

# Human trafficking in Chinese Banana Farms



Photo: War Shaung Presiding Monk's Facebook

***“Some came back. Some did not come back”***

A group of female workers in the Chinese's banana plantations are facing human trafficking”, said Daw Lay Htet Aye, 36.

Daw Lay Htet Aye who live in Mut Kyate village, Wine Maw township, Kachin state said that young ethnic females, who went to work at the Chinese banana plantations were sold by the Chinese people into marriages in China. Within four or five years, more than 20 women were trafficked to China to become wives.

Local people said that around 5 years ago, Chinese man who were working in Chinese banana plantations in the Wine Maw township married ethnic Burmese women and brought them back to China to be sold.

Thousands of Chinese banana farms are located in the Wine Maw township, all the way along Ta Law Gyi road, all the way along from Wine Maw township to Lai Zar, Gwae Htu road and Shwe

Naung Pin, etc.

Even though local people are against it, on March 17th, Myo Sat Kyal Pwint company bought lands for grazing in Mut Kyate village, Nant Wah village tract, Wine Maw township. The later cleaned the land with bulldozers to establish Chinese run banana plantations. Local people and women have been protesting against this.

The using of land and farms of the villagers which are located one or two miles away from Mut Kyate village were confiscated by the company and made a part of the banana plantation. Whilst the company increased their banana farm, the lives of local people and animals were put in danger and especially, women are made to feel unsafe. So they have to protest, said Daw Lay Htet Aye.

"We women, most of us are against it because if more workers came here, more women from our village will get into trouble. We get into trouble because we have seen what is happening around us. The workers from other areas such as Rakhine, Burmese and other outsider enter our village and cause trouble to us as women. If the company plants more banana trees they also dig more canals which are not safe for our children. Recently, the children next to our village fell into the canal and some of them died. Most importantly, women are not secure. Especially for our young daughters, it's very dangerous."

Said, Daw Lay Htet Aye.

Many ethnic people throughout Burma including from the Rakhine state, Irrawaddy region, Myaungmya, Patheingyi, Moe Nyin, Ho Pin came to work in these banana farms.

The presiding monk, Ashin Wee Zar Ya Ka from War Shaung village in Wine Maw township said that hundreds of women and children are working in these farms and they face problems such as children unable to study, not enough space to bury the dead body, no proper toilet and many people living in battered

huts built around the banana trees where the pesticides are sprayed. He had witnessed these workers' situation.

"The smell of the chemical pesticides and fertilizers was extremely bad. The soils are also despoiled and hard. After the company has planted once, they do not plant again on the same place. They rent another land for planting. When we went there, the smell of the fertilizers were horrible", said the presiding monk.



Photo: War Shaung presiding monk's Facebook

The presiding monk said that the Chinese banana plantation has planted almost all over the whole Wine Maw township for 8 years already. Over 40 women including young girls and married women from other areas within Wine Maw township such as War Shaung, Nant Wah, Lwel Kyaw and Wai Bar villages have been trafficked to China.

***"Here, young girls who passed Grade 10 were working with them as interpreters and some worked as cooks. Chinese old men seduced them with money and brought the girls back to their country, including Shan girls. Even though those Chinese cannot speak any Burmese many girls follow them to China. Some people though that Chinese who come here to sell water melons are rich and that is why they follow them."***

Moreover, because of the Chinese banana plantations, around 10 consequences according to strategy occurred among political, economic, military affairs, social, legalization, human trafficking, drug problem and affairs of maternal and children. Those are also the sign of the failure of Burmese future, as commented the Presiding monk.

***“Human extinction. People end their lives in a banana farm. When they grow up they are sold to China. Lands were confiscated. Human were exploited. The main problem is having sycophant among the ethnic. Even among the ethnic people they take advantage of each other” said the presiding Monk.***

Moreover, Daw Hseng Naung who is a 60 years old widow from Mut Kyate village said that around the banana farm, they dig the canals which were 5 feet wide, 8 feet deep as fences, and last two years a child age of 4 has drowned in the canal and died. That is their biggest concern.

