groups have not responded in kind.

***“Some people went to be soldiers. They are the soldiers who stay in the jungle. Not Burmese soldiers, soldiers who stay in the jungle, KNU. Some of them went beyond the border [to Thailand]. They went to any place which was far away.”*** - “Kyi Thein” (M, 17), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #9, 10/01)

SPDC restrictions against Muslims since the September attacks have consisted of increased surveillance of Muslim groups by military intelligence and harsher travel restrictions. One Muslim said that intelligence was particularly interested in Muslims with beards and wearing white clothes. This is the

common dress for religious Muslim men. The Osama bin Laden t-shirts which have become popular among Muslims and non-Muslims alike in other Southeast Asian countries have been banned in Burma, and Muslims wearing them in Rangoon have received three-year prison sentences. People selling the t-shirts have also been arrested.

***“For example, there are the shirts with the pictures of Osama bin Laden on the fronts. Some of the traders were selling those shirts. People in Rangoon who wear those shirts are put in prison for three years. The shop owners who sell the shirts are also put into prison. There were a lot of people who were sent to prison because of this. There are other people [non-Muslims] who wear the clothes. But if other people wear them it is a little better than if Muslim people wear the shirts. Because they are Muslim they are put in prison without asking anything. It seems that they are increasing the pressure on the Muslim people.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

A few of the Muslims interviewed by KHRG indicated that taken as a whole the pressure on Muslims had eased since September 11<sup>th</sup>. Travel restrictions have increased, but there have not been any more riots or destruction of mosques. They felt that this might be because the regime is now a bit more afraid of Muslims, too afraid to launch any more anti-Muslim riots. Most of the other forms of persecution existed before the attacks and have continued afterward to the same degree. One man said that perhaps he should actually thank whoever conducted the attacks in the US because now he did not have to worry anymore about whether mobs would come to destroy his house or the mosque.

***“Before Bin Laden [allegedly] made a problem at the World Trade Centre on September 11<sup>th</sup> they were already confiscating identity cards and pressuring us. They started doing it in 1995. Now it has become stricter, but we can’t accuse them [of anything specific]. We don’t know what they are planning, but it has become stricter.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

***“It has become stricter because the SPDC is afraid that the same thing will happen to them. Nobody can do anything inside Burma now. I mean that we are not free about politics, social relations, business and religion. Muslim people can’t do anything. We aren’t allowed to do anything. ... They were already making pressure before the World Trade Centre. After the World Trade Centre they forbade people from travelling. The rest of the pressure they were doing before. It became stricter afterwards. ... They already do it normally, but after Bin Laden they were concerned about that so they applied a little more pressure. We can’t travel anymore. They are more interested in the people who wear beards and people who wear white dress.”*** - “Aung Myint” (M, 33), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Sagaing Division (Interview #1, 2/02)

***“There were Muslim disturbances before in Burma, but after Bin Laden it seemed like the situation was a little better. I just think like that. ... Burma has been quiet since then [for Muslims]. Before we heard about what was happening to mosques over here and over there regularly. We heard they had made a problem in Moulmein. The next time we heard again, they had destroyed the mosques again. After that it happened again in Meiktila and they destroyed the mosques again. The Army has been quiet a little bit because of what Bin Laden did. They don’t dare to be active anymore. For me, I think I have to say ‘thank you’ to him. It seems like I have to say ‘thank you’ to him. ... It is stricter, but I think that as long as they don’t destroy the houses, there is no problem with the prohibitions. It is no problem even if we can’t go anywhere. It is more important to us that our houses aren’t destroyed. Now Muslim people want to fight the Burmese, but when a big group and a small group start fighting, the small group has to suffer. The big group pressures the small group. This is why we don’t show our heads [they keep a low profile and don’t confront the regime].”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

## VI. Surviving the Persecution

Muslims in most of Burma outside Rakhine State try to keep as low a profile as possible. Most are so impoverished that their primary concern is finding enough money to provide food and clothing for their families. Many Muslims have been relocated to 'new towns' on the outskirts of the major cities after the junta seized their land in the city. The 'new towns' often do not have even the most basic services such as running water or electricity. Many people who live in these slums have to travel long distances into the city centre each day to work. Jobs are hard to find, especially for Muslims, and wages are very low. The situation is desperate enough that many Muslims from the cities have gone illegally to Thailand or Malaysia to find work to be able to send money back to their families.

