EBN Statement On Crisis In Shan State

On 13th March 2011 the dictatorship in Burma broke a 22 year long ceasefire agreement with the Shan State Army – North. 3,500 Burmese Army soldiers took part in a military offensive in north-central Shan State, an area with a population of 100,000. Sixty-five clashes were reported in the first three weeks of the dictatorship breaking the ceasefire. Civilians are being targeted in the military offensive, with mortar bombs fired at civilian villages. Abuses committed by the Burmese Army include arbitrary execution, arbitrary detention, torture, looting, rape, forced relocation and forced labour. These abuses are violations of international law. Since breaking the ceasefire, abuses continue on a daily basis.

Under the new 2008 Constitution, the Burmese Army is the only permitted armed organisation allowed in the country. The organisations with ceasefire agreements took part in the National Convention which drafted the principles of the Constitution. Every single one of their proposals which would grant some level of autonomy to ethnic states, and protection for ethnic rights and culture, were rejected by the dictatorship.

The breaking of the ceasefire with Shan State Army – North on 13th March is the third time in the past two years the dictatorship has broken a ceasefire agreement. It is also threatening to break all other ceasefire agreements. This would lead to large scale conflict from Mon State, Karen State, and Karenni State, to Shan State and Kachin State. The result would be a major humanitarian crisis and a massive escalation in human rights abuses against civilians, as the Burmese Army targets civilians in conflict.

The European Union has repeatedly stated that dialogue is the way to solve political problems in Burma. All armed ethnic organisations in Burma, those on ceasefire, and those not, are willing to enter into dialogue. The dictatorship, however, is once again using violence and military force rather than dialogue. It is also deliberately targeting civilians.

Abuses Committed Against Civilians:
The Shan Human Rights Foundation has documented the serious human rights abuses being committed by the Burmese Army in Shan State since it broke the ceasefire. These include:

Shelling of civilians:
On 13th March the Burmese Army fired mortars at Wan Nam Lao village, hitting a temple and killing four novice monks and injuring two other villagers. In another attack 11 villagers were injured by mortars.

Forced labour:
Villagers are commonly being forced to act as porters and guides for the Burmese Army. They are made to carry military equipment and food supplies. In one instance on 18th March 50 women were forced to carry military supplies to Loi Larn mountain for the Burmese Army.

Forced Relocation:

200 families in four villages in Kun Hing Township were told to move to a new village or face their villages being burnt down.

Looting:
Burmese Army soldiers have been looting food, livestock, medicines, blankets, money, cars, and other valuables from villagers. They have also taken farmers oxcarts for transport. On some occasions food that cannot be carried away is destroyed rather than being left behind for villagers.

Arbitrary Detention:
Ten youths from Nam Lao village were tied up and detained at a house by soldiers from the Burmese Army. They were accused of not reporting SSA-N troop movements.

Torture:
The most common form of torture used by the Burmese Army has been severe beatings. One woman in Kesi Township was tied up for a week as punishment for her brother allegedly leading an attack against the Burmese Army. One boy tortured was just 16 years old and was reportedly covered in blood.

Human Shields:
In some cases those people used as forced labour are used as human shields, being made to walk in front, in the middle, and behind the Burmese Army soldiers, to prevent attacks on them, as they know the Shan State Army – North does not want to injure civilians.

Gang-Rape:
Several cases of gang rape by Burmese Army soldiers have already been reported. On 21st March in Nam Lao village, Nang M, a 30 year-old woman, was gang raped by a large number of soldiers. She died immediately after being gang-raped. Another woman was gang-raped in the same village on the same day.

Two women from Wan Pa Tab village were also raped, the exact date is not yet known.

On 23rd March Burmese Army troops from Light Infantry Battalion 291 and Infantry Battalion 33 gang-raped Nang B on a road outside her village. She is 19 years old.

On March 26th a 25 year-old mute woman from Wan Mai Kai village was gang-raped by soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 147.

Arbitrary Execution:
On 19th March 2011 the Burmese Army accused Sai Ar, a 28 year-old mute, of assisting Shan troops, and shot him dead.

We urge the European Union to issue a public statement calling on the dictatorship in Burma to end the use of military force to solve political problems, to end the attacks in Shan State, and for the European Union to also call for a nationwide ceasefire in Burma.

The European Union should provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by conflict, including cross-border aid to areas where aid agencies and others do not have access.

The European Commission should end cuts to funding for refugees in Thailand, and instead increase financial support.

The international community has repeatedly stated that the solution to the problems in Burma lie in tripartite dialogue between the dictatorship, the mainstream democracy movement, and ethnic groups. However, no serious effort has ever been made to secure such dialogue. Efforts to secure such dialogue should be a top priority for the international community, including the European Union, in its engagement with the dictatorship.

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