She said, “In the village, if Chinese came and start a banana plantation, our future will be full of danger. They use various pesticides and fertilizers which could make our lives unsafe. They also dig a deep canal around the banana farm which is twice the height of the people and it is so dangerous for the children. We cannot let our cow and buffalo go anywhere. Cow, buffalo drowned in those canals and died as well.

Daw Hseng Naung continue said that they destroyed and cut off our trees in an acre land that we have been working on for many years, especially iron wood trees, Cassia trees and Ya-Ma-Nay trees which we have grown for more than 10 years. Cutting them down we would face a life of joblessness. Therefore they have to act against these plantations to keep ownership of their lands.



Photo: War Shaung Presiding Monk's Facebook

She said that they depend on Cassia trees for their income and living. They cut the Cassia trees once in three years to get food, pay children's school fees and use money for family living.

The land is around 2 acres that Daw Lay Htet Aye's family owns and depends on for their living and children's education. It was taken away by Myo Set Kyal Pwint company. As a result they lost their place to stay and became unemployment, that's why they have to fight against the banana plantations.

Because the Chinese have planted banana trees everywhere, there is nowhere local people could find frogs, fishes and vegetable to eat. Finally they just have to work in the banana to earn living.

People from Myitkyina and Wine Maw township came and bought the firewood there in their place and they sold out two or three cars of firewood so it covers their children school fee and their living expenses. A car of firewood could get more than 100,000 Kyat.

Daw Lay Htet Aye said that in March 13, the trees in the garden, such as teak, iron tree, Cassia trees which make money for the family were removed by bulldozer which made them very upset.

“They removed everything in our garden land. Only a bamboo grove left because we prevented for it unduly. The company act like it is mandatory to sell our land to them. We need these two acres of firewood land for our children school fee. Not every house can use electricity. They said that we can work on daily wages but we cannot go every day. We have children to take care of, so if we have this firewood land then we could cover for food by working on farm. Now, we are so upset that we do not have the firewood land.” Said, Daw Lay Htet Aye.

People who work in banana farm get different wages, women get (4500) Kyat and Men get (5000) kyat per a day.

In the past years, the company said that they bought the land of the local people just to look after the cows and goats and the local people could find the firewood as much as they can. But now, they paid the compensation around eight hundred thousand to twelve hundred thousand per an acre of land to do the banana plantation. This is what the locals are against said Daw Lay Htet Aye.

The fertilizers and pesticides used for the banana farm are very strong and they wash the used materials in the stream near there. Cows and buffalo died by drinking that water, said local resident of Mut Kyate village, Sayar John Phoung Daung Zae.



Photo: War Shaung Presiding Monk's Facebook

The owner of the Myo Set Kyal Pwint company is known as Director Saung Lann Yainn Chan but he worked for the Chinese, said local people.

In July 8 2018, Nant Wah local people sent the objection letter to Kachin's State Prime Minister through U Naw Li; the representative of state Hlut Taw from the Wine Maw township, but they did not take any action and the company is still digging the local peoples' land by bulldozer that's why Nant Wah local people continue to fight.

"We submitted the objections letter to the Prime Minister, and the general administration department and Department of land records checked to company once on 11 February, but there was no responsible person so they asked to follow up with the office. A week later, we got the forest and land records. There was no notice that we even submitted the objections letter to the State Prime Minister. That is why we the local people have to stand for ourselves and against the banana farms."

There are also banana plantations at the place which is a little further from the Mut Kyate village. There the use of chemical fertilizer caused several consequences, such as fish dying in the river, and buffalo and cows dying after drinking the water in the river.

It has been 8 years already that Chinese bananas farms were grown in Shwe Nyaung Pin, Sann Phar, Man Winn and Gway Htu from Wine Maw township. Now, Myo Set Kyal Pwint company is digging more than (350) acres of land for additional banana plantation in Mut Kyate village, Nant Wah village tract, Wine Maw township. Recently, they have finished digging 200 acres of land and are ready to plant the banana trees there. Because of that the local people have to protest said Sayar John John Phoung Daung Zae.

Nang Kham Ying from Shan women network affirmed that women from the area near the banana farms were facing human trafficking to China.

