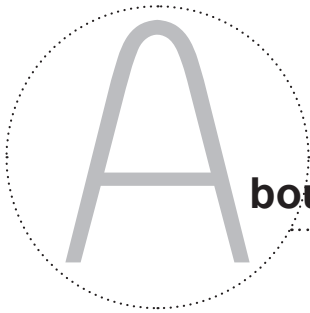


Snap Shot Stories
Invisible Victims
of Trafficking in
Thailand



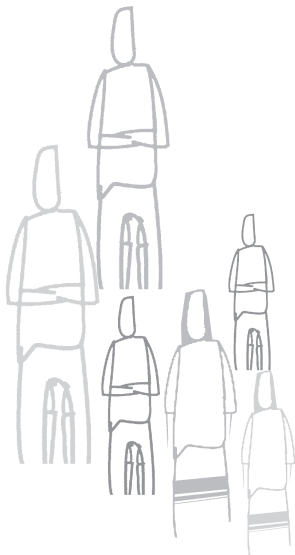
Mahidol Migration Center
Institute for Population and Social Research
Mahidol University



about Mahidol Migration Center (MMC)

[<http://www.migrationcenter.mahidol.ac.th/>]

Founded in 2010, Mahidol Migration Center (MMC) has firmly grounded migration studies at the forefront of Mahidol University Institute for Population and Social Research's multidisciplinary research agenda. MMC's distinguished faculty continues to work strenuously to shed light on migration trends throughout Thailand, in the ASEAN region and globally. MMC researchers and academics continue to demonstrate excellence in academic and action-oriented research on migration with the goal of improving the quality of life of marginalised migrant populations everywhere. With initial funding support from the Rockefeller Foundation, MMC continues to be a lead stakeholder in disseminating timely information about migration, particularly in Thailand. MMC staff continue to be well known amongst and influential with key decision makers engaging in migration policy making in Thailand's Government. MMC seeks to engage all sectors of society impacted by migration holistically, critically and constructively.



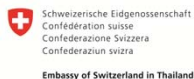
Snap Shot Stories

Invisible Victims of Trafficking in Thailand



Mahidol Migration Center
Institute for Population and Social Research
Mahidol University

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October 2011

Snap Shot Stories from Invisible Victims of Trafficking in Thailand

Mahidol Migration Center (MMC)

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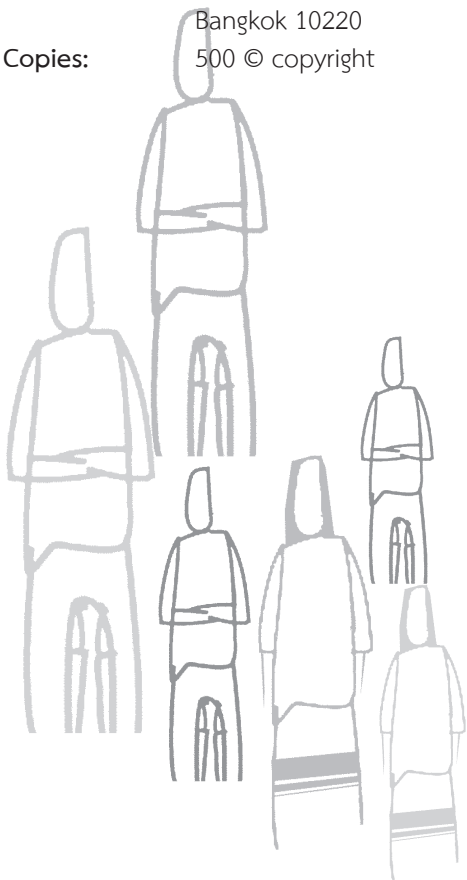
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This book of short stories about 12 trafficking victims from Myanmar would not have been possible without the assistance of many – researchers, fieldworkers, academic advisors, administrative staff and most importantly, the trafficking victims themselves.

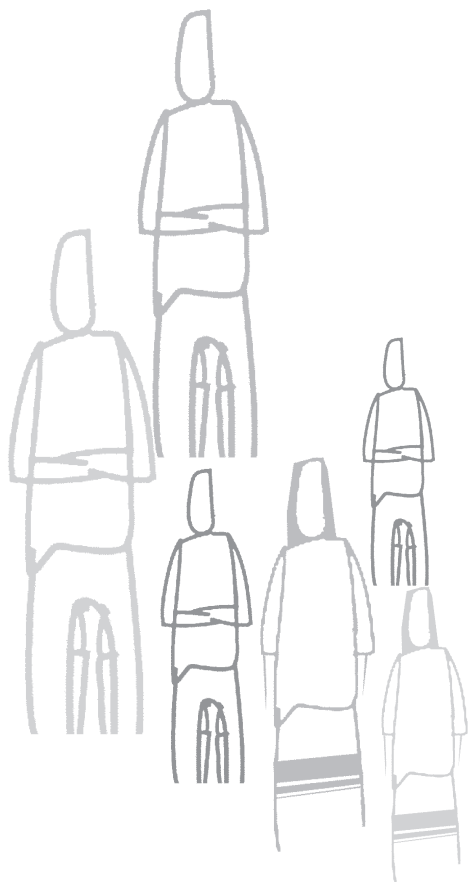
Mahidol Migration Center (MMC) brought together a diverse team for this research project. Everyone worked tirelessly, bravely and with hope to make some difference in giving space to the voices whom this book is about - the trafficking victims themselves.

For some victims, recounting their experiences was painful; for others it made them angry to explain how they were abused for so long. But victims were brave enough to speak to us and tell their stories in so much depth and with such vividness.

Writing the stories down and publishing this book would have been a relatively easy task for us all, if not for the difficulty we faced in summarising these tragic cases in just a few pages. Each victim's story is actually a book in itself....

Mahidol Migration Center
October 2011





F

oreword

Effectively combating trafficking in persons continues to be a pressing challenge in all continents of the world. Trafficking continues to be a heinous crime that plagues Thai society also. Some of the long and complex chain of events that lead to people falling victim to human trafficking in Thailand commence outside of our borders. However, the country remains a transit, destination and sending country for trafficking victims and events that occur inside our borders do play a significant role in undermining efforts to combat trafficking in persons in Thailand. One of the most at risk populations for falling victim to trafficking in persons in Thailand continues to be migrant workers from neighbouring countries, particularly Cambodia and Myanmar.

Human rights frameworks are central to addressing trafficking in persons and well thought out and workable migration policies can also significantly reduce risks. All governments across the world, including the Thai Government, should learn better how to combat the destructive trafficking phenomenon whilst respecting and clearly prioritising the human rights of trafficked persons themselves. Central to understanding human rights in the context of trafficking in persons is to hear from trafficking victims themselves - as those most affected. With this goal in mind, the Institute for Population and Social Research's Mahidol Migration Center assembled this short book to provide a 'snap shot' into the lives of invisible trafficking victims in Thailand - specifically, migrant workers from Myanmar.

The stories of the people that follow in this book rarely get told or heard. But these are the people

most vulnerable to trafficking in persons. These stories need to be heard to learn from bad experiences and so as to ensure people migrating to Thailand in the future do not fall victim to trafficking like all these people did. Although each story in this book is short and concise for ease of reading and reference, it is summarised from extensive data that came from detailed interviewing of all the victims involved. All those interviewed have consented to their stories being published as part of this book. However, so as to ensure confidentiality and security for these trafficking victims also, all potentially identifying information has been removed from their case studies. Pseudonyms are used for names and specific places or locations are not mentioned.

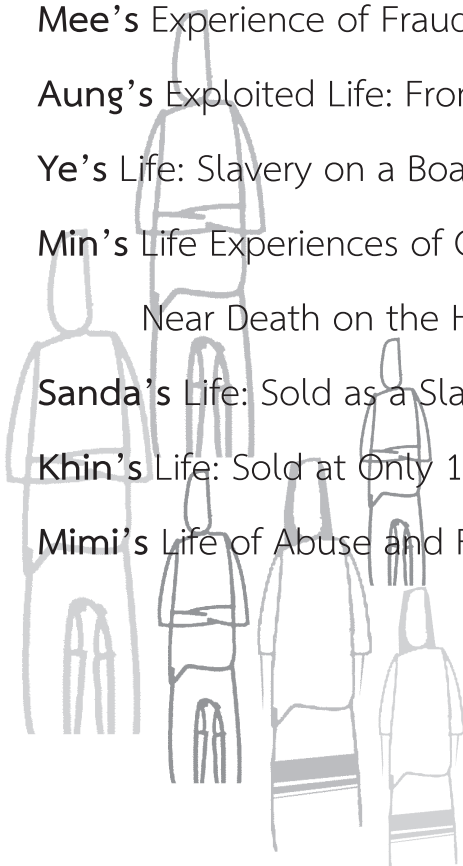
The stories that follow are sad and distressing to read. But I hope this book will contribute significant knowledge of trafficking victim's experiences to a wider audience and provide accurate victim based information to raise public awareness both in Thailand, regionally and internationally about the trafficking situation that continues to plague our country and which requires much more effective and sustained policy responses from the Thai Government and all stakeholders.

Finally, I would like to thank all the funders who made this project possible.

Sureeporn Punpuing
Director
Institute for Population and Social Research,
Mahidol University

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Introduction: Thailand, Trafficking and Migrant Workers

Thailand is well-known for its pristine beaches and spicy food. But this is not what attracts low skilled migrants from neighboring countries into the country. Prospects of work and security, higher wages than they can earn at home and an opportunity to explore new places and people instead pull migrants from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and even China into Thailand.

Thailand's rapid economic growth has created wealth and opportunities. Development has resulted in increased demand for labour, or to be more precise, cheap low skilled foreign labour to do dirty, dangerous and difficult work that Thais often will not themselves do. To sustain a growing economy and in order to compete in international markets for low cost export of goods, Thailand continues to be dependent on a cheap migrant workforce of more than 2 million people.

However for more than two decades since the early 1990s, policy makers in Thailand have not, at least until more recently, been willing or able to effectively regularise migration flows into the country. As a result, and left without legal and official means to enter Thailand, migrant workers, employers and industries employing migrants turn to smugglers to get workers into the country

to fill significant gaps in the labour market. These smugglers, usually referred to as 'brokers,' may be complete strangers to the migrant workers themselves. But sometimes they are closely linked to friends and relatives. Links with officials on both sides of Thailand's borders is an undeniable reality.

The push factors in migrant home countries that bring them to Thailand include poverty, a lack of opportunities for work and earning money and repressive political environments - sometimes even physical repression from their own governments. When migrants hear stories from friends and relatives about well-paid jobs in Thailand, their decision to migrate is inevitable. Yet without legal documents, knowledge about Thailand's employment system and an inability to read and speak the Thai language, migrants rely on brokers not only to smuggle them into the country but also, unless they already have strong networks in Thailand, to find them work, accommodation and a new life.

For too many, this position of vulnerability means that before they even realise it, migrants have been sold into a situation where they are working long hours without rest or pay on a fishing boat, their freedom of movement is restricted on a



construction site, they have been turned into a virtual slave or, in the most extreme cases, forced to provide sexual services against their will.

Migrant workers who find themselves in such situations of exploitation often report fear in approaching the police or other Thai government officials for assistance as they are undocumented and fear they will be arrested, extorted, abused or deported. All of these outcomes lessen a migrant's opportunity to earn money for their families back home, burden them with more debt or even, in some cases, increase their risk of human rights abuses further. For others, seeking assistance from the police sees them sent back to their employers where severe punishment or even death awaits them. Workers who are victims of exploitation report that police appear as a key enemy and perceive many officials as deeply involved in systems of exploitation of which they have become victims.

Some exploitation migrants suffer in Thailand can be considered 'trafficking.' Many increasingly know about Thailand's human trafficking problems from the annual United States Government's State Department *Trafficking in Persons Report* (TIP report).¹ However, few are aware of the scale of the suffering involved in human trafficking networks in Thailand and proximity of all this to us all. Human trafficking plagues a lot of countries in the world, but Thailand is one of the main hot spots in South East Asia as a source, transit and destination country for victims of human trafficking.

Shrimps exported from Thailand to the US could

have been peeled by migrants earning nothing at all paying off never ending debts in forced labour conditions. The buildings seen in Bangkok may have been built by migrants forced to stay in a small room and provided only with left-over food to eat. The fish being served in delicious authentic Thai restaurants may have been caught by migrants who sleep only 2-3 hours per night on board ships in the Gulf of Thailand and who are beaten for any small mistakes they make or tortured as examples to other of why they should not try to escape. Migrant domestic workers or fisherman being severely abused in Malaysia may have travelled through Thailand passing from one broker to another in a web of deceit and lies.

All these stories of gross exploitation of migrants in Thailand are certainly not new, but they are clearly under reported. If reported, many people have become sensitised to the problem of labour exploitation in Thailand and not enough attention is given to this issue by the Thai Government, Thai people, foreign embassies in Thailand and consumers of Thai products around the world.

The Thai Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551 (2008) uses a definition of trafficking taken from the Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Trafficking is defined as '*the procuring, buying, selling, vending, bringing from or sending to, detaining or confining, harboring, or receiving any person, by means of the threat or use of*

¹ US Department of State (2011) Trafficking in Persons Report 2011 (US Department of State, Washington), viewed at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164458.pdf>

*force, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or of the giving money or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person in allowing the offender to exploit the person under his control for the purpose of exploitation.'*²

Previously Thailand's law covering trafficking situations was the Measures in Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children Act B.E. 2540 (1997). This law only protected women and children and recognised sexual exploitation as the only form of exploitation related to trafficking. Now, more in line with the current trend of international human trafficking, Thailand has acknowledged forced labour and services as forms of exploitation related to trafficking and this is reflected in the wider exploitation definition in the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2008.

