



Chin Human Rights Organization

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ADVOCACY BRIEFING:

Human rights violations perpetrated against the Chin in Burma

March 2011 – March 2013

8 April 2013

Analysis & recommendations

In recent months, various representatives of President Thein Sein's 'reformist' government have referred to human rights violations as 'past mistakes', or as 'in the past' in meetings with visiting delegations. However, to date the government has failed to conduct any fully independent or impartial investigations into such alleged abuses, nor held perpetrators to account. Documentation from human rights groups shows that in fact, serious human rights violations continue across the country under President Thein Sein's government, with particularly severe consequences for ethnic and religious minorities. For the predominantly Christian Chin people, this includes violations of religious freedom, forced labour, sexual violence, and extra-judicial killing, despite the fact that a ceasefire between armed resistance group the Chin National Front (CNF) and the government is holding.

CHRO observed two rounds of ceasefire talks between the CNF and the Union-level government delegation in 2012, as well as public consultations arranged by CNF. During the public consultations, Chin people raised concerns about ongoing human rights abuses, and in particular, the right to freedom of religion or belief. Since President Thein Sein's government took power in March 2011, CHRO has documented **15** violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief. These range from discrimination and harassment by local authorities on grounds of ethnicity and religion, to the destruction or removal of four Christian crosses on the direct orders of the authorities, the disruption of a Christian conference by Burma Army soldiers, and coercion to convert to Buddhism by State actors in a government-run 'vocational training' school.

Since March 2011, CHRO has documented a total of **125** other human rights violations, in addition to violations of religious freedom. Due to the challenges and difficulties with human rights documentation in Chin State, CHRO believes that this represents the tip of the iceberg.

The most prevalent human rights abuse affecting the Chin is extortion or arbitrary taxation, accounting for almost half of the violations documented by CHRO. In previous years, forced labour was the most prevalent human rights violation perpetrated against the Chin. Although forced labour is in decline, it is still the second-most prevalent abuse, with the military responsible for 54 percent of the 28 incidents documented since March 2011; typically, portering military rations or supplies. Burma Army soldiers are also responsible for almost all incidents of food misappropriation, typically the killing or seizure of livestock at gunpoint. Local authorities were responsible for 62 percent of the extortion or arbitrary taxation incidents, with Burma Army soldiers responsible for the other 38 percent. The involvement of Burma Army soldiers in exacting forced labour, misappropriating food, and extorting Chin villagers must be understood in the context of the so-called 'self-sufficiency' policy of the Burma Army. This policy requires Burma Army soldiers to support themselves economically, but in practice it directly contributes to human rights abuses perpetrated against locals by Burma Army soldiers wherever they are stationed.

In addition, although there has been a decline in the overall number of human rights violations documented by CHRO over the past year, these have included very serious incidents. A Chin woman was raped by a Burma Army soldier in Arakan State. In Paletwa township, southern Chin State, a 13 year-old girl was sexually assaulted by a Burma Army soldier. Two Burma Army soldiers and a policeman beat a man to death in the northern township of Tedim, Chin State. At the time of writing, CHRO understands that no action has been taken against the alleged perpetrators of any of the human rights abuses documented by CHRO since President Thein Sein's government took power, underlining the fact that impunity for Burma Army soldiers and other State actors continues to be deeply entrenched in the country.

There continues to be a direct correlation between the high presence of Burma Army soldiers and human rights violations in Chin State. At the time of writing, there are 54 Burma Army camps in the area. Although the Chin armed resistance group the Chin National Front has completed three rounds of talks with the government, and has negotiated one of the more detailed ceasefire agreements, to date there has been absolutely no discussion about the withdrawal of Burma Army troops from Chin State.

Recommendations to the international community

1. Raise the issue of religious freedom as a key human rights concern yet to be addressed under the current reforms.

2. Call on the Government of Burma to issue a standing invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur for the Freedom of Religion or Belief, to travel to the country to investigate reports of violations of religious freedom, and to be granted unhindered access to all parts of the country, including Chin State.
3. Call on the Government of Burma to initiate substantive measures to tackle discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities and to protect and promote human rights at all levels of Government and within State institutions, including (but not limited to) reforming the domestic legislative framework to comply with international human rights standards, and revising the National Registration Card so that it no longer identifies the bearer's religion or ethnicity.
4. Support an independent and impartial international mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in Burma, in order to deter further violations and to end the culture of impunity.
5. Press the government of Burma to devise and implement a plan for the staged withdrawal of Burma Army troops from ethnic areas to begin before the 2015 elections.