She said, "Using pesticides and fertilizers could cause the abortion of pregnant women. It could be side effect to pregnant women. It is really dangerous work. They did not consider for the long-term. Because of lack of job opportunity, most people have to work for Chinese which makes me unhappy."

Since 2010, Chinese banana plantations have been working on those aforesaid areas and it's been about 7 to 8 years already. In 2017, the banana plantations were also grown in the Shwe-Nyaung-Pin military bases area. After 8 years of banana plantation, it effects social, economic, environmental and women were threatening by trafficking which all proves what presiding monk War Shaung has said.

***"There are different ways of human trafficking. There is the common way of human trafficking, which is happening in other areas and another way is persuading with money slowly. In here, our Kachin women and Shan women were paid twenty thousand or twenty-five thousands of Chinese money. The main thing is that they use the women just for giving birth to babies. They try to marry women from here and later on resell them to other men. Kachin and Shan were effected under that structure. They also persuaded the Shan leaders with money to take away their women as well. They cheated the local people and brought them back to China."***

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# Women's Response to President U Win Myint's New Year Greeting



Author- Mae Loon

On the occasion of Myanmar New Year, the newly elected President U Win Myint gave a greetings and good wishes speech to his people. He mentioned promoting Human Rights, strengthening the judiciary sector, combatting corruption, combatting narcotic drugs, and uplifting of the socio-economic life of farmers. He also mentioned the need to reduce central control to make preparations for the Federal Union administrative system. Right after his speech comes out we saw a lot of feedback regarding his promises to the citizen. Among all the feedback, Hi Burma wants to collect feedback and opinions of the female activist and leaders.



Padoh Zipporah Sein (Former Voice  
President of The Karen National  
Union)

**Padoh Zipporah Sein (Former Vice President of The Karen National Union):**

Overall, the president speech is good. According to his speech, I think people/citizen may have more expectations. Especially what he mentioned in his speech that he really considers the wellbeing of people/citizens. He mainly focus on the civil service personnel, students and farmers. When we look back at the whole thing these are the important sectors that need to improve in a country. Of course that is not a new thing, but in a country like Burma as we are not like other country, the President mentioned this in his speech. But, we expected to hear about peace in the country and about ethnic affairs. I feel sorry that he did not mention these two issues.

As he is a new elected President on the Myanmar, I want to hear how the peace process will go on but he did not mention it. If we look from the ethnic people's perspective, as President his promise and his future plans do not include the ethic people in the country. From my personal perspective, since the current fighting is going on especially in Hpa-Pon Karen State and also in Shan and Kachin States, he should say something about this ongoing fighting. He needs to talk how peace processes will continue, but as he did not, I feel a big concern.



Mi Sue Pwint (Member of  
Union Peace Dialogue Joint  
Committee – UPDJC)

**Mi Sue Pwint (Member of Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee – UPDJC):**

I have concern that the government wouldn't give up on the peace process and national reconciliation, nor lose the enthusiastic about these things. But overall, his new year speech reflected the real situation of people and he might be able to approach people from the ground. Stability and change are both important and how much of success it will be depends on how much the people in the country can go along with it.



Daw Kha Kha (LHEO  
Training Coordinator)

**Daw Kha Kha (LHEO Training Coordinator):**

I am happy to hear the President mentioned workers in his speech. If we want have a strong system of social security then the government has many things systematically. Such make the worker aware of their rights for social security, hospitals, quick response for the social security and the workers need to be able to hold the social security in their hand. And in order to have secure livelihood for the worker, the daily cost(expense) must be in balance with the income. If the commodity prices increase excessively then the worker's can not survive.



Daw Tin Tin Nyo- Policy Board  
Member of Women League's of  
Burma

**Daw Tin Tin Nyo- Policy Board Member of Women League's of  
Burma:**

Regarding to the “law”, there should be specific provisions on women and female children. In Judicial system, aside from impartial and effectiveness, we need Justice personal who are understanding of gender-sensitivity and ready to stand up for it. It needs to get into this judicial system anyhow.