While Thailand has enacted the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2008 to combat human trafficking, the actual enforcement of the law remains weak. The TIP report³ has placed Thailand in its Tier 2 watch list for two consecutive years after five years of being in the Tier 2 list. A placing in Tier 2 means that a State does not fully comply with minimum standards on trafficking but is making significant efforts to comply with those standards. Tier 2 watch-list means the absolute number of

victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing, there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year or a determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with minimum standards which is based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.⁴

The number of victims rescued and identified as victims of trafficking in Thailand is microscopic when compared to the estimated number of victims trafficked into, out of and through the country. Although official statistics on trafficking are clearly not representative, a study conducted by the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) on Cambodian deportees in 2008 suggested more than half of the Cambodians interviewed were trafficked. Annually Thailand deports around 130, 000 Cambodians per year, and extrapolating the findings from the UNIAP report, this would mean that around 65, 000 could be victims of trafficking.⁵ Cambodian workers make up only around 10 to 15 percent of all migrant workers in Thailand. Workers from Myanmar make up 80 per cent or more of migrant workers in Thailand.

² Article 3, United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime 2003, Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, viewed at <http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>

³ Ibid. n. 1

⁴ US Department of State (2011) *Tier Placements*, viewed at <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2011/164228.htm>

⁵ Olivie, A. (2008) *Identifying Cambodian Victims of Human Trafficking Among Deportees from Thailand* (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking, Bangkok)



In 2010, there were 18 convictions for trafficking in Thailand an increase from 8 in 2009. In 2009,⁶ shelter homes run by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security assisted 530 trafficking victims⁷ while in 2010 there were 381 victims.⁸ Compared with the perceived and likely scale of human trafficking in Thailand, these numbers speak for themselves as to how much more effort is needed urgently by the Thai Government to address human trafficking challenges the country faces.

During a 12-day official visit to Thailand in August 2011, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, voiced her concerns about the lack of law enforcement to combat human trafficking in Thailand and the need to effectively protect the rights of migrants who are increasingly vulnerable to forced and exploitative labour. Ms. Ezeilo noted that deep-rooted corruption and demands for cheap and exploitive labour had minimized the positive impact and potential of Thailand's comprehensive anti-trafficking laws. Furthermore, she said undocumented migrants were not regularly screened as victims of trafficking and if they were identified, they were kept in shelters for extended periods of time turning shelters into detention centers and a means for further violations of the human rights of trafficking victims.⁹

This story book was prepared to provide a glimpse into lives of 'invisible' victims of labour trafficking in Thailand. All victims interviewed for this book

were not rescued from their situations of severe suffering but bravely escaped from their nightmare and continue to work in Bangkok and its neighbouring provinces, documented and undocumented, to earn a living to support their families in Myanmar. They did not receive any compensation for their past suffering and nor did they want to enter the Thai Government's bureaucratic and paternalistic victim support systems which formally will result in their deportation back to their home country once they complete any necessary rehabilitation or provide evidence as a witness in any prosecution resulting from their case. Instead, like most trafficking victims report, the victims interviewed for this research just want to get on with their lives and earn money. They want to put the past behind them as an unfortunate experience – to simply move on.

The issues mentioned by Ezeilo in her preliminary report on her official visit to Thailand are common themes running through the stories of the trafficking victims that were interviewed for this story book. All victims used a broker to enter the country without any legal documents and were exploited for their vulnerability and choice to migrate. Does a worker's consent to be smuggled make them an undocumented migrant rather than a trafficking victim? Whilst it is true that most of the interviewed trafficking victims agreed to come to Thailand, the terms of their agreement is far from clear and in every case workers ended up in situations far different to what they understood.

⁶ US Department of State (2010) *Trafficking in Persons Report 2010* (US Department of State, Washington), viewed at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/142979.pdf>

⁷ US Department of State (2009) *Trafficking in Persons Report 2009* (US Department of State, Washington), viewed at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123357.pdf>

⁸ Ibid. n.6

⁹ UN News Center (2011) *Thailand must fight mounting human trafficking more effectively*, UN expert warns, issued on 22nd August 2011, viewed at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39349>

Evidenced in every story is the connection of traffickers and smugglers with police or immigration officials. The transportation of large numbers of undocumented migrants is almost impossible to go unnoticed but with some payment, traffickers are able to negotiate their way around check points. Employers are even able to get police to cooperate in sending migrants back to them if they escape from situations of trafficking and exploitation. Trafficking victims reported that immigration and police officers were involved in all border crossing and human smuggling process they were involved in. One of the twelve victims even said that he was received, detained and transported by a management level police officer during his journey to Thailand.

Due to this portrayal of the law enforcement officials as being part of trafficking rings themselves, none of the victims approached the police for help, fearing that they would be deported or worse, sent straight back to their traffickers. This mistrust in law enforcement officials is not surprising as most victims of trafficking are undocumented migrants and they know they are in the country without permission. According to Thai law, victims of trafficking will not be prosecuted for their irregular status and they should be able to approach the police or social workers for help. However, also officially, they must be deported back to their home country in the end anyway due to their original 'illegal' entry into Thailand.

Some of the victims interviewed for this book said that they wanted to seek compensation for their unpaid wages during their time working in a trafficking situation. Such a remedy is provided for in the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2008. Yet without wanting to be identified as a victim of trafficking, these 'invisible' people have no

chance of obtaining compensation for the work that they have done and, given their lack of interest in identifying themselves to give evidence against their abusers, their traffickers continue to operate their trade in human beings without legal consequences.

Other common issues in the victim's stories that follow include debt bondage, violence (including sexual violence) and unlawful detention. Throughout their narratives, it becomes evident that the victims of trafficking we interviewed felt more comfortable and assured of their prospective jobs when they were told that they did not have to pay upfront for the transportation fees and this made their decision to migrate easier. But this debt bondage was directly linked with the control and violence over the victims that they explained eventually pushed them into trafficking.

One victim revealed that she was able to pay her transportation fees upfront and had a very comfortable journey to Thailand. She was later exploited but not in relation to her transportation fees. Another victim organised his own transportation and only had to pay for a border pass when crossing into Thailand. He was later exploited too but his conditions were less harsh than those who did not or were not able to pay for transportation fees before their journey to Thailand. All the other victims were controlled by their employers or brokers as a result of their debt bondage and the abuses continued even after they finished paying off their 'debt,' which some actually never did.

The use of force is another standard method for controlling trafficking victims reported. Some of the employers of workers interviewed for this book openly kept weapons such as knives and guns to threaten the victims and prevent their

escape. Workers who did escape said they were punished with starvation and beatings and they reported seeing others killed after their failed attempts to free themselves from bondage and incarceration. The victims of trafficking interviewed were subjected to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment which is contradictory to the basic principles of human rights and many international laws such as the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

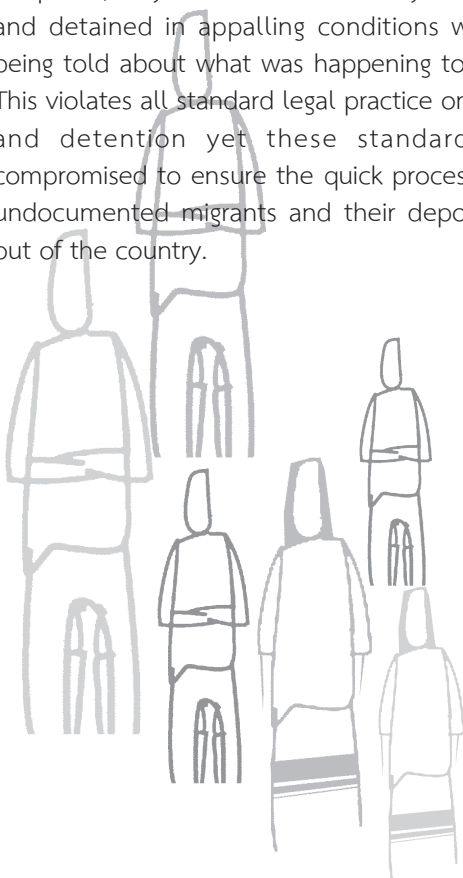
All the victims interviewed were confined to their work and living areas so freedom of movement was very limited. One victim told how the factory she worked at sold food and other necessary supplies to keep workers on site. Workers were prohibited from going outside. Restriction of movement is very common in all trafficking cases and in particular on fishing boats. As boats are at sea most of the time, victims have very little chance of contacting anyone for help or of escaping. When victims do escape, and this was never with the help of the police, they were often arrested by the police and detained in appalling conditions without being told about what was happening to them. This violates all standard legal practice on arrest and detention yet these standards are compromised to ensure the quick processing of undocumented migrants and their deportation out of the country.

More recently, many police and immigration officers have been trained to screen for human trafficking amongst arrested and undocumented migrants but victim identification remains a challenging task as awareness remains weak and law enforcement is sketchy and informal. Corruption amongst law enforcement officials is clearly also widespread. It is clearly the case that many officials are not robustly enforcing the law and/or working to protect victims of trafficking.

This book was assembled not simply to highlight the worst cases of human trafficking so as to shame Thailand's government for its continued inability to effectively address its trafficking challenges. Indeed, victims recruited for this study were chosen for convenience as they fulfilled the definition of human trafficking under Thai law. The victim's stories that follow are not particularly unusual or extreme but reflect the general situations faced by trafficking victims in Thailand.

It is with hope and expectation that our team at Mahidol Migration Centre at the Institute of Population and Social Research in Mahidol University carried out this project. By revealing more about the human beings behind Thailand's trafficking landscape, we hope sympathies and concerns will be aroused in readers and pressure for change and improvements will build into a response that will eventually reduce the number of people falling victim to human trafficking in Thailand.

Mahidol Migration Center
October 2011



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*So as to ensure confidentiality
and security for
the trafficking victims interviewed
as part of this research project,
all potentially identifying information
has been removed from the case
studies that follow.*

*Pseudonyms are used for names
and specific places or locations
are not mentioned.*

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Nay's Incarceration Story

Nay is a young woman from Bago division of Myanmar, brought up in a rice farming family. When Nay was 16 years old a friend of her cousin's from a neighboring district persuaded her to work in Thailand. The friend said the job she would work in would pay well but she was not told what the job actually was. She was told only that her prospective employer would pay all her transportation, food and accommodation costs in advance and that within six months Nay could pay back all her debts. Nay talked with her mother about working in Thailand and her mother did not want her to go as she feared for her daughter's safety. Nay explained to her mother about the well paid job and how good it was not to have to pay any money in advance. In addition, Nay told her mother to reduce her fear that she had heard from a person who had come to Thailand before that work was good.

One morning after 4 to 5 days of discussing with her mother, Nay and her cousin, accompanied by a broker, took a train to Bago. The next morning they travelled by bus to Mawlamyine, on to Mudon and then finally to Three Pagoda Pass near Sangklaburi on the Myanmar-Thai border. The broker dropped her and her cousin at the house of another broker near the border

where 16 women were waiting to cross into Thailand also. Nay was then asked to pay 50,000 Kyat (around US\$60) to this broker for food and transportation costs from her home to the border.

The following morning, another broker from Mudon took all the women across the Myanmar-Thai border in a truck. Nay said they crossed a land border without a checkpoint but she did not know where it was exactly. The truck drove them all to the house of a Thai broker the same evening. The truck did not go through any police or military checkpoints but Nay did not know clearly what way the truck travelled as she was squashed inside the vehicle. Around 5pm the same evening a motorbike came to take Nay and her cousin from the house. *"I did not know where I was but we were riding a motorbike and the street signs in Thai passed before my eyes,"* she said. The motorbike suddenly stopped near a teak forest and she was told there was a police checkpoint ahead. The broker led Nay and her cousin through the forest the whole night. *"I felt scared and so tired,"* Nay said.

In the morning, after walking the whole night, Nay arrived at a river. She took a boat across the river and then got into a waiting car. The car drove for a while until it arrived at a shrimp factory. Nay became aware she was in Mahachai, Samut Sakorn Province near Bangkok in Central Thailand. *“It was late afternoon around 5pm when I arrived at the shrimp factory.”* Nay entered the factory and was led to a dormitory room where a sleeping mat, pillow, iron and wardrobe were provided. An employer then told Nay that she had to pay back 25, 000 baht (US\$862) in debt, claiming this amount had been paid in advance for transportation costs she had incurred during the journey from the border. The employer said she would deduct this money from Nay’s monthly salary.

In the factory, Nay was tasked to lay down shrimp into a basket on a table and tear off shrimp shells. Workers all had to stand when doing this job. Daily work started at 8am and ended at 6pm and workers were paid 150 baht (US\$5.2) per day. This was much lower than the minimum wage of 215 baht (US\$7.4) per day for Samut Sakorn Province. During Nay’s first month at the factory she received 2, 000 baht (US\$69). An additional 2, 500 baht (US\$86) was taken by the broker to cover Nay’s travelling costs. A few months later Nay was provided with an ATM card but then it was retained by the broker. At this point she was getting no money for all her work. This broker remained around the factory, coming and going from time to time.

Life in the dormitory room was very restrictive as nobody was allowed to go out and the employer told workers that they would be caught by police if they tried to escape. Nay witnessed some of her friends being beaten by sticks and belts when they disobeyed the employer’s order to not go outside the factory without permission. Food was provided to all the workers but was

often inedible. *“They [employers] ate good food but we ate moldy fermented fish or leftovers in the fridge”.*

Nay was only allowed to use a mobile phone after work. *“I was sometimes damned or hit by a stick during working also,”* she said. When she got sick, Nay was forced by her employer to work. She was provided with gloves and a knife for tearing off shrimp shells but equipment costs were deducted from her wages. Nay’s employer said she must work for two years in order to pay off all her debts.

After a year of working at this factory, *“whether by luck or fate coming into my life,”* said Nay, one morning whilst she and others were working a group of 20 plain clothed police officers came to inspect the factory and Nay was arrested and charged with having no travel and work documents. Nay was released from the *“hell factory”* but was then detained at a police station. Nay’s wrists were tied together with plastic string, as were the other workers arrested, although Nay observed the employer was not detained. *“The employer would not be arrested, of course, since she already paid the police,”* Nay said.