Oppression in Rakhine State has never really eased for the Muslims who live there despite the assurances of the SPDC and the UNHCR. Religious discrimination, racial violence, forced labour, high extortion fees and the heavy militarisation of the State have left many Muslims so impoverished and desperate that they feel they have no choice but to flee to Bangladesh. The reasons behind the continued flight of Muslims from Rakhine State are ignored by UNHCR officials, who classify them as economic migrants so that they can continue to claim that their 'voluntary' repatriation of Rohingya refugees has been a success. Muslims who arrive in Bangladesh have no choice but to enter the illegal labour market, where they are subject to arrest and deportation by a hostile Bangladeshi government. The SPDC has heavily mined the Burma-Bangladesh border in an attempt to seal it against resistance groups coming in and civilians fleeing out. The result has been the death or maiming of many Bangladeshi and Burmese Muslim villagers who live in the area as well as people trying to flee to Bangladesh.

In Karen State it is becoming increasingly difficult for Muslim villagers to survive in their villages. The constant forced labour and the fees that have to be paid to avoid the labour have left many of the villagers impoverished and starving. They do not have any time to farm their fields or to do other work to get money to buy food. Many villagers end up selling everything they have in order to buy food to eat and pay the forced labour fees. Even for non-Muslim villagers in Karen State the combination of forced labour, systematic extortion, and other abuses have made life almost impossible, so the added persecution which Muslim villagers face simply makes the burden unbearable. The Muslim villagers try to stay on in their villages for as long as they can,

but once everything is sold and the food has run out, they are forced to flee to somewhere else.

***"They forced me to work. At first I had a bullock cart and cattle but I sold them and worked. We were suffering and working for them. After that our bullock cart was gone and our cattle were gone. We had nothing to eat. We had nothing to eat but they forced us to go and work. They forced us to go and work every day."*** - "Soe Naing" (M, 50), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Papun District, Karen State (Interview #10, 10/01)

Some Muslims go to stay with relatives in other towns or villages in Burma. The DKBA has told Muslim villagers in northern Pa'an District that they can move to anywhere else in Burma, but they cannot go to the refugee camps in Thailand. However, a steady trickle of Muslims still flee and seek refuge in Thailand. Muslim families sometimes have to send people one at a time to the camps until everyone arrives. The trip is difficult and they must avoid SPDC and DKBA patrols along the way. Muslims who reach the refugee camps are not welcomed by the Thai authorities, who have their own racist views towards Muslims and sometimes view Muslim refugees in particular as 'troublemakers' for no specified reason. As with most new refugees in Thailand, the Thai authorities reject most new Muslim arrivals, claiming that they cannot be refugees since they are not 'fleeing fighting'. They are allowed to stay in the camps but are frequently threatened with repatriation. The situation is only likely to get worse in the near future, because as of May 2002 the new Thai policy is that 'not one new refugee' will be allowed into the refugee camps. Some Muslims do not go to the refugee camps but to Mae Sot and other Thai towns instead. They try to find work in the towns to get enough money to survive and to send home to family members still in Burma. Thailand's hostile policy toward migrant workers makes working in Thailand risky, and many have been sent back as illegal immigrants.

***"Most of the people want to come to the refugee camp when they are faced with this problem, but the DKBA has dictated that they can move to any other place except the refugee camp. They would kill them if they can arrest them [for going to the refugee camp]. Some of the families send their people one by one until they have all arrived in the refugee camp and meet together. There are just a few people who have come to the refugee camp. Most of the people have fled to the lower places [further into central Burma]. They can't***

***come up to the refugee camp. They can go anywhere but the refugee camp. If they come here they will be accused of contacting the enemy, so they [the DKBA] want to find them to kill them.”*** - “Aye Ghaw” (M, 35), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa’an District, Karen State (Interview #8, 10/01)

***“Living in our place is the best, even with whatever pressure they put on us. Here [in Thailand] is the same. We don’t have work permits so it is difficult for us to work. Some of the bosses don’t dare to call us if we don’t have work permits. They only make work permits for the old people [people who have been in Thailand for a while] in Thailand. They don’t make them for the new people either.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)



Muslim women in a temporary shelter they built after fleeing from SLORC troops in Doolaya District in 1997. [KHRG]

## VII. Conclusion

The Muslim issue is a complex one, especially in Rakhine State. The SPDC's oppression of non-Burman ethnic groups throughout the country is based on race discrimination and military power, and most of the people in the country can see that this is wrong. But when the majority of the civilian population is willing to join with a regime they otherwise detest in order to persecute a minority like the Muslims, this makes the regime much stronger. People of all ethnicities and religions in Burma need to realise that their racism and religious misunderstandings only feed the SPDC's power to oppress them; more than that, they are the very foundation of the dictatorship itself. Many in Burma feel that Muslim religion and culture are too different from their own, yet the difference is no greater than the differences between Buddhism, Christianity, and Animism. Muslims are seen as taking over the land of the Burmese and, as some propaganda puts it, taking over the Burman race. Many Muslims in Burma are relative newcomers to the country and their ancestors arrived with the support of a foreign colonial power. Because of this they are seen as not being true Burmese. But for Muslims, Burma is



the only country most of them have ever known. They were born there, speak Burmese as a first language and consider themselves to be Burmese. They feel that they have just as much a right to live in peace in Burma as anyone else. Neither India nor Bangladesh is their home.