While dealing with rape or domestic violence cases, the police often handle them wrong. Such as made fun of the women or act like not really respect the women. These are the things that need to change. If the Judges, lawyers, Polices do not act appropriate ways, then the survivor of violence will not try to seek justice from legal channels. If it ends up in these ways, then the wish of the President that he want to shore up with the judicial sector will face with barriers and delayed.

As the Mr. President mentioned about the involvement of people with authority and their efforts to interfere, it is really good if he can take action on it. Regarding to the “people with authority” not only targeting specific people but should refer to “anyone”. If the case is committing by the people with arms, seeking for truth should be also impartial.



Naw Ohn Hla- (Democracy and Peace Women Network)

**Naw Ohn Hla- (Democracy and Peace Women Network):**

In U Thein Sein's government a farmland management body was formed to solve the farmland problems and later on the land administration system came out but it did not really solve the problems. Finally U Thein Sein lost the election in 2015 and NLD took over the government. Later on U Htin Kyaw established order 15/16/ and 14/16 to help solve the farmers and their land problems but instead of solving the problem it become confusing during 2 years of NLD government. The farmers face more difficulty. Now again U Win Myint's government mentioned farmers and I wish he can implement according to what he said. If he doesn't follow what he said, or elected government are the same as previous, then the people will lose hope.

I warmly welcome President U Win Myint to his appointment and his speech but it should be realistic in implementation. In the previous President, he said the land must return back to the landowner but in realistic the landowning law made worse. The law passed in the time that he took the position as the speakers of State and Region Hluttaw. So I want to remind him, now he is a President of the country and if he wants to do for the farmers he has to change the landowning law.



Daw Khin Ohmar- Policy Board member, Burmese Women's Union

**Daw Khin Ohmar- Policy Board member, Burmese Women's Union:**

His speech established a plan on how he is going to lead during his Presidency. His speech is good. Including the promise to amend the constitution...but how the government is going to do this and what is the home affair and army's role, how they are going to coordinate... we have to keep on watching. There is a very important thing that he miss to mention in his speech and that is "Peace". Or maybe a possibility that there is a divide responsible/role between President and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Does that mean Daw Aung San Suu Kyi takes a role for Peace? If this way, what is the plan for Peace process and what is the goal? Especially it will be good if she can speak out about what will be done for the people who flee from fighting. Especially there was on going fighting in Kachin state and people who flee from the fighting were blocked and could not received humanitarian aid while the Buddhists are



enjoying it's new year Thin Gyan water festival. It will be really nice if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi can mention how she is going to help displace persons from fighting.



Naw Hser Hser-Joint General  
Secretary I of WLB

**Naw Hser Hser-Joint General Secretary I of WLB:**

Regarding his speech, it is good to hear. Even though his speech does not cover for the whole country, at least he points out the main and current problems that he wants to change. Mainly he focuses on the country's development parts. But, in practice the issues of fighting in ethnic areas, IDPs and those fleeing from fighting were not considered. Another one, from the women's justice point according to my experience I don't think even the President has the power to do something about the sexual violence committed by the Burmese army in our ethnic areas. Looking at this I do not have that much trust. But since he mentioned developing people's livelihood or Political reform, I want to see the reform and change in general. We have to keep on and watch whether he is able to do or not, he will do or he will not.

Especially he mentioned the cooperation with CBO's and CSO's ...



So we have to wait and see that how much CBO's and CSO's will have a channel to support for the future federal union. My perspective is not only talk but I want to see the practical.



Cherry Zahau (Human Rights Activist)

**Cherry Zahau (Human Rights Activist):**

It is really good that the president gave a speech to the people on the Buddhism New Year's Day. Regarding Human Rights, he mentioned a lot but he did not include how to prevent Human Rights violations and what should be done for Human Rights protection. For example, U win Myint did not dismiss the laws, specifically the obstacles such as political and civil rights of citizen while he was the taking the position as a Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw . He did not amend it. There is a question that even he did not amend during his time of the Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw and how he is going to change right now as the president. In the same way, when we look back the things he had done during the past 2 years, the role of the speakers of State and Region Hluttaw were really limited in his term. As the Central control, he directly guided and lead the State and Region Hluttaw. So.. the second question came out that will he make a change on those things

immediately right after he becomes president? The another bothering thing to me is, he mentioned people for those "who works for Human Rights must also give respect to the dignity of other". This kind of words is a word that come from the HRs activities who always stand up for those who have been violated.