All arrested workers were transported to a temple where they were photographed and fingerprinted before they were sent to a jail. Some of the arrested workers were younger than 15 years old. Amongst the arrested workers, one man suddenly died in the jail but it was not clear to Nay why this was. Those workers who did not have agents to bail them out were told they would be deported from Thailand. Nay’s boyfriend thought to help her but the same broker who had recruited her to the shrimp factory threatened to kill him if he attempted this. The broker had no money to bail Nay out and he felt unsatisfied if she was free and he gained no benefit from her. Finally Nay’s

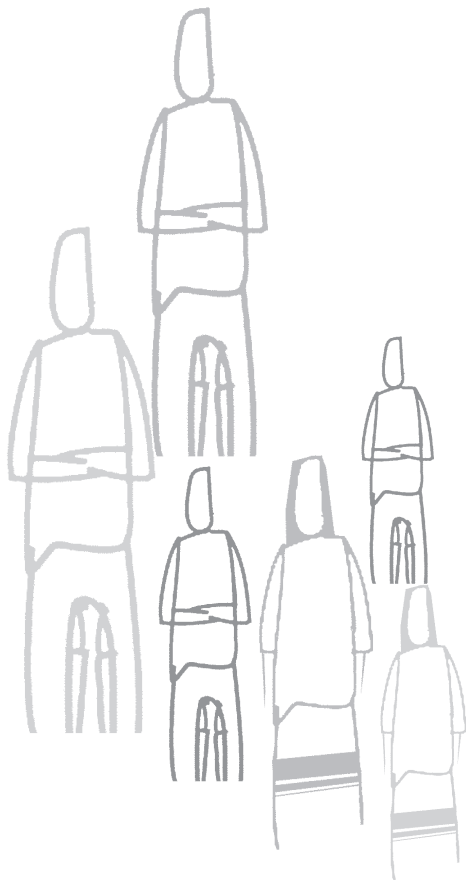


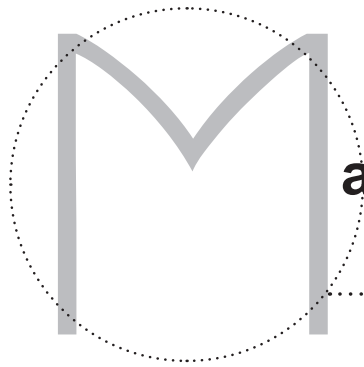
boyfriend managed to secretly hire another broker to bail her out from the prison at a cost of 8,000 baht (US\$276). Nay was imprisoned for 33 days in total before her release.

Nay is now working in another shrimp factory in Mahachai and is registered with a passport, work permit and health insurance. She hopes that one day if she can make enough money she will go back home to her family in Myanmar and stay there permanently. Occasionally she sends money back to her family, 7,000 baht (US\$241) to 10,000 baht (US\$345) at a time. Nay said *“Working in Thailand is generally okay. But if a well-paid job was available in my hometown I would immediately return home and work there – at least I could then be in close contact with my family and my cousins.”*

Nay initially decided to migrate to Thailand in the hope that she could earn more money than she could in Myanmar and then send this money

home to support her family. She perceived some debt bondage but understood it was just for a short period of time. Instead Nay was trafficked into labour exploitation. Nay wasted a year of her life working hard in an exploitative factory for nothing. Eventually she was released with assistance from police but she felt that she was stepping from one kind of exploitation to another, the second time by the same authorities that were tasked to protect her. Nay noticed how corruption flourished between her employer and the police. She said she could never forget how the police let her employer go whilst she, the victim, was detained. Nay said this destroyed her trust in law enforcement officials who should ensure justice and provide protection. Nonetheless, Nay said working in Thailand posed several genuine challenges and threats but it also created opportunities to make money that she did not have in her hometown in Myanmar.





Mao's Life of Troubles and Challenges

Mao, a 22 year old man, lived with his grandmother in Mon State, Myanmar. He worked as a construction worker and was sometimes employed in the rice fields. His parents left him behind with his grandmother to work in Thailand when he was 13 years old. Life in Myanmar was hard as he and his grandmother could not find enough money for food to survive. Mao often tried unsuccessfully to contact his parents. However, one of his cousins was working in Thailand and his grandmother managed to make contact with this cousin and, because of financial difficulties, asked the cousin to search for work for Mao in Thailand. She also contacted a local woman who had a lot of experience of crossing the Myanmar-Thai border so she could escort Mao to Thailand. This woman was not a broker. Mao only knew his cousin was working in a textile factory in Samut Sakhon Province in Central and he did not know what kind of job would be waiting for him when he arrived in Thailand.

A few days after making contact with his cousin in Thailand, a lady came to pick Mao up at his home. She took him to Tavoy by public bus and then they both continued on to Kawthaung. From Kawthaung, Mao got on a boat heading to the port town of Ranong in Thailand where the lady left him. At the port, a Thai broker was

waiting for him and drove him together with another 6 men and 8 women to a Chinese graveyard. *"I was then left in the graveyard for 4 days without anything. I had to put up with the intense heat from the sun in daytime and slept on the open ground at night time in darkness surrounded by tombs,"* Mao said. Every day a broker came to drop off food and drink for the workers and then left. On the fifth day, around 6pm, a group of 5 people suddenly arrived and arrested all the workers. These people said they were soldiers. They did not wear military uniforms but they did have weapons. *"They spoke nothing to us and just handcuffed us,"* Mao said. Women arrested were not handcuffed but were placed beside the handcuffed men.

All the workers were transported to a place that looked like a military camp. Mao said he saw military tanks in the compound in an urban area surrounded by high walls. These armed people questioned Mao about his name, hometown and took his fingerprints. Mao was provided a phone to call his cousin in Samut Sakhon to ask for the transfer of money to a broker to bail him out for around 2, 000 baht (US\$69). Mao had already been held in detention for around ten days. However, the same evening around 5pm, Mao was deported by boat from Thailand

at a border point divided by a small river that people could walk through. At 10pm, shortly after arriving at the other side of the river, Mao said he crossed back over the same river with another broker and got into a waiting van of another broker in Thailand whom his cousin had made contact with. He did not know how much his cousin had paid to this broker or what had been arranged for him.

There were about 50 people squashed into the brokers' car and all passenger seats had been removed to provide space. *"I felt scared of being arrested again. The car I was travelling in stopped from time to time and I heard voices of people talking but I did not understand the language. There seemed to be checkpoints but the car continued going through them without any problems,"* Mao said. The journey to his cousin's textile factory in Samut Sakorn took around 11 hours.

When Mao arrived, his cousin picked him up and took him to stay together in a rental house next to the factory. A few days later his cousin brought him to have a health check up for processing a work permit to also work in the textile factory. His work started from 8 am to 8 pm and he was paid 199 baht (US\$6.9) per day and 35 baht (US\$1.2) for overtime. *"Working in the textile factory was pretty good. I sometimes shared household expenses with my cousin. I started to have a social life with friends, drinking alcohol with them. Life started to change however when I acted as a guarantor for my friends to borrow money from other friends. Later the debtors ran away without paying back the money to me. The lenders, also from Myanmar, instead came to ask money from me, 30,000 baht (US\$1, 100), and I did not know what to do and how I could earn such a big amount of money to pay them back,"* Mao said.

Given Mao's difficult situation, a friend recommended him work on a fishing boat where he could receive higher pay and then pay back all his debts. Mao then contacted a Myanmar broker and he travelled to meet with the broker on Koh Krok, where he stayed for 2 to 3 days. The broker did not tell Mao where the boat would go for catching fish. Before going on the boat, an agent gave to Mao 1, 000 baht (US\$34.5) for buying materials for daily use such as soap and toothpaste.

When Mao arrived at the boat, there were 20 men on board. His task was to lay down fishing nets and perform maintenance during voyages. Food was provided to all fisherman but the employer deducted costs from workers' salaries. The employer determined the wage rate as 8,000 baht (US\$276) per month for more diligent workers and 6, 000 baht (US\$207) for general workers. *"The work was so tough; laying down fishing nets, collecting fish under the sunlight and rain and I had to sleep on the boat where I worked, working and sleeping at the same time. Three workers got sick and died as there were only basic medicines on the boat like pain killers and balm. I witnessed 3 people dying and the employer simply plucked dead bodies into the sea. I saw another two workers die when the boat was in the dock as they had become severely ill when on the boat."* Mao said that his employer and supervisors forced workers to work even when they were sick. Workers were damned and beaten too. Mao said he felt like he was being controlled. The boat was catching fish in Indonesian water and would dock in an Indonesian port on an island.

After a few years, one day whilst on the Indonesian island, Mao received news from a friend that his parents, whom he had tried to contact unsuccessfully for a long time, had died. *"I really*

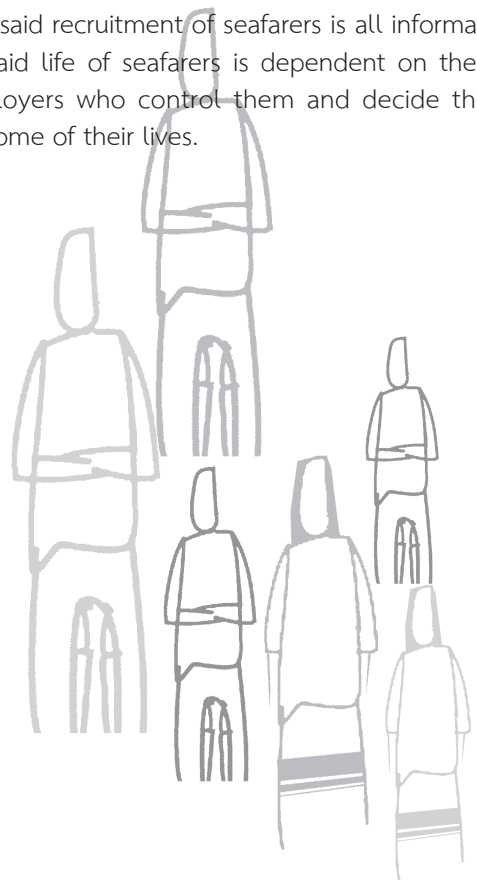
wanted to go back home then but my employer did not allow me to leave,” he said. Mao was so sad at this time that he told an Indonesian lady who worked in a port office about his dead parents. The lady helped him escape and sent him to a camp where she knew a supervisor. The place looked like a refugee camp and all that Mao knew was that if a person wanted to leave the camp, someone had to bail them out. Mao stayed in this camp for three months until he asked the camp supervisor to assist him to return to Thailand. The supervisor was a powerful person who had relations with most fishing boats and he helped pay for Mao to go on a boat which came from Thailand to send food for larger fishing boats.

When Mao reached a dock in Samut Prakan Province in Thailand, the captain gave him 700 baht (US\$24) for travel costs so he could return to the place where his cousin lived in Samut Sakorn Province. *“Over the past three years working as a seafarer I received 20, 000 baht (US\$690). The employer in the boat said he would keep every month’s salary for me but the truth was he exploited me and didn’t pay*

my wages... I never thought to report my situation in the boat to police officers actually, I did not know who could help me to do that,” Mao said.

Mao is now working in a textile factory in Mahachai, Samut Sakorn. He receives salary and benefits in accordance with labour laws and he earns more money now and can send this money to his grandmother in Myanmar. He also uses his money to make merit for his parents after their death. He is not thinking about returning to Myanmar for now as he wants to make more money.

Mao migrated to work in Thailand with the hope of meeting his parents who left him behind to work in Thailand when he was young. He hoped to earn money to support his grandmother in Myanmar. Life and working conditions for Mao on the fishing boat were much harder than he thought. Mao was the victim of extreme exploitation and he was fortunate to survive. Mao said recruitment of seafarers is all informal. He said life of seafarers is dependent on their employers who control them and decide the outcome of their lives.





Maw's Life: Being Sold

Maw, a 19 year old man from Mandalay in Myanmar, was born to parents who were civil servants. His father died when he was young and his mother left her job to migrate to work in Mae Sot on the Myanmar-Thai border given economic hardship of their family. Maw's mother earned money in Mae Sot which she sent back to Myanmar to support Maw. Eventually, Maw's mother persuaded him to also work with her in the textile factory in Mae Sot which offered high wages. Maw missed his mother and wanted to help her making money so he agreed to go to Thailand.

Maw set out on the journey to Thailand by taking a public bus to another town where he stayed overnight. The following day he continued with another bus to the border town of Myawaddy. He went to stay with an abbot in a temple near the border for a week as the border was closed. Maw then used a border pass to cross over to Thailand which cost him 500 Kyat (US\$0.7 dollars). Then he took a small bus to Mae Sot where his mother lived. Two days after his arrival from Myanmar he began working without any documents in the same factory as his mother. His work involved checking incoming and outgoing textile products.

Maw's day of work was from 8am to 5 pm. For him, working conditions and benefits were fine. Rice was provided to workers who had to organise other food themselves. Maw worked for one year at this factory and left when his mother did. His mother then set up a stall selling clothes in Myawaddy and Maw helped his mother for 3 years before he got married. He moved to live with his wife in Mawlamyine in Mon State and then made a living by doing rice farming. Maw could earn little money from rice farming however. He and his wife therefore started selling toys during community festivals and temple fairs but again earnings were not as they wanted. Finally Maw contacted his older brother who was working in Bangkok and asked him to find a new job for Maw in Thailand. Maw was 25 years old when he left his wife and one baby child to start another journey to Thailand.

Maw used a border pass to cross into Thailand at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border again. He then travelled by public bus to Bangkok with his relative's employer, pretending to be the employer's domestic work and paying the employer 5, 000 Baht (US\$170) for this assistance. When inspected, the face on his relatives' documents looked very similar to his own and

he had no problems at the checkpoints. Once he arrived in Bangkok, and during his first three months there, Maw stayed with his brother and helped him with sewing tasks at home. Then Maw moved to work at a rice stall nearby carrying rice bags. This work was so heavy that Maw eventually had to resign. He remained undocumented.