Methodology

Chin State is a very remote, isolated part of western Burma. Infrastructure there is very poor, with no fully paved roads, making access difficult. Many villages in Chin State are still only accessible on foot, via a network of small tracks. The lack of basic infrastructure in Chin State makes it extremely difficult to collect timely information. As a result, most human rights violations are documented days or weeks after the fact, if at all. In addition, Chin State is heavily militarized. At the time of writing, there are 54 Burma Army camps in the area. Security issues for CHRO's small team of fieldworkers persist, as they are at risk of arrest and detention by the authorities during the course of their work to document the human rights situation in Chin State. Information is collected by CHRO's fieldworkers in accordance with documentation guidelines produced by the Network for Human Rights Documentation – Burma, of which CHRO is a member.¹ CHRO's documentation is published bi-monthly in *Rhododendron News*, available at <http://www.chro.ca/publications/rhododendron.html>. Due to the challenges and difficulties with human rights documentation in Chin State, CHRO believes that the information presented in this briefing represents the tip of the iceberg.

¹ See <http://www.nd-burma.org/documentation/resources.html>, accessed 5 April 2013.

Violations of freedom of religion or belief

Since President Thein Sein's government took power in March 2011, CHRO has documented **15** violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief. A synopsis of each incident is presented here, in reverse chronological order. To read a full account of each incident, please see the references in the footnotes.

18 February 2013

During his first visit to Chin State as the President of the country, U Thein Sein held a meeting with Chin State government, officials and town-elders in Hakha in the morning on Sunday. "The meeting took place from 10am to 2pm. Normally, church services in Hakha start at 10am till 12 noon. So, Chin Christians who had to attend the meeting could not go to church," a community leader from Hakha told Chinland Guardian. For decades, official visits and events have been held on Sunday mornings, with no respect for the right to observe days of rest in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief, or the right to freedom of religious assembly.²

8 September 2012

Around 40 Christian leaders based in North Dagon, Rangoon were summoned and interrogated about their activities by the Township Administration Officer. A Chin pastor told CHRO, "The main reason they cited [for the meeting] was that our properties including the land and buildings were not legally registered. And they said that we maintained the facilities outside the parameters permitted by law. We responded by saying; "If that is the case, we will apply for a religious land ownership. Tell us how much we should pay for the permit legally. We asked them if they will grant us the permit. But they said they won't grant us the permit."³

28 May 2012

Nine local Buddhist youths interrupted a Christian service and physically attacked worshipers in Nga-Shaung (Ng' Ghong) village, Mindat Township. The nine Buddhist youths led by Pu Mnai Khui Shing pointed their fingers at the Christian leader, saying: "You, Christians, said your God can save you, where is your God to save you now? We do not want Christians in this village. You all Christians get out of this village." The incident was reported to the local police station, but it is not known if any action was taken against the alleged perpetrators.⁴

² See *Thein Sein met Chin officials, leaders on Sunday*, 18 February 2013, *Rhododendron News*, January – February 2013.

³ See *Christian Leaders Summoned in Rangoon*, 8 September 2012, *Rhododendron News*, September – October 2012.

⁴ See *Buddhist Youths Attacked Chin Christians in Chin State*, 28 May 2012, *Rhododendron News*, May – June 2012.

27 April 2012

Village Tract Chairman U Ha Ling ordered a Christian family to leave Rawnglaung village in Mindat township on the basis that, “the village is Buddhist”.⁵ The order, reportedly backed by the Mindat Township Religious Affairs office, was the latest in a long line of incidents of harassment and abuse of the family (including stoning of their home), by local monks, Buddhist lay missionaries a.k.a. *lu thatana pyu*, and local Buddhists since they converted from animism to Christianity in 2003. A local pastor involved in the case was also interrogated by an official from the Mindat Township Religious Affairs office.⁶

19 April 2012

A cross on top of a clock tower (a structure more than 33 feet high) in Mualbem village in Tedim township was destroyed when it was razed to the ground by bulldozer, to make way for a new road.⁷ The order was given by village headman Pa Hau Khan Nang, a Tedim-based USDP party organizer, without proper consultation with the villagers. Villagers faced extortion demands to pay for the road, as well as land confiscation without compensation.⁸

