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BURMA: Situation of Karens, Kachins, Arakanese, Pa-os, Was, Shans, Mons and Karenis.

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[From a Karen living in exile (1980) in a Far Eastern Country, we have received the following communication which depicts the very grave situation of the indigenous peoples of Burma.]

"...Burma was granted complete independence in 1948. The party in power claims itself to be a socialist governmental body. In fact, it is a one-party system of government which does not give any privilege to the dissident groups and as such it is a dictatorial regime, a departure from democratic modes of administration. Having no arms to support them, the rival parties have no bargaining power to interfere with the affairs of the state. The result is that there is anarchy in the country though it appears to the visitors that there is law and order, peace and prosperity. There is disagreement, dissatisfaction, and opposition throughout the country.

The indigenous races suffer most: they are the Karens, the Kachins, the Arakanese, the Pa-os, the Was, the Shans, the Mons, and the Karenis. These border races are treated by the Burmese as minorities, and are persecuted by the major race as they had done in the pre-British era. We had a breathing spell only during the British occupation. Before Independence our leaders appealed to the Labour government to grant us an area where the Karens are predominant. The British told them to negotiate with the Burmese rulers. When approached, the Burmese leaders urged that our leaders should fight for a state within constitutional channels. Meanwhile they were making extensive preparations to exterminate us. When they were sure of their strength they told our people bluntly that to get a state the Karens should have to fight for it with arms. The belligerency started with the Karen headquarters being attacked by the Burmese on the 28th January 1949. The Karens had no other option but to accept the challenge and fight back, though it is a venture against overwhelming odds.

Our people have fought for more than 30 years. There have been reverses and successes. But we still can hold our grounds. But we cannot be aggressive and in the offensive: because of lack of arms, our fighting men cry all the time, "Give us tools: we will finish the job." Now all of the minorities have their separate defence forces fighting the Burmese army, excepting the Chins. It has turned out to be a fight between the Burmese army and the forces of the indigenous races. This dictatorship government should have been toppled, if it is not aided yearly by foreign countries such as Western Germany, Japan, World Bank, etc.\*In1

It has proved to be a war of attrition. Our people have gone through untold hardships and sufferings. The chief problems

are 1) food, 2) health, 3) destitution, 4) security, 5) refugees.

The bulk of our people earns its livelihood by cultivation which is interrupted by enemy action, especially in the areas close to the enemy troops who destroy crops by cutting and levelling plants with knives, and by burning paddy in barns, and in the process of threshing and garnering. Those people whose paddy is destroyed by the enemy have to eat roots, leaves, fruits, bambooshoots and have to depend on those whose paddy is not destroyed.

Health is a vital problem also. The most common disease is malaria. There are cases of dysenterry digestive disorders and isolated cases of cancer and tuberculosis. As there is no supply of medicine the patients use only herbs and jungle medicine which are in most cases inoperative.

Destitution: here it means poor and penniless. The enemy introduces a blockade system which prevents the Karen villagers who are not yet subdued by them from going to the Burmese towns and billages to buy or sell things. Thus the villagers have no way of earning money. They do business among themselves in the jungle, but they do not get enough money they need to use for each year. They buy cloth and commodities brought by pedlars from Thailand and they are very costly due to transport difficulties and charges. Many of them have only clothes they are wearing.

Security: From time to time the Burmese sldiers especially during the last four years do not follow the rules of warfare observed by civilized people. They carry on war against the civilians. They kill civilians, including children without any question. When they do not kill they force (them) to serve as porters carrying very heavy loads, or they torture and kill them when they fail to serve them. There are times when they send these porters in front of their troops during clashes. Wheat we detest most is the raping of our wome folks. Our people on the hills maintain strict morals. When our women folks are raped they, through shame and resentment, mostly commit suicide afterwards. No one can be sure of his security. Everyone is on alert. On sight of the Burmese soldiers every one runs away.

Refugees: Many refugees are on the Salween River banks. They do not represent one fourth of the total number of refugees who are scattered all over the hills generally inaccessible to the Burmese troops. Those on Thailand's border get some help in kind such as clothes, cloth, medicine, rice and so on from some private, charitable, and humanitarian organizations. Such aids are not regular and sufficient. But refugees along the Salween River even. Through great hardship the refugees manage to go through each years with the help of God, kind and considerate fellow Karens, and the Kawthoolei Government.

Our people can still survive because of our strong will and

determination to resist aggression and because of the general understanding that this is a national struggle for survival. No doubt there are Quislings among all indigenous races. But the struggle will go on.\*lnl

No census can be taken because of disorderliness throughout the country, but our rough estimate, which we believe will not be far incorrect, is that our total population throughout Burma only is between 6 and 7 millions.

We shall be very grateful and appreciate very much if you can do something, within your powers, for my people."

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