Now Maw was 27 years old and he was contacted by an acquaintance who knew his brother and who told him to contact a woman who was a recruiter and could guarantee him a good job and a better future. A recruiter told him about a job at a plastic mat factory in Nakhon Pathom and she made an appointment with him in Om Noi on the outskirts of Bangkok. Maw trusted these people as they were part of his social network. When Maw reached Om Noi the recruiter called him and said the job at the plastic mat factory had been filled and he could instead work in Kanchanaburi Province and she had prepared transport. He was transported by a car a long way to a seaport and detained in the abandoned warehouse. *“I realised that I had been sold,”* said Maw.

The morning after Maw arrived at the seaport, which he later knew was Hat Yai in the South of Thailand, he was told to work collecting and selecting fish. *“One worker warned me not to try to escape or I would be shot dead,”* Maw recounted. That same evening, he went back to sleep in the warehouse but this time the exit route was unlocked. *“I looked around and saw other people were busy with their tasks, lights were not shining over the area. I silently walked to a darker area and ran quickly,”* he said. Maw ran for half an hour until he was so tired that he had to take a rest in a rubber plantation. *“I was so scared running through the dark forest but the image of being detained in the warehouse*

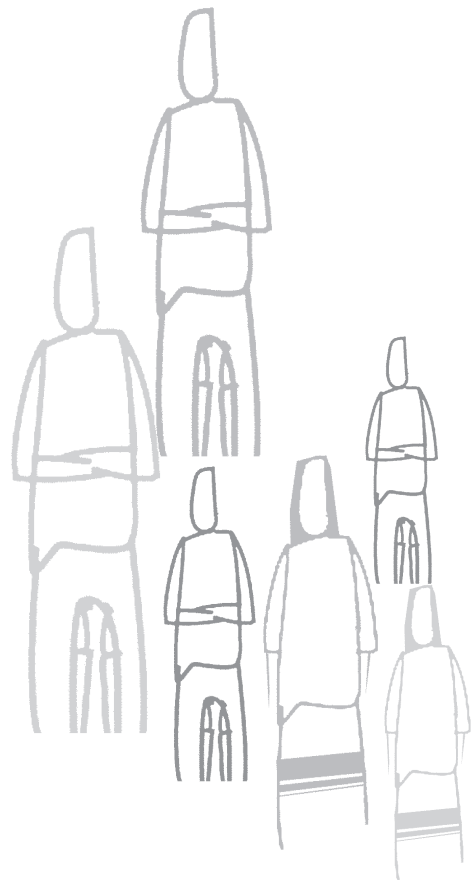
and even being forced to work on a fishing boat went through my head and pushed me to keep running even if I had to run all day and all night,” he said. While resting in the plantation, Maw heard people talking in Burmese and when he got closer he saw two workers from Myanmar employed to look after the plantation. Maw asked help from these two people who called his friend and arranged a car to pick him up the next day. These people helped him to cover half of his transportation costs of 8,000 baht (US\$276). The car drove for half day to reach his friend’s house in Bangkok.

Maw is now working at a flour factory in Bangkok and describes his working conditions as good, given that his employer doesn’t abuse or condemn him and he even has health insurance. He now is registered with a passport and work permit. Maw has not contacted his wife and child for two years and he does not know what happened to them. He said he could not stand the shame to explain his story if his wife asked him why he did not send her any messages over the years and did not send money to her for feeding their child. Maw wants to return home one day to his wife and child but he wants to earn enough money first.

Maw said working in Thailand was unstable and people from Myanmar were vulnerable to being trafficked. But these were challenges people from Myanmar had to face when they could not find work opportunities in their own country. Maw said the Thai authorities should assist trafficked victims but he personally would never report suffering to the police since he believes they are behind most trafficking rings anyway. Maw has seen many of his cousins assisted by police to cross the border illegally. *“Why do trafficking survivors not call the 191 hotline? It’s obvious,”* he said.



Migrant workers in Thailand who return to Myanmar often come back to Thailand to work again. Crossing borders between Myanmar and Thailand can be done in various ways but most people choose irregular ways as regular ways are impossible in practice for most. Trafficking survivors like Maw are often reluctant to approach authorities, particularly the police, for assistance. This creates vulnerability for victims to be re-trafficked as they remain invisible. Victims' reports could be a useful source of data for authorities in cracking down on trafficking rings. But building trust between police and survivors of trafficking is difficult given the existing situation in Thailand.



Keng's Changing Life

Keng, a 14 year-old girl, came from around Myawaddy township on the Myanmar-Thai border. She lived with her father, mother and grandmother. When she was young, Keng's mother was arrested on the accusation of selling illicit drugs. At that time, Keng's aunt was working in a meatball factory in Mahachai, Samut Sakorn Province in Central Thailand and she asked if Keng wanted to come and work there too, telling Keng that the job was easy. After a few days Keng decided to travel to Thailand and her grandmother did not stop her. Her father had problems at work and could not come home and her mother was imprisoned so she had nothing to loose in coming to Thailand.

Keng took a bus from her home town to Myawaddy and stayed with another aunt for one night. The next morning her aunt accompanied her to the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border and lent Keng 500 Baht (US\$17) for transportation costs that she would later have to pay back. From the border Keng got on a canoe to cross the small river to Mae Sot which cost her only 20 baht (US\$0.7). As it was an unofficial crossing there was no border checkpoint in place. A Myanmar broker, whom her aunt in Thailand had contacted, took Keng to stay at his house

for one night then drove her to the house of another Thai broker. Keng waited for a van in front of a factory not far from this broker's house. When she got in the van she saw eight men and women, all from Myanmar. The driver ordered all the workers to use shirts to cover their eyes. The van windows were blackened out. *"I felt scared and now wanted to go home,"* Keng said. After 30 minutes the van dropped everyone at another house in Mae Sot and they stayed there overnight.

Upon reaching this broker's house, Keng told the broker that she did not want to go on anymore but the broker did not allow her to leave. She was put under surveillance instead. The following day a pick-up truck came to the house and all eight people were crammed into the space overhead of the truck above the driver's seat, which was covered by a frame like closed umbrella with a small door for people getting inside and out when the truck stopped. *"I felt then that I would die for sure as I could hardly breathe in and breathe out. I could not move my body and we were packed in like tinned fish,"* Keng recounted. The large space at the rear of truck was empty to avoid police inspection and suspicion. *"There were police checkpoints*

on route and I heard people talking each time the truck stopped before we started moving again.” The truck stopped at a deserted house where everyone had lunch. The driver informed everyone of the place they were going to. Late that same evening Keng arrived at a meatball factory in Mahachai. Someone at the factory paid Keng’s 16, 500 Baht (US\$570) transportation costs when she arrived. She stayed with her aunt who was at the same factory. Keng began work the next morning without documents. Her task was to measure the weight of meatballs before packing them.

Keng’s first day working was so long. She started work at 7am and finished at 3 am the next morning. Every morning after that her employer came to knock on the door of the dormitory to wake workers up, shouting aggressively. When workers chatted with friends during work or meatballs fell down on the ground, workers would be verbally abused and even hit with a stick. Keng received 135 baht per day (US\$4.65) and 10 baht per hour for overtime (US\$0.3). Working conditions were poor with no fans or ventilators. The employer deducted Keng’s wages for costs of protective gear such as caps, masks and shirts. Telephone use must be approved by the employer. The employer paid wages every 50 days to the workers.

Food and other accessories were sold inside the factory as workers were prohibited from going out. The factory installed CCTV to ensure surveillance of the workers. There was a small gate and sometimes workers went out to buy food near this gate. Workers who had passports would have them confiscated by the employer. When police came to inspect work permits at the factory, the employer would hide workers who were undocumented and tell all workers in advance that if police questioned them

regarding wages they should say they were paid 225 baht (US\$7.76) per day with 40 baht (US\$1.3) per hour overtime. If working on Sunday they must say they received double pay also.

Early one morning after 3 years of working in the factory, Keng finally planned to escape. She went to the back of the factory where there was no fence and which was covered with high thick grass and dirt. She wore four shirts and the outer one was her factory uniform which made her blend in normally. After getting out of the factory area she ran to a motorbike taxi and changed to a second motorbike after a short while for safer travel. Keng was afraid the first driver might report her escape to the factory owner. Previously the employer had taken photos of workers and warned them that if anyone escaped she would ensure the police brought them back. Keng had heard that some people who escaped were caught and beaten.

After successfully escaping, Keng went to stay with her friend who took her to work at a new meatball factory where she received 4, 000 baht (US\$130) per month. After that she registered for a work permit and then got a job at an electronics factory, also in Mahachai. Keng said *“I did not report my ordeal to police as I knew that the employer had a good relationship with the police already.”*

Keng sometimes contacts her parents in Myanmar. She said that she never hopes for anything nor expects to achieve anything in her life whilst in Thailand. Keng said *“I enjoy working in Thailand though we workers sometimes have to be very careful. However I tell my friends not to come here. But if they do, they should have a passport and plan their journey well.”*



Nai's Confusing Journeys

Nai, a 19 year-old man from Tavoy in Myanmar, lived with a family of 6 people. Before coming to Thailand, Nai's life was "pretty good" as he ran a small enterprise buying shrimp in Myanmar and selling this shrimp in Ranong, Thailand. At first his business went well but later he accrued debt of 200, 000 baht (US\$6, 900). Nai had no way to pay off his debt and felt so embarrassed that his neighbours and community would see him in a bad light as a loser in business. Nai therefore decided to come to work in Thailand. He did not know what kind of job he would be doing but he just wanted to escape from his debt and embarrassment in Myanmar.

Nai got on a boat sending shrimp to Ranong and got off at Kawthaung before the boat sailed on to Thailand. He stayed with an acquaintance for two weeks in Kawthaung before hearing that there was a well paid job available at a bakery factory in Chumphon in Southern Thailand. Nai took a boat from Kawthaung which would smuggle him into Thailand but on the way the boat was inspected by marine police and he was arrested on a charge of holding false travel documents which had been prepared by a broker for 2, 000 Baht (US\$70). Nai was detained by the police until the same evening when they

deported him to Myanmar. However, instead of heading into Myanmar the boat turned around in the ocean and returned to Ranong by a different route. When the boat reached a dock he was again approached by police who checked his travel documents and then arrested him again and photographed and fingerprinted him in preparation for another deportation. At this time a boat captain came to talk with the police and Nai was released into the custody of this person.

A motorbike quickly came to pick him Nai from the port and took him to a house which belonged to the police. Around 50 people from Myanmar were at this house. Nai remained at the house for five days during which time he helped doing household chores. Then one morning he and another 20 people left the house covered by a large plastic sheet in the back of a pick-up truck. Nai said a motorbike rode ahead of the truck to send a signal to the driver if there was a police checkpoint ahead. As darkness fell, the police stopped the truck and ordered all people to get off. Nai and others were detained in a police station for 7 days before they were transferred to a provincial jail.

After 10 days in the jail Nai was deported in Ranong again. The police arranged a boat which took him and other arrested workers to an island situated in the middle of the ocean, far enough away from land that he could not escape. *“The islands looked like a vacation place as I saw some foreigners and nice houses but I did not know where it was,”* said Nai. A man from Myanmar then told him to get on another bigger boat in the dock. Nai had no choice. The boat set off and stopped in the middle of the water again. Soon small boats came to the large boat with agents carrying lists of people. *“I was told to get on one boat and it took me back to the same dock as my first arrival to Thailand. Then a car took me to the same house again (the police’s house),”* said Nai. This time, he remained at the house for 2 days.

A car then took Nai and another 20 people on a half day’s journey where he was told a bakery factory would be. Instead he arrived at a palm plantation in Chumpon in Southern Thailand. Nai was forced to work in this plantation cutting and collecting palm produce. The work was hard as he had to use a big knife to cut produce and load it onto trucks. *“It was in the hot months and I suffered so much I felt I was dying. Every day I thought of my parents at home and eventually wanted to commit suicide to release myself from this hardship, but luckily my co-workers stopped me,”* said Nai. The employer provided rice to Nai and the other workers but for other food they relied on plants and vegetables around them. Nai was forced to work by his Thai supervisor who threatened he would be shot dead if he stopped.

Nai worked on the plantation for over a month without being paid. The employer said to Nai *“I have paid you already many times over for your travel costs here.”* In the plantation there were *“controllers,”* one of whom came from Mon

state in Myanmar and another who was Thai. The Mon person was quite kind but the Thai man was angry and ordered the workers to work from early morning until 8 pm every day under threat of execution. Nai said *“I thought about how to escape but the plantation was large and I just did not know where to go.”*

One day, Nai observed that there was a fruit garden nearby. He saw a woman working in the garden and he asked her for help by using sign language to communicate as he could not speak Thai. He showed her wounds suffered from his hard work. Fortunately the lady understood his suffering and lent him a phone to call a friend. The lady also told her son to arrange a car for Nai. For the next few days after meeting the lady Nai remained in the plantation and then eventually the car came and took him to his friend’s house in Chumpon. Another two workers escaped with him at this time also. The Thai lady covered half of their travel costs herself and the rest was paid by a friend.

Nai began a new job at another rubber plantation in Chumpon but he only stayed there for one month for safety reasons. *“It was one night while I was having dinner with friends in the cottage. There were unknown shooting from outside into our cottage – fortunately nobody was injured,”* he said. After this, Nai’s friend organised work in a factory processing rubber in Chumpon. He had to work with chemical substances when washing the rubber. The employer was not so bad but working conditions were poor as there was no preventive equipment supplied to workers. Nai stayed there for a year and then his cousin asked him to work in a freezing room in Hat Yai Province where seafood was frozen. He travelled with a broker to Hat Yai but worked in this job only for ten days due to low pay. At this time his aunt and uncle came live with him in Hat Yai.