20 March 2012

Several soldiers from Matupi-based Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 140 disrupted a Christian conference of more than 1,000 delegates held at Sabawngte village in Matupi Township on 10 March 2012, and threatened a Chin MP at gunpoint. The soldiers remained in the village overnight, disrupting the worship service by carrying guns and patrolling around the church. To date no legal or disciplinary action has been taken against the soldiers from LIB140.⁹

24-27 February 2012

At a Chin State-level ministerial meeting, cabinet members took a decision to build a pagoda at the entrance to Hakha town. The decision caused controversy as very few residents of Hakha town are Buddhist. In addition, questions were raised about how a Chin State cabinet composed of six Christians, four Buddhists, and one subscribing to indigenous religion Laipian, could arrive at such a decision.¹⁰ It later emerged that U Myo Aung Htay - the State-level

⁵ See *Chin Family Evicted from Village for Conversion to Christianity*, Rhododendron News, March – April 2012.

⁶ See also “*Threats to Our Existence*”: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma, CHRO, September 2012, pp.87.

⁷ See [Christian Cross Destroyed by USDP Members in Tedim Township](#), Chinland Guardian, 19 April 2012, accessed 5 April 2013.

⁸ For more detailed information, see “*Threats to Our Existence*”: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma, CHRO, September 2012, pp.54.

⁹ See Case Study Four, “*Threats to Our Existence*”: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma, CHRO, September 2012, pp.61.

¹⁰ See [Questions over Govt’s Plan to Construct New Buddhist Pagoda in Chin State](#), Chinland Guardian, 19 March 2012, accessed 5 April 2013.

General Administrator and the highest-level civil servant in Chin State, a Burman Buddhist - was allowed to vote, in violation of the 2008 Constitution.¹¹ At the time of writing, CHRO understands that Chief Minister Hung Ngai has since withdrawn the decision due to public pressure.

February 2012

Colonel Aung Min from LIB266, Commander of Tactical Operations Command 1 ordered a 3-foot high cross on Mount Rungtlang near Hakha town, within sight of the LIB266 army base at Hakha, to be destroyed. He gave the order to Police Officer Lieutenant Eric Van Bik, who tried to negotiate with the family that planted cross. They refused to comply with the order, and the cross was later removed but not destroyed.¹²

13 September 2011

Local students and teachers in Thantlang Town, Chin State have been forced to go to school on Saturdays in replacement of Buddhist sabbath day that falls on a weekday, mostly Monday. Locals complained that important days for Christians, such as Good Friday, are not observed while schools are closed on special Buddhist days.¹³

10 September 2011

A Chin Christian from the US visiting his family has been ordered to leave town by the local authorities while preaching at a local church in Thantlang, Chin State. The head of the Immigration Department was said to have warned Tial Lian Thang to make a report to the government authority in Hakha that afternoon, after interrupting a Christian gathering organised by the Johson Memorial Baptist Church.¹⁴

3 September 2011

A Chin pastor, who had been living as a Christian missionary in Kyaukhtu Town, Magway Division for nearly three years, was ordered to discontinue his work and leave the town by the local authorities.¹⁵

¹¹ Article 248 of the 2008 Constitution defines the State government as including only the Chief Minister, Ministers, and the Advocate-General.

¹² See *"Threats to Our Existence": Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma*, CHRO, September 2012, pp.54.

¹³ See *Students Forced to Attend Classes on Saturday due to Buddhist Sabbath Day*, 13 September 2011, *Rhododendron News*, September - October 2011.

¹⁴ See *Chin Preacher from USA Ordered to Leave Town in Thantlang*, 10 September 2011, *Rhododendron News*, September - October 2011.

¹⁵ See *Chin Christian Pastor Ordered to Leave Town in Magway Division*, 3 September 2011, *Rhododendron News*, September - October 2011.