***“[P]eople can worship now. But about this [the destruction of the mosques] some Muslim people feel like there is a burning in their hearts. Buddhist monasteries are the same. If their monastery was destroyed like this, they would feel something also, right?”*** - “Kyaw Tun Win” (M, 27), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Pegu Division (Interview #2, 2/02)

Racism and prejudices against Muslims run deep for some. One need only look at the present communal violence in India to realise that the installation of a democratic regime - particularly a Buddhist Burman dominated regime - may not be the end of troubles for the Muslims. A repeal, or at least a revision, of the 1982 citizenship law must be carried out immediately to allow Muslims to gain the benefits that citizenship entails. This should be one of the first priorities of any democratic regime which may come to power. It is unlikely that this law will be changed under the SPDC, as long as the Muslims provide a convenient scapegoat for the junta and a way of diverting the public's attention from other matters.

***“What I feel and what I need is that we need to get democracy quickly. They do a lot of human rights abuses. Recently, we couldn't worship our own religion. They oppress and divide the nationalities, so we need to get democracy quickly.”*** - “Win Zaw” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx village, Pa'an District, Karen State (Interview #7, 10/01)

Muslim children at their temporary roadside refugee camp in Thailand after they fled with their families from the SLORC's 1997 Offensive in Doooplaya District. [KHRG]

The plight of Muslims in Rakhine State has received some international attention, but the situation for Muslims in the rest of Burma is often overlooked and overshadowed by the problems of other ethnic groups or by the democracy issue. Widespread communal violence against Muslims has stopped for the moment, but Muslims wonder how long it will be before it happens again. It is likely that the SPDC will continue to use the Muslims as convenient scapegoats for problems and as a way of diverting the public's attention away from the economic and political problems in the country. In the meantime, the insidious daily persecution - the refusal of citizenship, travel, work and education restrictions, and religious restrictions - continue, making it endlessly difficult and frustrating for Muslim families to live from day to day. For the Muslims there is no place to go. If they leave Burma as the regime sometimes suggests in editorials in the state-run press, where will they go? Burma is the only country most of them have ever known and neighbouring Thailand, Bangladesh and India do not want them either. In Burma as in the rest of the world, it is imperative that the centuries-old persecution of Muslims be stopped and that the Islamic people, culture and religion be accorded the respect and dignity which they deserve. To think or act otherwise is to play into the hands of dictators and take us all further back into barbarism.

***“We are thinking about that and it is heavy in our hearts. I was born in Burma, I grew up in Burma, I am a Muslim from Burma. We can't stay very easily in Burma. What do we have to do? Which country will accept us? Isn't that right? We can't leave our relatives. Even with what is happening we want to stay in our hometowns.”*** - “Khin Kyaw Mya” (M, 28), Muslim villager from xxxx town, Rangoon Division (Interview #3, 2/02)

# Index of Interviews and Field Reports

This index summarises the interviews and field reports quoted within this report, using the numbers which also appear in the quote captions. All names of those interviewed have been changed. Under 'Dst.' (District), **Pa** = Pa'an, **P** = Papun, Karen State. Under 'D/S.' (Division/State), **S** = Sagaing Division, **M** = Mon State, **P** = Pegu Division, **R** = Rangoon Division. **All interviewees are Burmese Muslims with the exception of Interviewee #6, "Moe Zaw Shwe", who is a Karen Christian.**

## Field Report

| #   | Date | Name | Sex | Age | Town    | D/S. | Summary   |
|-----|------|------|-----|-----|---------|------|---|
| FR1 | 9/01 | xxxx | M   | ?   | Toungoo | P    | Riots in Toungoo, some background on discrimination against Muslims |