Mee's Experience of Fraudulent Brokers

Mee is a 19 year-old girl from Noudong in Mon State, Myanmar. She does not have any siblings. As her parents worked in Thailand since she was young, Mee lived with her grandmother. One day, Mee's parents called to tell her that she should come to work in Mahachai in Samut Sakorn Province in Central Thailand to earn more money but they did not tell her about what kind of job she would do. Mee left home one morning at 6am, escorted by her uncle, taking a bus to the border town of Myawaddy where she arrived around 4pm. Her uncle had Mee get on a boat to cross the border river, which was like a canal. After this, Mee was on her own. She reached Thailand without seeing any checkpoint.

Mee's mother had coordinated for a broker to pick her up once she arrived at the Thai side of the border. She got on a motorbike with one other lady who she did not know and travelled to the house of a broker. Along the way they passed a police checkpoint and the police checked the handbag of the lady driving the motorbike but did not check Mee. She was confused why the police did not check her even though she did not have any documents. When Mee arrived at the broker's house she saw more than 20 people already there. Shortly afterwards a

car came to the broker's house and picked everyone up. More than 20 people were crammed inside the car and covered with a large black cloth. *"I felt so tired then and it was difficult to breathe but I was not hungry or thirsty,"* Mee said. Mee did not know whether there was a police checkpoint or not during her journey as she could not see outside the vehicle. After 30 minutes the car arrived to the house of another broker where there were already many people gathered together.

The next morning, Mee and other workers got on another pick-up. Some workers sat in the back seat of the cab on top of one another while some of the men sat at the back of the truck. All of them were covered with cloth. On the way the truck stopped for at least 3 police checkpoints and everyone was told to be silent each time. One passenger understood Thai language and she heard the driver talking to the police. The truck was permitted to go on each time. Eventually after 2 hours the truck arrived at another house and everyone stayed there until around midnight the same day when police suddenly burst into the house. Most of the workers could not escape. Those who were caught were photographed and fingerprinted

and then loaded onto a police truck and taken to a police station where food was provided and men and women were detained separately. Mee was detained for one night and the next morning police fingerprinted her and then sent her and others arrested to the Thai-Myanmar border and had them get on a prepared boat crossing the river to Myanmar. The workers did not see any immigration checkpoints when crossing back into Myanmar.

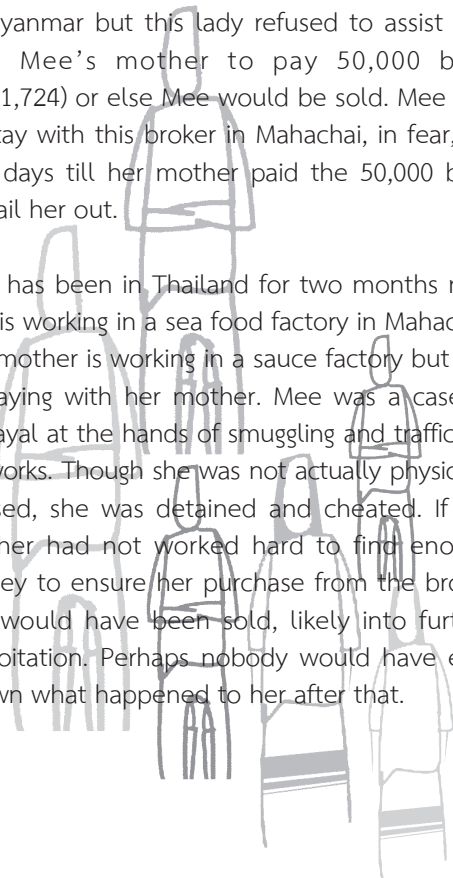
As soon as Mee arrived at the river bank on the Myanmar side of the border she approached a driver of a motorbike taxi and asked him for help. The driver gave her a phone to call her mother in Thailand and her mother asked the driver to look for a broker to send Mee back to Thailand again. The driver then took Mee to his sister's food stall. The sister was a broker in Myanmar and had extensive networks in Thailand. The lady requested Mee's mother to pay 500,000 Kyat (around US\$720) for all Mee's travel costs from the border to Mahachai in Thailand, where her mother should wait for her. Mee's mother agreed and the day after transferred the money to the lady in Myanmar via a network of people and bank accounts. Mee had to stay at the food stall for one night while waiting to cross the border. The following day, when the broker received the transferred money, she sent Mee to a boat to again cross into Thailand at Mae Sot.

Once Mee arrived in Mae Sot a car was waiting to pick her up. Already 20 people from Myanmar were in the car. The car then drove along the mountains and after a while came across checkpoints. The police let the car pass through these checkpoints. When the car came down towards low land from the mountains all the workers had to change into another car. The second car took them to a place which looked like an abandoned house where everyone had

to sleep on the floor. The following day after breakfast another truck, which looked similar to those used for transporting prisoners, came to pick all the workers up from this house. The truck drove all day until it reached a warehouse. Then another van came to pick up Mee and three workers from the warehouse to send to them to the house of another broker near rice fields. Mee had to stay at this house for ten days. During this time a broker provided food but did not tell Mee and the other workers why they were waiting so long before continuing on their journey.

On the eleventh day, a car came to pick Mee up but did not send her to her mother. Mee was worried and asked the broker what was happening. The broker said that Mee's mother had not yet paid for her travel costs. Mee was able to contact her mother who called a broker in Mahachai to say that she had already transferred money in advance to the lady in Myanmar. Then Mee's mother called the lady in Myanmar but this lady refused to assist and told Mee's mother to pay 50,000 baht (US\$1,724) or else Mee would be sold. Mee had to stay with this broker in Mahachai, in fear, for two days till her mother paid the 50,000 baht to bail her out.

Mee has been in Thailand for two months now and is working in a sea food factory in Mahachai. Her mother is working in a sauce factory but she is staying with her mother. Mee was a case of betrayal at the hands of smuggling and trafficking networks. Though she was not actually physically abused, she was detained and cheated. If her mother had not worked hard to find enough money to ensure her purchase from the broker she would have been sold, likely into further exploitation. Perhaps nobody would have ever known what happened to her after that.





Aung's Exploited Life: From Roti Seller to Painter

Aung is an ethnic Chin from Myanmar who has 8 brothers and sisters. Aung's father did not have a regular job but did casual work to support his family. When Aung was young there was hardly enough food to feed his family. When the children were old enough they all tried to find jobs to support their family but well-paid jobs were not easy to come by in Myanmar. Aung was able to attend school until grade 10 but his parents did not have enough money to send him to special school for tertiary education. After finishing grade 10 Aung began to work as a farmer. It was very difficult to grow food on the barren hillsides of Chin State. Aung was barely making enough money from his farming to support himself but he really wanted to give left over money he earned to his family so they would have food to eat.

Aung previously had never heard about work opportunities in Thailand. One day when he was 19 years old his uncle's wife Jee (his aunty) told him that he could earn easy money in Thailand and send a lot of money back to support his family. Jee said that Thailand was a good place to work and many of his relatives were already working there happily. As Aung needed to earn money urgently and he trusted his aunt and uncle to find him a job, he decided to go to find work in Thailand.

Jee was an Indian-Burmese woman living in Mawlamyine in Mon State. Jee and her relatives worked as brokers arranging transportation for migrants from Myanmar to Thailand. Jee would send workers to Bangkok where relatives would receive them and find them a job. After negotiations, Aung agreed to pay 20,000 Kyat (US\$29) to Jee to arrange his transportation from Chin State to Bangkok in Thailand. Aung did not have the money to pay Jee so his uncle told him that he could go first and then pay back his debt within one year of working in Thailand. Aung's uncle also mentioned that there would be some other fees deducted from his wages later on. Aung was told that he would be working in sales but no details of the place of work, working hours or wages were given to him. Aung did not suspect anything as it was his aunt and uncle that had arranged for his journey and he believed that he could find a well-paid job in Thailand.

Aung's aunt arranged for him to be taken to Mae Sot on the Myanmar-Thai border. Aung had his student identity card and his Myanmar identity card with him but his aunt took these from him when crossing the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border. Aung travelled with 24 other peoples from Myanmar and he assumed they were all going to work in Thailand like him. During the journey,



Aung did not meet any police or immigration officers but it was a difficult journey. Everyone had to walk through thick jungle and avoid roads. At times the paths were very steep and they all had to climb whilst other parts of the journey they were transported by cramming as many people onto a motorbike as possible. Aung and the others were not given any food to eat and they had to sleep in corn fields and eat fresh corn only. Aung was scared during this journey through Thailand. He did not understand Thai language and he didn't want to get into any trouble.

Aung eventually arrived in Bangkok where an agent arranged by Jee picked him up. He was sent to Jee's relative's house to sell roti, a deep-fried pancake. As the preparation of the desert required skills that he did possess, Aung was punched and beaten by the family when he made a mistake, for dropping the dough or for being too slow. When he first arrived, Aung tried to escape at night but he didn't know where to go. He didn't understand Thai and didn't know anyone so he returned to the house. As punishment for running away he was beaten by the oldest son using a chain.

Aung worked making and selling roti from 3pm to 11 pm every day. He was paid 30 baht (US\$1) for these 8 hours of work per day. He had to sell all the roti by the end of the day or else he would get beaten by a clothes hanger by the roti trolley owner whose vehicle was 'loaned' to him. There were 5 other migrants working with the family also. Aung and the other workers slept in a living room on the second floor of a townhouse. The family stayed in the same house. Whatever food the workers received was from leftovers of the family meals. Aung worked like this for over a year. He was allowed to rest for 3 days only because he was too sick to physically work. His employer 'registered' him as a migrant

worker but the 'registration' cost 500 baht (US\$17) per month and 'protected' Aung from being arrested by the police. It was not a legal migrant work permit but rather payment to the police for them to turn a blind eye to his undocumented presence.

Aung tried to escape another time by climbing the fence of the house but failed and he was locked-up in a room for 5 days. Aung was not allowed out of the house or to go any further than where he sold the roti. He wanted to contact his family and his uncle but he was not allowed to make phone calls. After 6 months of work Aung told the family that he wanted to send the money he earned back to his family in Myanmar but the family told him they already did this. Aung never found out if this was true or not but he doesn't think any money was ever sent back to his family. Whenever Aung asked for his wages he was beaten and threatened that he would be reported to the police. Aung was worried about his family at this time as he had heard that due to the blossoming of the bamboo trees rats had had plagued a whole harvest in Chin State.

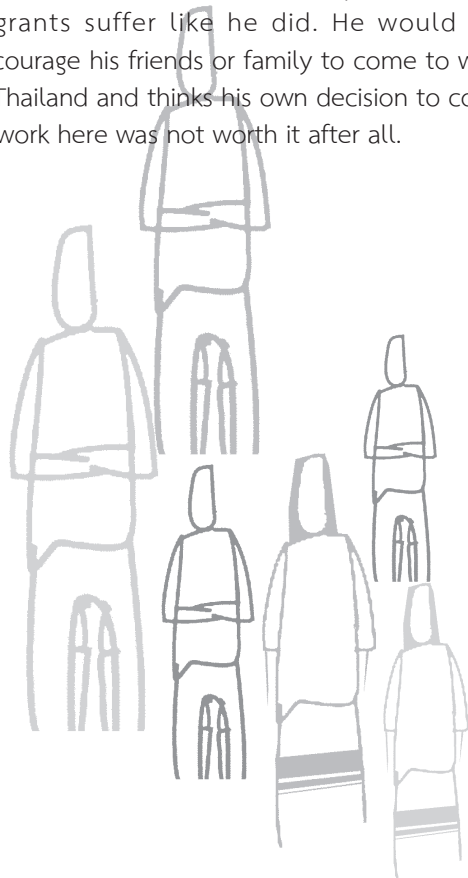
Aung's plight was known among the locals in the area where he sold the roti. Some people took pity on him and would help buy all the roti if he could not sell them by the end of the day. Aung made a Thai friend who was kind and Aung began to learn Thai language. After over a year of suffering, Aung decided that he needed to escape. One day he made 1,200 baht (US\$41) selling roti. He pushed the trolley back home and when he approached the townhouse he grabbed 600 baht (US\$20) and ran. He ran as fast as he could and met up with his Thai friend. His friend let him stay for 5 days and their elder sister gave Aung 2,000 baht (US\$69) for transportation. Aung left to find a new job.

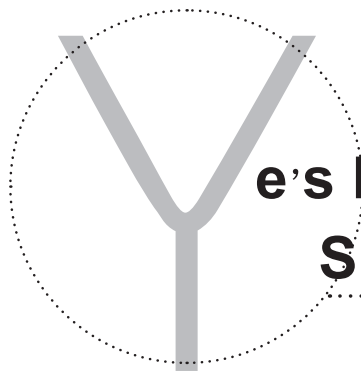
Aung has now been working as a painter for the past 3 years. He earns 230 baht (US\$8) per day. He can earn an extra 100 Baht (US\$3.4) if he works overtime. Aung receives his payment every 2 months and works every day. He has no day off for work but when he is sick or too tired he can ask for a day off, although his employer is very strict. Aung tries to stay in touch with his family but since they live in a village, it takes 3 days before any of his messages reach them. He wants to send back money he earns to his family but he does not know how to do so. Recently Aung talked to his father and found out that his mother is very sick so he is worried. Aung's mother misses him a lot and wants him to come home. Only two of his sisters are living with their family now. Aung's elder brother is married and has to take care of his own family. Aung is the youngest son in the family so he feels that it is his duty to take care of his family.

Aung cannot go back to Myanmar as he does not have enough money and he will not be able to find any work back home. He thinks his life in Thailand is difficult and only slightly better than in Myanmar. Despite his hardship and the little money he earns, Aung tries to help other migrants by buying clothes for them. He does whatever he can to alleviate the suffering of workers for he has suffered before and does not want this kind of suffering to happen to other people also.

