

WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
ELEVENTH SESSION
1993

Statement of the Karen Youth Organization
and

Karen Women Organization

read by

Ms.Paw Paw

Madame Chairperson,

Although this is my first time attending this Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the names of this Working Group and yourself have long been familiar to members of the Karen Youth and Karen Women's Organizations. You provide us with a great sense of hope, and I consider my self extremely lucky to be the first Karen Youth to have the chance to participate in this Working Group.

Many here will know the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on, Human Rights in Myanmar. He sets out in great detail the overall human rights situation.

As this is not a complaint, I wish to stress the condition in the Karen area, which I know best.

The Karen and other indigenous peoples of Burma have been the victims of civil war for almost 45 years now. The indigenous peoples make up half of the country's population.

Government troops are now patrolling every village in western Karen State, torturing and interrogating every villager they catch and taking many as porters. The soldiers suspect every men of being a Karen soldier, so to avoid being tortured and executed all the men must flee the village to hide in the forest. This leaves the women and children alone in the village to try to protect their homes and belongings from looting soldiers. The village men can only return for brief and secret visits when no troops are in the area. As a result, the women now have to do all the farming and village work, and care for their children as well. They must feed their families, and also provide food for the men to survive while they hide in the forest.

Then the troops come to the village and take their food. They shoot the villagers' livestock for meat, take their rice, and cut down many of their crops and their fruit and coconut trees because they say it's all food for rebels. They loot the villagers' money, gold and personal belongings, even their clothes. The women are left with absolutely no way to provide for their families.

The soldiers take the women as porters or to do other slave labour. Sometimes they keep the women as porters for months and rape them almost every night. They give them no food, and beat them or kill them when they get weak. Girls as young as 15 are forced to go with them, and grandmothers over 60 also have to carry their loads. Even pregnant women must go, and they often have miscarriages. Some women carry a baby on their front and a load on their back, and other women are forced to leave their children at home alone while they're gone, with no breast to feed them. The soldiers force the women to walk in front to step on landmines. Many of the women ~~of the women~~ arrive home pregnant, but they are too ashamed to tell anyone.

The army camps constantly send order for the women and children to go to their camp to build their barracks, dig trenches, and bunkers. Some villages has to send teenage girls to the army camp to do errands, wash the officers' clothes, give them their baths, and message and sing the captain to sleep at night. There is always a soldier there pointing a gun at them so there's nothing they can do. The officers rape many of them. The women and children are also forced to build roads, sleep on them in order to guard them and sweep them for mines, then if a mine is found they are fined heavily and beaten, or their village is shelled.

The children have been robbed of their childhood. As soon as they are big enough to work or carry, usually by age 12, they are taken with their mothers to do force labour. None of the children have any chance to go to school because their families are always running from soldiers. The troops come and demand money for schools and clinics, but then just take the money and nothing is built. Even if the villagers build a school, the teachers must always flee to avoid being taken as porters. Many Karen children die of malaria or stomach disease before age 5, because there is no medicine and no doctors.

The women and children finally become so desperate that they run away, but they don't know where to go. They're afraid or unable to go to Thailand, so they just flee to other areas or to hide in the forests, where they have no way to survive. No one is helping them.

Soon even our forest may be gone, as it is cut and sold to foreign countries.

Madame Chairperson, we want to see peace, we want to see the end of the war against Karen Youth and Women, I am here today to seek your help.

Thank you , Madame Chairperson.