So.. what does he means for this quote? For example, does he want to refer to the situation in Rakhaing State? In Rakhaing state, the Rohingya are not accepted by our country. Does he mean that the world criticizes that Rohingya are not treated like humans in Burma? Human Rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of colour, religion, etc. As human rights activists, we have to stand up for any actions or things against inhumane behaviors. An interesting point is that although he mentioned about Human Rights, but there's still ongoing fighting in Burma especially in ethnic areas. The people from Kachin state do not get the right to life and to live in safety which are referred to as basic human rights as. He did not say anything regarding those. Also did not mention anything about human right violation in Rakhing state which is well-known by the world. I guess as a Burmese people, they don't think really deeply to the situation but they will only satisfy with what the President speak out even it is only in a word, and he well known on this as well. That is only the outer surface. It is a doubtful thing that how he will be working on human rights even he did not highlight and talking about the real situation and the human rights violation in Kachin, Rakhaing state and other areas in the country.

### **A high school female teacher from Mon State:**

In the past two years term of government, the country is in debt and I do not hope the salary will increase. In previous government they increase often and by the month of April we are waiting for a new salary. Since March, we were waiting for salary even though the commodity prices getting higher and higher but we still live on low wages. I did not hope that

this term government would be able to increase the salary in 2 years.

Anyhow I am happy to hear these good news. Some people blame that the increased amount is very small amount proportionally to the commodity prices. For me I do not think in that way. I want to thank them for what they give. The president's speech encouraged the civil service personnel. The increased amount is not that much, may be 30,000 kyat. However this amount will improve the situation for us. For me I can not survive only with my salary. I have to teach extra to cover my expense. I really like when he mentioned building housing for civil service personal and it will be great if we receive health care as well. As teachers, we need health care after we finish our service. The pension money is only 100,000 kyat and we can not survive. If the government provides a house then we do not need to worry about where we are going to stay after finishing our service.

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## Refugee from Northern Shan State

Cherry and Anna

Looking at children wearing their school uniforms going to school Hkaw Mai says "I really want to go to school. When I am recovered, I will return to school. I will confess before the lord". Hkaw Mai is from Man Kaung village, Mong Paw Township, northern Shan State. But she is currently in Thailand where

she came for medical treatment.

When we are talking about Kachin refugees, we know that they are refugees from Kachin State. However, there has been fighting not only in Kachin state but also in northern Shan state where thousands of refugees face grave difficulties.

A teacher who has been living with refugees from Hmai Hai village, Mone Ko Township, on the China-Burma border was trying to arrange for Hkaw Mai to go to school. However, one week before school started Hkaw Mai fell down on a pig food pan. Her whole body is burnt so she could not go to school. She has become a double refugee. She was not accepted at Mansi hospital in China or a hospital in Yangon so she came to Chiang Mai for treatment for her injuries.

A teacher who is helping her told us that with the help of Kachin Baptist Conventions, the girl was taken to hospital in Mansi city, China and Yangon. But when the doctors checked her wounds, they rejected her for treatment.

“Hkaw Mai did not have any hair even when she arrived in Chiang Mai. Her skin looked scary. Her hands got closer to her upper body and she could not move them anymore. Her head also could not move. Now that her hair is re-grown she looks much better” said a friend.

With great luck, one of the preachers in Chiang Mai helped her get treatment so that her family does not need to worry about her. She is currently still in recovery.

For a 12 year old girl, it is normal to have small breasts as puberty comes but Hkaw Mai will not have grow breasts since her chest was terribly burnt.

“I sympathize with her. She is having her treatment far away from her parents so I am happy that I could help support her,” said the teacher who is taking care of her.

Hkaw Mai did not go to school until she was 12 because she was taking care of her younger brothers, and her mother who has hemiplegia.

“One hand of my mother is not working. My father is opium addict and only interested in finding opium. He does not care about his children. We are very poor and because of that I could not go to school. We had to give away my younger brother for adoption” said Hkaw Mai.