When Aung thinks about when he worked for Jee's relatives he said he always wanted to go to the police and tell them his story but he didn't do so as he had no documents and was afraid. Aung believes that he would have been arrested and not helped. Now Aung is a registered migrant and if he has a chance he would like to tell the police what happened to him. He wants the police to arrest the family and Jee for what they did to him.

Aung was deceived by his aunt to come to work in Thailand. Although he consented to come to Thailand he understood that he would be working and earning money fairly. He did not consent to being held captive in a house with no freedom, working long hours for very little pay and being punished when he did not sell all the roti. Aung was exploited but even though the law was there, it did not help him and the police presented a threat to him rather than a helping hand. Aung understands that what was done to him was inhumane and wrong. He hopes no more migrants suffer like he did. He would not encourage his friends or family to come to work in Thailand and thinks his own decision to come to work here was not worth it after all.





e's Life:

Slavery on a Boat from Hell

Ye was married and had two children when he was living in Karen State in Myanmar, 9 kilometers from the Myanmar-Thai border. His mother passed away when he was young and his father worked for Myanmar's military. After his father retired he received nothing from the government to support his family and Ye was disappointed. His father's health deteriorated and he is now paralyzed. Ye wanted to leave Myanmar to find work. He could not support his family with his income and believed the Government would never help his family.

Ye was 31 when he decided to leave for Thailand. As he lived so close to the border he thought the easiest option to solve his financial problems was to migrate to Thailand as it was so close and he had heard that workers could earn money working on fishing boats. He had also heard that some of the villagers working on fishing boats had died but was willing to take a risk as he could barely earn enough money to buy daily food for his family. Ye said he was desperate at this time.

Ye contacted a friend who knew a broker in Myanmar. The broker called Ye and told him that it would cost him 12, 000 baht (US\$414) as transportation fees to go to Thailand. As Ye did

not have enough money to pay these fees, the broker told him that the amount could be deducted from his wages once working in Thailand. He was taken to Myawaddy by this broker and he met a different female broker there.

This broker took Ye to 'gate 999' where the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was stationed. The DKBA soldiers ordered him to carry logs from a river but Ye did not agree to work for them as he wanted to go to work in Thailand. The soldiers punched, kicked and threatened him with a gun. They told him to move the logs or else they would kill him. Ye worked until noon on that first day with 5-6 other people and returned to the camp as he was getting hungry. The soldiers punched and kicked him again for not working. They pointed a gun to his head and pulled the trigger but there was no bullet in the gun. Ye was very frightened and wanted to leave.

Ye remembered the female broker's phone number so he called her and said he wanted to go to Bangkok immediately. The lady said it would cost him another 2, 000 baht (US\$69) to cover his food and accommodation costs before they could cross the river to the Thai side of the

border. Ye agreed to go to a fishing boat but nothing more was said about work conditions or benefits. The next morning someone came to pick-up Ye up from gate 999 and took him to a border village in Myanmar. He stayed with 38 other people at a broker's house for about a week and then crossed the river over to the Thai side of the border during the night with a guide. The workers continued to walk in the dark through forests and arrived at a village in the early morning.

With a guide leading them, the workers again started trekking through deep jungle the next day. Ye and the workers were not provided with regular food and when food was provided it was in very small portions. They had to look for fruits and vegetables in the jungle to eat. During the journey they had to cross a road and a police car was there. The guide went to talk to the police and Ye saw that the police gave the guide 2,000 baht (US\$70). Apparently the broker had asked for some money to buy food for the people. One of the women injured her foot while walking in the jungle but no medication was given to her. The guide told the women that she could not follow them anymore as the journey was too difficult with her injury so she was left there alone

When the people were too tired to walk, the guide mixed a handful of Ya ba, methamphetamine and caffeine tablets with some drinking water and gave it to them all to drink. The guide told them that two other migrant groups were arrested by the police while they were travelling recently. Ye started to worry and the other people became more alert. Ye's group was robbed by some Mon people and some of the people went missing but no one looked for them in the haste of the journey.

Finally after several days of continuous walking, Ye arrived at a large cave. He saw 400 to 500 migrants hidden in the cave. A truck came to pick the workers up. Each truck loaded 40 people - 20 in the front and 20 in the back. All the workers were taken to a place where they were assigned a destination. The group by this time had not eaten for days and there was no more fresh water left.

A truck took Ye and 10 other workers to a pier and Ye was pushed onto a fishing boat. He was not used to being on a boat and got sea sick during the first night. Ye was told to sort fish. There was a Mon net manager who controlled all the workers on the boat. Ye heard from the other workers on the boat that this net manager had killed some workers before. There were two captains on the boat. One had a gun and the other carried a knife.

Ye worked on the fishing boat for about 1 month. He was told that he would be paid 4,200 baht (US\$145) a month but the net manager took 1,000 baht (US\$25) from his wages and he was never paid anything at all. Ye had to tow the net four times a day at 4 am, 10 am, 3 pm and 8 pm. There was barely any time for him to sleep. Ye could not endure this work for long and decided to escape. He fled with another worker by jumping off the boat and swimming to the shore. Both workers slept at a temple but were told by a Myanmar man not to stay for long as police and immigration would find them and take them back to the boat. If that happened they would likely be killed.

Ye started walking and soon realised that he was in Pattaya city, East of Bangkok. He was starving and had to eat the food offered to the small shrine statutes. It was mostly spoilt food from being left outside but he didn't have many



options. Ye found 5 baht (US\$0.15) on the ground and tried to make a call to a friend. Suddenly two Mon men grabbed his shirt and shouted 'thief, thief.' The Mon men called the previous boat's net manager whom came to pick him up. The net manager said to Ye "I told you that you cannot escape." As punishment, Ye was locked in a room for two days where he was beaten and then he was taken back to the boat.

Ye learnt during his time on the boat that many of the workers wanted to kill the net manager. Some had already paid off their travel debt but they were still forced to work. An Indian cook on the boat gave Ye a knife to kill the net manager but Ye did not do it. The workers that tried to escape were often caught by the police and sent back to the net manager. The net manager would have to pay the police for their release and then told the workers they would have to pay off their release fees again, increasing the debt they already owed. Some workers who could not work anymore or were too tired were pushed into the sea. Ye felt hopeless and hated the net manager.

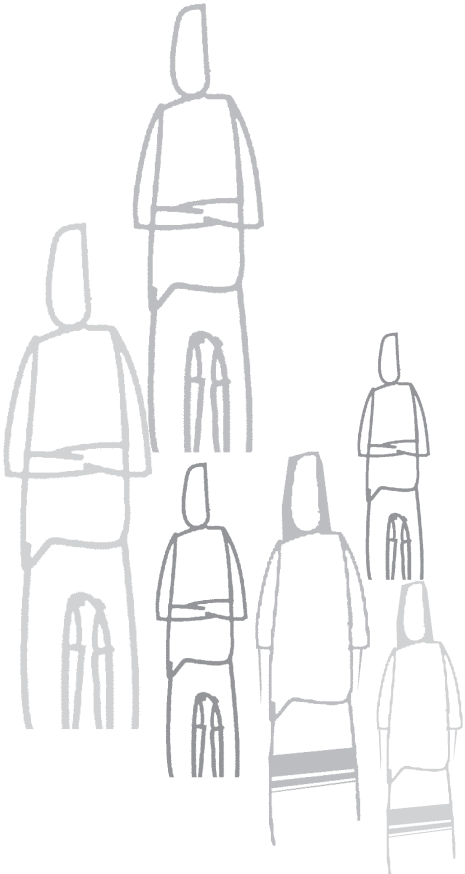
Ye was transferred to another boat . It was a big boat that travelled to Indonesia. There were around 60 workers on this boat. Ye endured similar problems on the new boat. The new net manager was only 22 years old. He was a Mon and indiscriminately abused all the workers, even the older ones. Ye was kicked and hit on the head. He was told that he had to work for 3 years to pay off his debt. Another worker told Ye that he had already paid off his debt but was forced to continue to work. He has been working in the fishing industry for 10 years already. Every time he tried to escape, the police would capture him, return him to the boat and he would have to work to pay off his release fees and debt again.

Ye worked for 8 months on this boat. He was never paid for his work and was forbidden to have any cash of his own. He said the situation on board the boat was even more a prison than in Myanmar. Ye said once a worker got on a fishing boat there was no escape. But he did not want to stay in this prison forever. Ye had a mobile phone but there was no signal out at sea. One night, he noticed that the boat was close to Bangkok and his phone had signal. He called his friend and was so happy when his friend answered. He arranged for his friend to pick him up once he escaped from the boat.

First Ye escaped into another boat but his net manager caught him. He was taken back into a room where he met another worker who said that he would help him escape. It was night time and the captains and net managers were drinking and a taking Ya ba on the boat. The worker winked for Ye to leave and gave him 100 baht using the excuse that Ye was going to buy more drinks. When Ye came on land, the mother of the net manager who sold Ya ba asked him where he was going. Not convinced that Ye was going to buy drinks, she told another worker to go with him as she trusted that worker who had been working on the boat for a while. That night Ye and the other worker both escaped.

Ye finally got to Bangkok and was taken in by a church. He was so happy to not have anyone threaten his life and force him to work anymore. Ye said that he can never forgive the net manager who tortured him. He wants to tell his story to all the villagers in Myanmar so that they think about coming to Thailand themselves. Ye wants to save their lives before they must endure the same fate as he did. Ye is now a registered migrant worker. Although his supervisor is strict, Ye is happy with his life. He has a new wife and plans to move once he has enough money and has a stable income.

Ye’s story is similar to many migrants who seek to earn money in Thailand but end up being enslaved. As there is no legal means practically for them to enter into Thailand, the only way to enter the country is to rely on brokers who are ready to exploit workers’ vulnerability and desperate need for money. Ye did not dare to ask for help from the police during his exploitation as he said they would have just sent him back to his employer. Although the law against human trafficking is there, without the honest enforcement by the police and education to workers, people like Ye will continue to come to Thailand and be at the mercy of brokers and employers who treat them as reusable merchandise rather than human beings.





Min's Life Experiences of Cruel Journeys and Near Death on the High Seas

Min, a Karen/Burmese ethnic from Shan State in Myanmar, lived in a village near the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border with his parents. His father had a bad leg and his mother was struggling to support the family. His father worked for the Myanmar Government and, when he retired, received some pension but it was not enough for the family to survive. Living near the border of Thailand, Min noticed that some people in his village were earning large sums of money from work in Thailand. Min thought about his family and how he could help earn more money to support them.

When he was in his early 20s, Min was working as a motorbike taxi driver in Myawaddy. He had two motorbikes but both of them were not registered as it was difficult to obtain official registration. The Myanmar police and army eventually confiscated his motorbikes. When he was working as a motorbike driver he had met a Mon man with whom he had discussed about going to work in Thailand. Min was not serious about leaving to Thailand at that time but, after his motorbikes were confiscated, he felt that he had no choice but to find work in Thailand. The Mon man said that Min would be paid 6,000 baht (US\$207) per month for work in either a restaurant or a factory if he went to Thailand and the work would not be hard.

The total broker fee for securing this work for Min and for his travelling to the workplace was set by the broker at 12,000 baht (US\$414). Min did not have enough money to pay up front these costs so the broker said that the costs could be deducted from his wages once he started working. Min was told that one third of his wages would initially be given to him, one third to his parents while the rest would be used to pay broker fees. Min was not told when his debt would be fully paid, but according to his calculations, 12,000 baht could be paid 3 months after starting work in Thailand.

Min was taken by the broker to join a group of migrants to be transported to Thailand. Min and the other people travelled by car for 3 days before they reached Three Pagoda Pass, the border pass between Myanmar and Thailand near Sangklaburi in Kanchanaburi Province. As they continued their journey into Thailand, the number of people gradually increased and eventually there were 15 pick-up trucks and about 700 people. The migrants were stacked on top of each other like cattle in three layers lying down. A tarp cloth was pulled over them to cover them and corners were left open to allow air in so that they could breathe.

During the journey, the pick-up truck stopped in the middle of the night and the people were told to start walking. Min and the others walked from dusk until dawn and very tired. The man that was leading the workers had a bag of Ya-ba, methamphetamine and caffeine pills. The man mixed the pills into the drinking water and let the people drink the water. Min was only afraid of being left behind. During the journey across Thailand the migrants were given very little food and water. Min remembered they were given spoilt rice with big chunks of half-cooked pork. This food was inedible so people looked around for fruits and drank water from dirty streams as they were dehydrated. Some people disappeared during the trip as the terrain was difficult, steep and densely covered. Sometimes the workers could not see where they were stepping. The men leading the groups did not care about workers left behind and didn't go looking for them.

Everyone walked continuously for 3 days before resting at a village. Min estimated there were at least 300 people at the time they assembled at the village. There were 3 men in charge of the group. One carried a knife and the other carried a gun. All had many mobile phones strapped around their belts. A Karen woman in the group spoke some Thai and translated for Min. The men leading told them all to remain quiet or they would be beaten or killed.

The group walked for another 4 days before a car came to pick them up and sorted them into groups. Along the way, they passed some police checkpoints. After speaking with the driver of the car, the police let them through each time. Min and 4 other workers were finally taken to a boat. Min did not know where he was but the boat was anchored not far from the shore. When Min finally got on the boat, he was given a pair

of trousers and boots, toothpaste and aspirin. His feet were still swollen from all the walking so he could not fit into his boots.

Min was told to handle fishing nets. There was a Mon and a Thai man watching over the workers. The Thai man had a gun and threatened the workers with it. Min had to work hard and when he didn't he was kicked in the stomach. The workers slept on the boat and a loud bell would ring to wake the workers up for their shift. Min banged his head on the ceiling every time he got up as it was so low. Min hated the sound of the bell and only ever got a few hours of sleep. He had to work day and night. Min was so tired that when he lay down he would immediately fall asleep. He was never paid for his work.