## Interviews from Central Burma

| # | Date  | Name            | Sex | Age | Town | D/S. | Summary  |
|---|-------|-----------------|-----|-----|------|------|--|
| 1 | 2/02  | "Aung Myint"    | M   | 33  | xxxx | S    | Travelling trader; religious restrictions, travel restrictions, forced labour, right to citizenship, restrictions on education, effects of September 11 <sup>th</sup>  |
| 2 | 2/02  | "Kyaw Tun Win"  | M   | 27  | xxxx | P    | Car driver; anti-Muslim riots, identity cards, travel restrictions, restriction on education, forced labour, effects of September 11 <sup>th</sup>                     |
| 3 | 2/02  | "Khin Kyaw Mya" | M   | 28  | xxxx | R    | Day labourer; restrictions on education, restrictions on ability to work, identity cards, forced labour, restrictions on travel, effects of September 11 <sup>th</sup> |
| 4 | 2/02  | "Than Maung"    | M   | 23  | xxxx | M    | Travelling trader; identity cards, travel restrictions, religious restrictions, restrictions on education, effects of September 11 <sup>th</sup> , forced labour       |
| 5 | 2/02  | "Thein Soe"     | M   |     |      |      | Muslim human rights activist; identity cards, general discrimination, religious restrictions, travel restrictions  |
| 6 | 12/01 | "Moe Zaw Shwe"  | M   | 32  | xxxx | P    | Trader; anti-Muslim riots, forced labour   |

## Interviews from Karen State

| #  | Date  | Name          | Sex | Age | Village | Dst. | Summary   |
|----|-------|---------------|-----|-----|---------|------|---|
| 7  | 10/01 | "Win Zaw"     | M   | 28  | xxxx    | Pa   | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced relocation, religious discrimination, destruction of mosque, forced labour, DKBA discrimination against Muslims       |
| 8  | 10/01 | "Aye Ghaw"    | M   | 35  | xxxx    | Pa   | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced relocation, religious discrimination, destruction of mosque, forced labour, DKBA discrimination against Muslims, rape |
| 9  | 10/01 | "Kyi Thein"   | M   | 17  | xxxx    | Pa   | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced relocation, religious discrimination, destruction of mosque, forced labour, DKBA                                      |
| 10 | 10/01 | "Soe Naing"   | M   | 50  | xxxx    | P    | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced labour, DKBA discrimination against Muslims   |
| 11 | 10/01 | "Aye Aye Mya" | F   | 33  | xxxx    | Pa   | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced labour  |
| 12 | 10/01 | "Than Win"    | M   | 45  | xxxx    | Pa   | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced labour  |
| 13 | 10/01 | "Min Sein"    | M   | 55  | xxxx    | Pa   | Villager who fled to a refugee camp in 2001; forced labour  |

***“In Burma, the Burmese government puts pressure on the Muslim people. We aren’t allowed to live in Burma. Let’s do a blood test. We will bleed a lot and it is just Burmese blood. Now because we are Ka La, if people order us to go to Ka La state [meaning India or Bangladesh] they will drive us out. We have to stay in Burma. Where are we going to stay? They are making pressure on the Ka La but where are we going to stay?”*** - a 27 year old male Muslim villager from Pegu Division

This statement expresses some of the frustration felt by the Muslims of Burma. Despite having lived in the country for generations, even hundreds of years, the Muslim families who form a minority in every town of every State and Division are looked on as foreigners and illegal immigrants, both by Burma’s ruling military junta and by much of the non-Muslim population.

Denied identity cards and refused the most basic rights of citizenship under the SPDC regime’s racist laws, the Muslims of Burma have to struggle for the simple privileges of going to school, finding a job, applying to a university, even travelling to the next town. They are forbidden to maintain their mosque buildings or build new ones, at the same time as the SPDC authorities call many of them to forced labour building lavish new Buddhist temples. The restrictions make most of them poor, and their poverty leaves them unable to bribe their way out of the most brutal forms of forced labour used by the Burmese military, such as frontline portering. But this is not all - whenever the Buddhist population gets restive under military oppression, the SPDC regime attempts to redirect the anger against the Muslim minority, resulting in riots and killings such as those which terrorised Muslim communities throughout Burma from March to October 2001.

Visible, different, in the minority and unarmed, the Muslims of Burma are easy targets. But as can be seen from the interviews in this report, they have developed mechanisms and methods for survival - and even under the worst forms of persecution, they will not give up their religion or their homeland.

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) was founded in 1992 and documents the situation of villagers and townspeople in rural Burma through their direct testimonies, supported by photographic and other evidence. KHRG operates completely independently and is not affiliated with any political or other organisation. Examples of our work can be seen on the World Wide Web at [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org) . KHRG can be contacted at [khrg@khrg.org](mailto:khrg@khrg.org) .