15 August 2011

The local government authorities still do not allow Chin Christians to construct buildings or rent a house to live in as a family in Tayawaddy village of Sagaing Division. For several years, Chin Christian students based in the village have tried to construct a church. They have resorted to worshipping in a simple wooden structure covered in tarpaulin, amidst intimidation and threats.¹⁶

28 July 2011

15 local Chin Buddhist youths destroyed two large wooden Christian crosses planted near the newly completed suspension bridge on Mung (Hmolong) River in Kyindwe village, Kanpetlet Township, following direct orders from the Chin State authorities.¹⁷

6 July 2011

Around 1,000 women employees of government departments in Hakha were ordered to participate in a ceremony marking Myanmar Women's Day at 10am on a Sunday morning. Civil servants fear that they will lose their jobs if they don't follow such orders.¹⁸

May 2011

A 20 year-old woman attending a Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training a.k.a. Na Ta La school in Mindat town was forced to shave her head and wear nun's robes. She told CHRO, "As a Christian girl it was not appropriate for me to carry on living at that Na Ta La school, so I ran away....I ran to another village, 20 miles from Mindat town. The monks from the Na Ta La school came there with soldiers from LIB274, looking for me. They told me, 'You have to come back to the school in Mindat, or else you will be forced to join the army.' They told me there is an order for that; even women aged 18-35 have to perform military service, and men aged 18-45. They said there is no choice, everyone has to be a soldier."¹⁹

Other human rights violations

Since President Thein Sein's government took power in March 2011, CHRO has documented a total of **125** other human rights violations, in addition to violations of religious freedom.

¹⁶ See *Chin Christians Banned to Rent and Construct Buildings*, 15 August 2011, *Rhododendron News*, July – August 2011, and *"Threats to Our Existence": Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma*, CHRO, September 2012, pp.50-51.

¹⁷ See Case Study Two, *"Threats to Our Existence": Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma*, CHRO, September 2012, pp.54.

¹⁸ *Women In Hakha Forced to Attend Myanmar Women's Day on Sunday*, 6 July 2011, *Rhododendron News*, Jul-August 2011.

¹⁹ See Case Study Thirteen, *"Threats to Our Existence": Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma*, CHRO, September 2012, pp.109.

Table of human rights violations March 2011 – March 2013, in order of prevalence²⁰

Type of HRV	No. of incidents Mar 2011 – Feb 2012	No. of incidents Mar 2012 – Mar 2013	Totals
Extortion / arbitrary taxation	33	27	60
Forced labour	19	9	28
Food or property misappropriation²¹	13	3	16
Arbitrary arrest and detention	6	1	7
Land confiscation	2	3	5
Torture & ill-treatment	2	1	3
Sexual violence	0	2	2
Extra-judicial killing	0	1	1
Militia training	1	0	1
Forced relocation	0	1	1
Racial discrimination	1	0	1
TOTALS	77	48	125

Below is a synopsis of a typical example for each category of human rights violation. For full details of each incident, please visit the edition of *Rhododendron News* shown in the footnotes, at <http://www.chro.ca/publications/rhododendron.html>.

Extortion / arbitrary taxation

20 March 2013: A Burmese army officer and his group from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 268 based in Leilet in Falam Township, extorted money three times from February 12 – 16 by collecting 70,000 Kyats from a truck loaded with ginger for sale in Farkawn, Mizoram in India. The dealers had no choice but to pay them, as the soldiers threatened they would not let them go if they failed to do so, said the local.²²

²⁰ Of the three most prevalent types of HRVs, the breakdown of incidents and perpetrators is as follows: Extortion/arbitrary taxation - 37 incidents by local authorities, and 23 by the military (62 and 38% respectively). Forced labour – 15 incidents by the military, 13 incidents by the local authorities (54 and 46% respectively). Food or property misappropriation – 16 incidents by the military or police, one incident by the local authorities (94 and 6% respectively).

²¹ Includes two incidents of property confiscation from cross-border traders by Burma Army soldiers, but the other incidents all involve misappropriation of livestock or rice.

²² See *Burmese Army Soldiers Forcibly Collected Money from Ginger Dealers*, in *Rhododendron News*, March – April 2013, due to be published in early May 2013.

Forced labour

25 January 2013: Burma Army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 304 based in Darkhai village, Tonzang Township forced Pu Pa Thang to carry their military rations to a border checking gate, about five miles from Darkhai village, the victim told CHRO.²³

Food or property misappropriation

10 October 2012: Burma Army soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion No. 50 based in Gangaw Township and currently stationed in Lungler village of Thantlang Township, Chin State, killed a mithun [domesticated buffalo] for their rations in Lungler village, a local, who asked not to be named, reported to CHRO. The victim was afraid to report the matter to the higher officials as the battalion commander warned him not to do so.²⁴