A small amount of food was provided to the workers on the boat 4 times day, and consisted generally of rotten vegetables. Once Min and the others workers stole a fish and tried to cook it by placing it on the exhaust pipe of the boat. They were all caught and beaten. After working on the boat for 3 months, one of the workers asked Min to run away with him. Min did not know how to escape or where to go. Every time the boat docked at the pier, all the workers were taken to a house and all locked inside one small room. They were only let out when the boat left for sea again.

Two workers did try to run away but one of them got caught. This worker was taken back to the boat and tied to a post with his feet half immersed in water. Electric shocks were sent into the water and the man was electrocuted. He was also tortured with cigarette buds. Later the man was taken to the back of the boat and shot through the head. Min felt very angry but he couldn't say anything. He could not endure the abuse anymore and finally decided to escape.

In the middle of the night he tied himself to a life buoy, jumped and swam away from the boat. He left the boat around 2am in the morning and arrived at the shore at 8am. He remembered drinking a lot of sea water before he finally made it to the shore to safety and freedom.

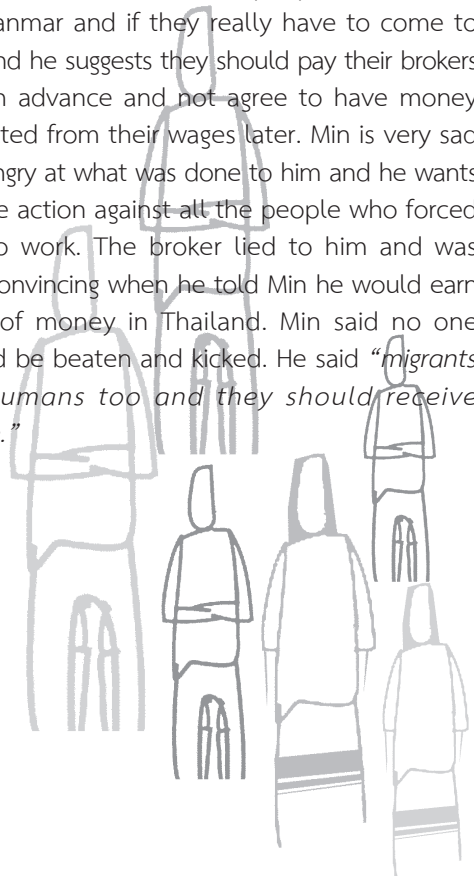
When Min arrived on the shore, he did not know who to contact or where he was. He met a man from Myanmar who helped him and found him a new job near the pier stacking and transporting carts of seafood. Min wore a lot of clothes to cover his face so only his eyes were exposed when outside. He was still working in an area close to where his old boat docked and was afraid of getting caught. Another worker that escaped from the same fishing boat told him that anyone who found a worker who had escaped and returned them to the boat would receive 5, 000 baht (US\$170).

There were many fishing boats coming and going near where Min was working and he saw many workers from Myanmar. One time a worker approached him and asked for help. Min understood what the man was enduring as he has been through the torture before. Min helped the man escape and together they left the place where Min worked as it was too close to the pier and the fishing boats anyway. Min contacted a church and some people from the church came to help them. The church was in Pattaya City, East of Bangkok.

Min never dared to go to the police during his exploitation as he was afraid of them. Since Min escaped from the boat he has been arrested by the police twice however. The first time he was deported back to Mae Sot and his wife, whom he married in Thailand, had to pay 15, 000 baht (US\$517) to an agent to transport Min back to Bangkok again. Another time Min was arrested

along with 21 other workers at a construction site where he was working. They were taken to the Immigration Detention Center in Bangkok where the food given to them was so bad. The officers on guard said the food was donated and they had to accept whatever they were given. Min was then deported back to Mae Sot again. During the journey a police officer slapped and punched him in the eye. Min did not understand why the police officer did like that to him. Once again he had to pay an agent to get him back into Thailand. Min is now working at a paint factory mixing chemicals. He earns 5,500 baht (US\$190) per month. Although the job is very tiring, Min receives money for his work and he is able to survive in Thailand.

Min's life in Thailand did not turn out as he planned. He now feels that it was not worth coming to Thailand and wants to tell his friends not to come in the future. Min felt he did not have a choice before as he was so poor. Min knows however that many people are starving in Myanmar and if they really have to come to Thailand he suggests they should pay their brokers fees in advance and not agree to have money deducted from their wages later. Min is very sad and angry at what was done to him and he wants to take action against all the people who forced him to work. The broker lied to him and was very convincing when he told Min he would earn a lot of money in Thailand. Min said no one should be beaten and kicked. He said "*migrants are humans too and they should receive justice.*"



Sanda's Life: Sold as a Slave to Satisfy Sexual Desires

Sanda was 39 when she came to Thailand. She is a Christian Chin and the second oldest of 5 siblings. She was married and lived with her 3 children in Chin State, Myanmar. Her parents owned a concrete house which in Myanmar meant you were considered well-off. When her father died in 1997, Sanda's youngest brother was supposed to inherit the house but Sanda wanted to sell it to get money to support the family. Her uncle refused. In 2000, her husband passed away. Sanda's brother was sick and she needed money for his medicine and to support her family. Sanda therefore sold the house and bought a smaller wooden house. Her brother passed away two years later.

Sanda gave the remaining money from the sale of the house to her younger sister for her teacher-training. When her brother passed away her uncle told her to marry again but she did not want to. Sanda was struggling as she was building up debt and she had to support herself and her children. Her uncle suggested that she send her children to an orphanage in Yangon and go to work in Malaysia. Her uncle had relatives there so Sanda reluctantly agreed. She didn't hear again from her uncle about going to Malaysia however so she was sad, disappointed and desperate. Sanda was a single mother and she needed money so she decided to go to work at the Myanmar-Thai border.

A friend from Sanda's village advised her how to get to Mae Sot, one of the Myanmar-Thai border towns. Sanda asked her sister to take out a loan of 300,000 kyat (US\$430) for her before starting on the journey to Mae Sot. Her sister had a teaching degree so she was able to take out loans. Sanda had to pay the money and the interest (at a rate of 10%) back later. She was in a lot of debt already and had to sell her house again. Before Sanda went to Mae Sot, she visited her children in Rangoon in May 2008. She told them that she was going to earn some money and that they all would be able to stay together again one day in the future.

On the bus to Myawaddy, the town opposite Mae Sot in Thailand, Sanda met another migrant woman who told her that she was returning to work at a wool factory in Thailand. This lady suggested Sanda go to work at the factory too. Sanda agreed, but when she arrived at Myawaddy, the woman told her that the factory had been raided and she could not work there. Sanda then met another Indian-Myanmar woman on the bus and asked her about finding work in Bangkok. The woman told Sanda that it would cost 8,500 baht (US\$293) to take her to a shrimp factory in Mahachai, Samut Sakorn in Central Thailand. Sanda agreed but she did not have enough money with her to pay the lady so she was told she could pay the money back through



her wages once she arrived in Thailand. When arriving in Myawaddy, this woman transferred Sanda to a Mon couple.

Sanda was smuggled across the Myanmar-Thai border by the Mon couple through thick jungle. She can remember well the exact day she travelled across the border. Sanda and other workers began their journey at 2am in the morning in the dark. They were not allowed to use a flashlight or light a fire during their walk as it could attract attention. The path was steep and rough. At one point during the journey someone had to help push Sanda up a hill as she could not climb it alone. Sanda fell down many times and was so tired and scared. Sanda and the others walked in the jungle for 5 days and were picked-up at Kamphang Phet in Central Thailand and driven to Rayong Province in Eastern Thailand. She did not know that the Mon couple had bought her for 20,000 baht (US\$690).

First Sanda had to work at a construction site. There was a leader controlling all the workers and they had to obey his orders. Sanda poured cement and dug holes for 15 days. She was afraid to escape from the site as she had heard that one worker who escaped was killed. She didn't understand the language used either and did not know where to go anyway. After 15 days, the Mon couple came to pick Sanda up and locked her in a room far from the construction site. They told her that she had to marry a Myanmar man, Tae-ou. She didn't want to marry the man as he was almost 40 years old and had a wife already. Sanda was given a week to reconsider and the Mon couple, staying in the same building, threatened her that if she did not marry the man she would be sent to work in a brothel. Sanda tried to escape but the windows had iron bars and the door was always locked.

Tae-ou came to stay in the same room as Sanda after 2 weeks. Sanda was weak as she barely had received any food. Tae-ou tried to rape her but she fought hard with the little strength she had left. After 3 days, Sanda had no strength however. Her body was full of bruises from struggling with Tae-ou. She could not fight anymore and he raped her. She was then given food to eat as a reward.

During daytimes, Sanda had to work in the room. She had to gut about 50 kg of fish per day for the Mon couple but she never received payment. The Mon couple told her that her wages were taken to pay for fees they paid to buy her and the room rent which was 600 baht (US\$21) per month. During the night when Tae-ou returned to the room, Sanda had to struggle with him as he would try to have sex with her everyday. She even wore jeans thinking that they would be hard to take-off but they were torn apart by Tae-ou. Tae-ou raped Sanda continuously without using a condom. He would sometimes come back drunk and beat her too. Sanda fought back and there was a lot of noise. The neighbours heard the noise and were aware Sanda was held against her will. They would talk to her when they had a chance but were afraid of the Mon couple and did not want to get involved.

Sanda was not given any money from Tae-ou to buy food or clothes. She just had to have sex with him - that was her job. She was given a rice bowl with some curry once a day by the Mon couple but otherwise she did not receive anything to eat. Sanda was a sex slave for Tae-ou and the Mon couple were the pimps. Sanda was held for 1 month in the same manner. Then Tae-ou said that he was going to sea for work. A Mon man took a liking to Sanda and helped her escape when Tae-ou was away. He borrowed 20,000 baht (US\$690) to buy Sanda from the

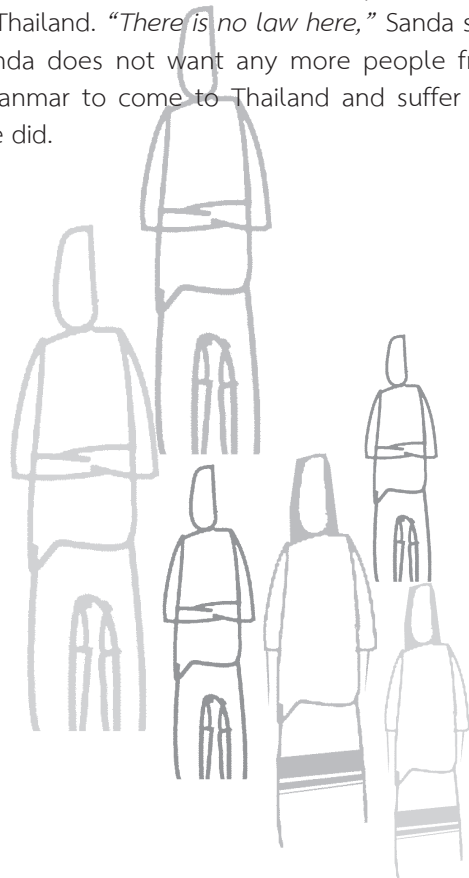
Mon couple. As Tae-ou had left temporarily, the Mon couple decided to sell Sanda to the man. Sanda is now married to this man.

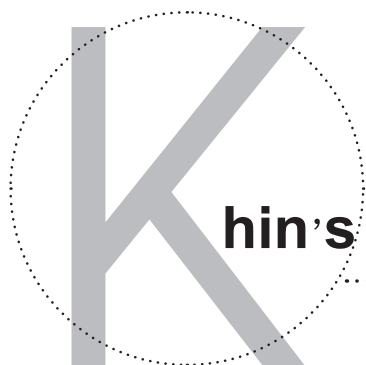
Both Sanda and her husband are now working at a different construction sites and earn 200 baht (US\$6.9) per day. Sanda works 20 to 25 days each month. None of the workers at the construction site are given protection equipment for their work and are simply told to be careful when they work at height. The same Mon couple is controlling the workers but Sanda does not have to have sex with anyone anymore. The Mon couple registered all the workers on the construction site but not Sanda. She was not told why this was.

Sanda's life is a bit better than in Myanmar but her experiences have left scars on her that will never heal. She was raped and may have contracted HIV, she says. Sanda is scared to register herself as a migrant worker, even if allowed, as she knows authorities will test her blood and she fears she will find out that she is HIV positive. She even avoids sleeping with her husband regularly as she does not want to infect him. Sanda does not understand a lot about

HIV. She does not know that the virus can be passed with just one exposure. She does not tell her husband about these fears also. Some of the other workers told Sanda that if a person has HIV, their body would ache. Every time Sanda's body aches, she fears that she has HIV. The money Sanda earns in Thailand currently is not enough to send home to her family. It is barely enough to support her and another women and her young baby whom Sanda now helps. Sanda still owes debt to her sister in Myanmar. She wants to go back to Myanmar to her children but travelling costs are too high for now.

Coming to Thailand ruined Sanda's life, she said. The brokers benefitted from her misery and Tae-ou used her for his own pleasures. Sanda was looked down on like she was not human, she said. Sanda wants justice and compensation for all the wrong that has been done to her but she was and is still afraid to even ask help from the police as she is undocumented. Other workers told Sanda that the law will not help her anyway in Thailand. "There is no law here," Sanda said. Sanda does not want any more people from Myanmar to come to Thailand and suffer like she did.





hin's Life: Sold at Only 12

Khin, a Christian of Karen ethnicity, lived with his older sister and parents in Southern Myanmar. He has never attended school and was only 12 years old when he was trafficked to Thailand. Khin does not remember a lot about his past as he was very young. When he was helped from his trafficking situation, he didn't know when his birthday was or what was happening to him at all. He tells his life story slowly with long breaks in the narrative.