Hkaw Mai mother, who is staying at Mone Ko refugee camp, said they have to run from fighting in northern Shan state along with another family.

“We have 4 children, 1 girl and 3 boys. Among my sons, the eldest had rickets and only lived for 6 months and died. For the youngest boy, when he was only 2 weeks old, I had to give him up for adoption because I did not have enough money to take care of them,” said Daw Maram Bu, the mother of Hkaw Mai.

“Now at home, my son is already 6 years old. Last year, we could afford to pay only for one month nursery school fees so he went to school for only one month. This year, his uncle paid his school fee so he can attend. I felt very sad to think about my children’s future but I cannot do anything because I am a disabled person. I want my children to be educated, that is why I gave my son for adoption. Now my daughter Hkaw Mai got burnt and is not able to go to school. She is having treatment in other country” said Hkaw Mai’s mother, crying.

One of the neighbors said “Her husband does not give any helping hand and the wife cannot do much with only one hand. They both do not have any relatives to help them, so their live are much more difficult”.

“Some of the villagers have helped them as much as they could. The adopted parents of their younger son also send them some money. But we do not know how much they get,”.

According to U Aung Min, minister of the president office, said there have been about 200 fights in 4 months in Kachin state and Shan state. Most of the fighting happened in Kachin state and the northern part of Shan state. Many people do not know about refugees from northern Shan state and they do not get much attention or humanitarian aid.

Daw Maram Bu said she cannot ensure that Hkaw Mai can go to school after she returns from treatment.

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## Opposing fear or Interview with Naw Ohn Hla

Kachin Girl



“I want people to know that they need to get rid of the shadow of fear. If they show that they are afraid, they will be more intimidated. I want them to know that if they want to go to against this, they can. That is the message we are giving to them and now it is becoming more widespread”.

I was waiting at one of the restaurants to meet with the leader and women’s activist Naw Ohn Hla. It was raining heavily. I have tried to interview her before but she was arrested again. This time, I am determined to interview her so I was waiting at the corner of the restaurant.

Now she has arrived. She is holding a black umbrella. Under the umbrella she was wearing a dress of white material, and she has tied her hair on both sides. She has no make up on her face, but her pure and humble face appears vividly. She is still very active despite being 52 years old. “Because of the

heavy rain, it was very crowded on the bus so I am a bit late” she said, explaining her delay. She grabs a chair and sits.

Naw Ohn Hla is from Kone Ka Muu village, Maw Bi Township, Yangon. She got involved in activism during the 8888 uprising and later she became a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD). In 2005, she resigned from the party. Since 2007, she has been actively involved and led prayer campaigns for the release of political prisoners. In 2012, she co-founded the Women’s Democracy and Peace Network.

She has been arrested on and off 17 times and has been imprisoned 7 times. Currently she is on bail after she was released for praying at Shwe Da Gone pagoda, in Yangon, for the release of political prisoners in 2007.

Naw Ohn Hla started telling her story about how she became a political activist for social welfare workers. Naw Ohn Hla told me “In the past, I worked as social welfare worker. I am a Karen ethnic woman and worked for Karen welfare and ethnic identity. I felt that the dictator of the (BSPP) Burma Socialist People Party had strongly oppressed and treated the people unjustly so I took part in the 8888 uprising. I wanted the people to stop being fearful. If they are afraid, they will be intimidated more. So I want people to take part in the struggle – like we do. That is why we are raising awareness as widely as we can.

**Question: How did you found the Women Democracy and Peace Network?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** “When we founded the network, most of the members were ex-political prisoners, especially those who were together with me in prison. We started with 7 organizing committee members. We did not start as an organization because we wanted to recruit women from different states and divisions. We planned to organize a conference where we would elect the leadership after we had recruited women from different parts of Burma. At the moment, we had around 500 members. We had our first gathering meeting with all members

in August 2014 and with everyone consenting, we founded the organization and elected the leadership.