Arbitrary arrest and detention

07 June 2012: Second Lieutenant U Saw Shwe, Deputy Head of Mrauk-U Police Station in Arakan State, interrogated Pu Ai Lăi, Pu Ma Thang and Pu Kyaw Aye from Khopheishei village and Church of Myanmar Province (Anglican) Pastor Rev. Teng Shü from Tanthaung village on 31 May 2012. They were falsely accused of threatening engineers and passing information about the ongoing Lemro (Phunglong) Dam Project to news media.²⁵

Land confiscation

17 April 2012: Burma Army soldiers have confiscated over 960 acres of farmland belonging to Chin locals in Phaneng village, Matupi Township. Tactical Commander of Burma Army Infantry Light Battalion (LIB) No. 2 based in Matupi seized the plots of land from the villagers for military uses.²⁶

Torture & ill-treatment

09 July 2012: A Chin local in charge of a restaurant in Tedim town was strangled and beaten up by Corporal Ko Zin Htwe, of the Military Affairs Security (MAS), in Tedim Township of Chin State. Corporal Ko Zin Htwe squeezed the neck of Ma Mang and punched him after the restaurant worker refused several times to sell alcoholic drinks on credit.²⁷

Sexual violence

22 January 2013: A 13-year-old Chin girl, who was travelling to Upe village in Paletwa township to help her grandfather, was sexually assaulted on 27 December 2012 by one of the soldiers

²³ See *Soldiers forced Chin villager to carry military ration*, in *Rhododendron News*, January - February 2013.

²⁴ See *Army Soldiers Killed Local Animal for Ration*, in *Rhododendron News*, September – October 2012.

²⁵ See *Chin Locals Interrogated for Lemro Dam Project*, in *Rhododendron News*, May – June 2012.

²⁶ See *Army Soldiers Confiscated over 960 Acres of Farmland*, in *Rhododendron News*, March – April 2012.

²⁷ See *Chin Shopkeeper Beaten up by Soldier in Tedim*, in *Rhododendron News*, July – August 2012.

from LIB No. 544 under commander Than Htun. In an incident a few days earlier, soldiers struck houses in Upe village with sticks and threatened that the whole village would be burnt down to ashes, as the Chin parents would not let their daughters go out at night to serve the commander. Upe villagers said the soldiers mockingly chanted: "Who are you going to report us to, Tactical Operations Commander or President Thein Sein? We obviously know that you don't know how to do so."²⁸

Extra-judicial killing

18 July 2012: Pa Thang Sian Mung, from Sozang village in Tedim Township, died at a hospital in Tedim town last Friday from his injuries, after being beaten on 11 July. The 41-year-old was attacked by Burma Army Corporal Kyaw Hlaing Win and Private U Aung Zaw Myint, believed to belong to Light Infantry Battalion 269, and Policeman Saw Myat Htun, while attempting to intervene when the security personnel were assaulting local villagers.²⁹

Militia training

07 April 2011: Burma's military authorities have forcibly ordered about 50 local people including government employees to participate in militia training lasting two weeks in Hakha and Thantlang towns in Chin State since late last month.³⁰

Forced relocation

16 May 2012: To date, an estimated total of 165 households have been forced to relocate due to the expansion of Kalaymyo Airport since 2010. Many are struggling to rebuild new houses in Taungphila of Kalaymyo in Sagaing Division. "We were told that we would get an area of land measuring 60ft by 80ft. But what we actually got is only 40ft by 60ft, which means a 20ft-by-20ft plot of land has been missing in the process," a family member reported.³¹

Racial discrimination

13 February 2012: A Chin student group at Pakokku College lodged a formal letter to the rector, accusing an assistant lecturer of Botany department of using racial remarks against Chin students in her class. "Dr. Khine Khine Myint insulted the destitute conditions of education, economy and social relationship of the Chin people in front of all the students in the class. She even used such words as 'dirty and rotten' referring to the ethnic Chin," said the complaint letter sent to the college authority.³²

²⁸ See *Soldiers attempted rape, threatened villagers in Chin State*, in *Rhododendron News*, January – February 2013.

²⁹ See *Soldiers Attack Left one Dead in Chin State*, in *Rhododendron News*, July – August 2012.

³⁰ See *Civilians Forced to Take Militia Training in Chin State*, in *Rhododendron News*, March – April 2011.

³¹ See *Over 160 Families in Trouble after Forced Relocation in Kalaymyo*, in *Rhododendron News*, May – June 2012.

³² See *College Lecturer Accused of Using Racial Slur against Chin Students*, in *Rhododendron News*, January – February 2012.