Khin said that when he was in Myanmar his father hit him on the head a lot. He did not understand why and he was very sad at this treatment. He could not endure the pain any longer so he ran away with a friend. Two other friends joined them and they walked for 4 days from his village to Pala-ou District in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province in Thailand. Khin stayed at an unknown Karen teacher's house for 3 months until the teacher sent him to work at a rubber plantation.

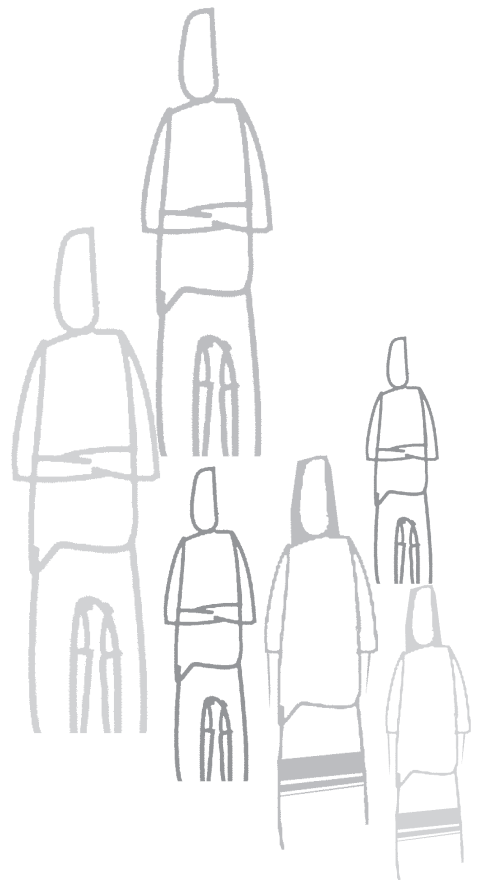
All the workers at the plantation were Karen. Khin was provided with gloves and a knife to cut the rubber trees and worked for 100 Baht (US\$3.3) per day from 7am to 5pm with Sunday as a day off. On Sunday, Khin would go to church. He made some new friends at the plantation

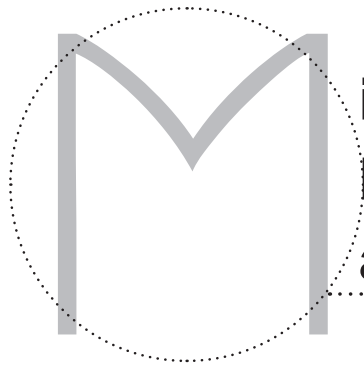
and started to adjust to his new environment. Khin received his pay regularly and he lived with the other workers near the plantation. One of his new friends told him that they could earn more money working in Bangkok so after working at the plantation for 2 months, Khin followed his friend to Bangkok. Khin cannot remember where he went but someone came to pick them up and took both of them to a fishing boat.

The boat left for sea and Khin had no idea where he was or where the fishing boat was heading. He was told to lift boxes of fish and pull the fishing net from dusk till dawn. He received some food but Khin was not paid for his work. The person who controlled the workers on the boat neglected Khin as he was too young to be working. Khin worked on the boat for 7 days and when the boat docked at the pier he was cast off with his friend. Eventually he fell into the hands of a Thai lady who locked he and his friend up in a room for 3 days before they were taken to another fishing boat. On seeing the two boys, the new boat owner only accepted Khin's friend for work as he was 19 years old. Khin was considered too young to work and was left on the street alone.

Khin did not speak any Thai and did not know where he was and who he could ask for help. He started wandering around. After 3 days, Khin was walking on a car overpass when a car stopped and took him to a police station. The police station was in Klong Toey district of Bangkok. Khin had not eaten or drank properly for 3 days. Khin was then sent to the Immigration Detention Center at Suan Plu in Bangkok. He was detained for 3 months there. People from Myanmar and Thailand shared the cell with him.

Khin was later deported to Mae Sot on the Thai-Myanmar border. When he arrived there, the immigration police handed him over to the DKBA army in Myawaddy however. As he had to pay for his release, an aid worker bought Khin from the DKBA and he was taken back to Mae Sot and stayed at the safe house of a Myanmar aid organisation. He then moved to a boarding school where he learnt Thai, English and Myanmar languages. He made some friends there and was happy. Khin is currently seeking out regular education and care but he does not have legal documents to stay in Thailand and remains at risk of arrest, deportation or re-trafficking.





Mimi's Life of Abuse and Forced Marriage to a Senile Man

Mimi is the second youngest child out of 11 children and is a Muslim from Southern Shan State in Myanmar. Her father sold clothes at a local market and was the sole income earner in her household. Her mother was not allowed to work by her father. When her father's health deteriorated, her family business deteriorated also. Mimi finished grade 9 and left school to help support her family. She worked many different jobs to help earn money for her family. One of her jobs was extracting gem stones from rocks by breaking the rocks into pieces. Her work earned her roughly 50 baht (US\$1.7) per day. Later her elder brother fell ill so Mimi had to take care of him. She also had to take care of her nieces, nephews and her grandparents. One of her elder sisters did try to help to provide food to the family but it was barely enough for the family to survive on.

Mimi was desperate and needed to earn enough money to feed her family. She had heard from a friend that she could earn between 10,000 Kyat (US\$14) and 15,000 Kyat (US\$21) per day working as a maid in Thailand. Mimi thought domestic work would not be so difficult and she could earn much more money than in Myanmar so she decided to leave for Thailand.

She was 23 years old at that time. Mimi asked a friend to contact a broker. The agreed transportation fee to Thailand was around 10,000 baht (US\$345). Mimi had to sell some small stalls to pay for her transportation costs but she was able to pay in full by cash. Mimi was put on a bus and came to the Thailand through the Tachilek-Mae Sai border in Shan State. She said that her journey was quite comfortable. When Mimi arrived in Thailand, she phoned around the Muslim community to find work.

Mimi's first job was as a domestic worker with an Indian family at Pratunam in Central Bangkok. She was paid 3,500 baht (US\$121) per month and accommodation was provided free for her. She worked for this family for about 2 months and they treated her well and she was paid for all the work she did. However, when the economy worsened, business became bad for this family and they returned to India. Mimi then contacted a broker to find her another job. Her second job was with a Punjab Indian in Chantaburi Province. She was promised 4,500 baht (US\$155) per month by this employer for domestic work. Mimi worked from 6am in the morning until 9pm in the evening in this job. She stayed with the

employer and was given regular meals. Mimi worked there for a month but only received 2,000 baht (US\$69). She was not paid what she was promised and decided to leave. The employer was happy for her to leave anyway.

Mimi returned to Bangkok and a friend found her a job working at a tea shop in Bangrak district in the city. She was promised 3,000 baht (US\$310) per month by her employer. She worked from 8am to 10:30pm every day. She had to stand all day and her feet were always swollen. By the time she finished work and showered it was already midnight and she did not get much sleep each day. She lived with the employer and received regular meals. After 15 days of work, her employer had to go back to Pakistan and she was not paid for the 15 days she had worked.

Mimi then found herself sold by another broker she had contacted for assistance. The broker knew her new employer well and she paid 30,000 baht (US\$1100) for Mimi. Her new employer was a Thai woman who was married to a Pakistani man. The Thai woman soon divorced this man and Mimi was then living with the lady, her 3 children and the lady's 70 year old father. First Mimi did not know that she had been sold to the family as she did not understand what was happening and thought she had just found another job. It was only later that she understood that she was regarded as goods that could be sold and resold. The Thai woman sold meat at a local market so in the morning she would leave early for work and leave the 3 children for Mimi to look after. Mimi was told that she would be paid 4,500 baht (US\$155) per month to work as a maid and an extra 100 baht (US\$35) each day for taking care of the three children.

After working for one month Mimi asked for her wages from the Thai lady's father but he refused to pay her. He threatened that he would report her to the police if she did not continue to work for them. After this Mimi was locked in her room when she was not working. She was not allowed to leave the house and was carefully watched by the father. After 2 months, the Thai lady and her children were told to leave by the father following a lot of quarreling. Mimi wanted to leave too. She did not want to work for the old man as she was afraid of him and did not want to be alone with him. When she told the old man that she wanted to leave he called a policeman to the house. The policeman was his nephew. The policeman threatened to arrest Mimi and charge her with theft. Mimi was very scared and she did not know anyone and did not have a phone that she could use to contact somebody else for assistance.

Mimi worked with the old man without problems for a week but then he broke down her bedroom door in the middle of the night and raped her. She tried to escape many times after this event but failed. Again she was locked in her room and could not leave the house. When the man was not raping her, he would beat her and swear at her. Mimi has burn scars on her right hand from boiling oil that was thrown at her by the man. He was angry that she refused to have sex with him. When Mimi managed to escape once, she was found by the broker that had sold her to the family and sent back to the house. Mimi was suffering a lot. She couldn't speak Thai and she had no phone or money and was afraid to ask for help from the police.

The man who was abusing Mimi had a lot of wives. He insisted Mimi marry him but she refused. The man called the police and they detained

her for 3 days. She had no legal documents with her and no one came to visit her. The police said that she had to marry the man or else they would not let her go. Mimi did not want to stay in the prison so she reluctantly agreed to marry the man. Being Muslim, it was tradition for the groom's family to provide dowry for the bride. Mimi only received 125 baht (US\$4.3). There was no marriage certificate and a small wedding ceremony was attended by a few Thai Muslim community leaders. Mimi could not ask for help during the marriage process as she couldn't speak Thai and as a Muslim woman, she had to keep quiet in front of the leaders.

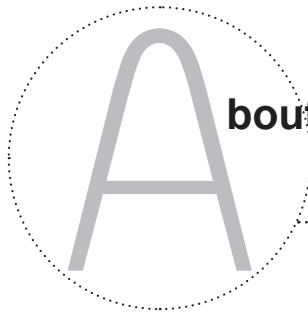
Mimi was married to this man for 8 months. Every day she was beaten and abused. Whenever the man left the house, he would lock the door to her room and lock the house. Mimi was in a prison and could not stand it. One day Mimi broke the glass of the window in her room and escaped. She ran as fast and as far as she could. She did not know where she was going. Mimi was extremely depressed and disorientated. She got to the Southern bus terminal in Bangkok and bought a ticket for the next available coach. That coach was headed for Phuket City. But a Thai lady noticed Mimi was distressed and took Mimi to stay in her house in Bangkok. The lady was kind and provided Mimi with food.

One day when Mimi was at the market, the man who had kept her imprisoned spotted her and grabbed her arm. He called the police and they arrested her again. Since her escape, the man

had filed a report against Mimi claiming that she had stolen from him. The police asked Mimi if she had brought the man's property back. Mimi did not understand what they were asking or why they were asking her. When she escaped, she had taken a bag to put her belongings in so she thought the police meant this bag. The police did not ask if she had stolen the bag but whether she had brought the bag back. The police fingerprinted Mimi and she saw that the old man paid money to the police also. Mimi was detained at the Bangrak police station and later had to attend court. Mimi's elder sister heard about Mimi's situation and asked for legal assistance. Her sister's husband was able to assist Mimi to find help in Bangkok. Mimi eventually won her case in court and was set free. She soon found work and accommodation and has now gained documents to live and work in Thailand.

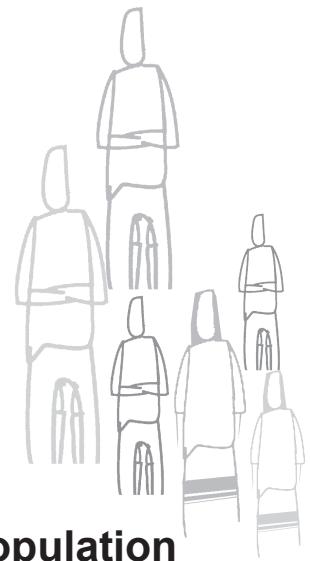
After her trial, Mimi went back to Myanmar once to visit her family and give them the little money she had saved whilst working in Thailand. She then returned to Thailand and married a Muslim Myanmar man in Bangkok and they have just had a baby boy. Mimi now wants to forget her past and she felt, looking back at her life, that coming to Thailand was not a good idea, even though she now has a family and a regular job. She is rebuilding her life in Thailand now and says she is slowly finding happiness again.





about the Institute of Population and Social Research (IPSR)

[<http://www.ipsr.mahidol.ac.th/ipsr/>]



Established in 1971, the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University's Salaya campus near Bangkok is one of Asia's premier population research and training hubs. The Institute conducts research and provides training in population and development and explores their relationship to the social, economic, reproductive health, medical and public health fields. This allows the Institute to help address emerging issues for Thailand and neighboring countries in South-East Asia and beyond, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life for all. The demographic transition throughout Asia has emerged at different stages in recent decades as political and economic change has swept the region, and the Institute is uniquely positioned to keep abreast with these changes through our timely research. This knowledge and technical support is widely disseminated to scholars and policymakers internationally, regionally, and at the country and local levels. In 2006, IPRS was ranked first among social science research institutes in Thailand by the National Office of the Higher Education Commission. Today, IPSR is a Collaborating Centre of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Centre of Excellence in Population and Family Planning/ Reproductive Health and a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Research in Human Reproduction.



This

story book was prepared to provide a glimpse into lives of 'invisible' victims of labour trafficking in Thailand. All victims interviewed for this book were not rescued from their situations of severe suffering but bravely escaped from their nightmare and continue to work in Bangkok and its neighbouring provinces, documented and undocumented, to earn a living to support their families in Myanmar. They did not receive any compensation for their past suffering and nor did they want to enter the Thai Government's bureaucratic and paternalistic victim support systems which formally will result in their deportation back to their home country once they complete any necessary rehabilitation or provide evidence as a witness in any prosecution resulting from their case. Instead, like most trafficking victims report, the victims interviewed for this research just want to get on with their lives and earn money. They want to put the past behind them as an unfortunate experience – to simply move on.

