



Palaung Women's Organization

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Press Release

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Military repression in Burma's northern Shan State fuelling human trafficking to China

A new report released today by the Palaung Women's Organisation reveals alarming rates of human trafficking from Burma into China, fuelled by large scale migration due to increased military repression and economic hardship in northern Shan State.

Stolen Lives documents 72 cases of human trafficking involving 110 people, which took place along the China-Burma border mostly in the past six years. The majority of those trafficked were young Palaung women from tea farming communities in northern Shan State.

Burma's military rulers have tightened control of Palaung areas since the surrender of the Palaung State Liberation Army in 2005, pouring in troops and militia who have imposed increased taxes on agriculture and trading. Unable to survive on the meagre profits earned from tea farming, young Palaung women have been forced to migrate to China in search of work, leaving them exposed to the risk of being trafficked.

'Most Palaung women have no experience of independent travel as they are expected to stay at home and look after their children. As a result, many of the women have no idea they are being trafficked until it is too late,' says Lway Moe Kham, principal researcher on *Stolen Lives*.

Survivors provide harrowing accounts of being forced into marriages with Chinese men or into sex work in destinations across China. Some ended up as live feed for leeches. Young children and babies were also trafficked, some sold by drug-using fathers. Opium cultivation in Palaung areas has skyrocketed in recent years due to official complicity in the drug trade.

The report contradicts claims by Burma's regime that anti-trafficking measures introduced over the past few years are effective, and highlights that the structural root causes of migration and trafficking need to be addressed in order to tackle the problem. Political and economic conditions have worsened in Palaung areas since Burma's recent election.

'A genuine political dialogue which addresses the needs and ambitions of Burma's ethnic groups is a necessary first step if Burma is to solve the complex economic and social problems fuelling human trafficking,' says Lway Moe Kham.

The full report can be viewed at: www.womenofburma.org and www.palaungland.org

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