**Question: What have you done since the founding of the DPW?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** “Since DPW was founded, we have helped fight against all injustices. Even though we are a women’s group, we mostly work on land grab cases. Of course we have also helped many women’s cases. At the same time, when we are working on the land grab cases, women are in the forefront – as we have witnessed. As we are women, we have always intended to help women. Among the peasants, there were so many female widows facing severe difficulties after their farmlands were taken away. As a consequence, land grabbing has created a huge impact on the life of peasants. The problems are huge – such as social problems, health problems, economic problems, including not being able to support their children’s education from primary to university level.

I want to share one case about Daw Than Yin from Shin Paung Wae township whose farmlands were grabbed. When her land was taken away, all her plants – like peanut and sesame – were completely destroyed. Because of this she went to work as a tenant farmer – where she was mistreated. As a result, her daughter was not able to enter her 10th grade exam. Since there was no income, they were enduring huge difficulties and pain. We want to help her as much as we can and that is why we are paying for her daughter’s school fees. We could not support her much so we helped them connect with monastery education and we pay for her bedding, food, clothing and books.

We also helped in cases to do with domestic workers and underage girls who were forcefully taken as wives. Ill-treated people do not dare report their cases to the police. Even if they want to report it to the police, they do not have money for all the proceedings, and they also have to hire a lawyer. In this situation, I went to report to the police on their behalf and connected them to lawyers. In Yangon, when



land is grabbed, even when men are the breadwinner, it is women who have to take care of the children's food, bedding and education.

Now we have 10 committee members at DPW. We send off younger members for different educational opportunities such as training and internship on Human Rights, Environment, Women's Rights and Adolescent Reproductive Health organized by other organizations. We have organized discussions on current land grab issues and land laws. I am not an expert but I used to be a farmer myself. In the past, we've invited an expert on the issue of land rights and land laws, lawyers and legal experts as a guest speaker. If they could not make it, then I led the discussion.

**Question: What did you do regarding land grabbing issues?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** Farmers whose land has been grabbed did not know whether it is against the law or not. They also did not know how they can legally respond. In this situation, we provided discussions on "Land Laws". We provide information on how they can respond in a legal way. After they know and understand about the laws, they respond back to the land grabbers. For example – farmers from Shin Paung Wae were very afraid to talk about it in the beginning. Their lands were seized by the arms ammunition factory and they were afraid to report this. Later, when they learned about their rights, they started reporting.

**Question: Is there any success cases of farmers for their demand of the return of their lands?**

**Naw Ohn Hla:** Yes, but although there were winning stories it does not mean that they get back their land. There was one winning case. In 1996, the Defence Ministry owned an arms ammunition factory which grabbed more than 120,000 acres from 13 villages in Shin Paung Wae Township, Magway division. The farmers fought their case. The army had confiscated the lands and ordered the farmers to work in the farms. One time, one of the military soldiers opened fire against the tenant farmers and asked for money so the farmers got angry. About 500

farmers came out with a petition and sent it to the President and the International Labour Organisation. The post office has sued U Paw Oo who sent the petition for making false accusations. However, we supported the farmers in this case and at last we won.

Since they have been working to support the issues of women and land grabbing, DPW has been followed and watched by the authorities. Sueing and imprisoning is just a day to day matter for Naw Ohn Hla. Whatever happens to her, she will continue to work for the benefit of the people as much as she can. She is determined to work for the people.

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## Sex Workers Need Empowering

Maw Kaw Kaw

***“I am aware that it is a good income working as a sex worker. I can send back money to my family. I have worked at sea nearly two months.”***

***“My friend told me to follow her. She told me to sell sex to foreigners. And then I asked her – Do the men buy sex from foreigners? She told me that men were carrying things. The women can communicate better than men so women are having to sell sex. When I arrived there, the work was prostitution”*** As told by a sex worker who is living with HIV.

Her father passed away when she was a child, and she was left with five siblings. Her father was a soldier. As her father worked in public service, her family had to move from one place to another with her father. Her family did not have a stable place to stay. After her father died their family did not have the ability or the resources to stand on their own.

***“I had to work in construction because of family poverty. I***

*had to carry heavy amounts of soil which was not suitable for my age. The employer told me that if I was not able to carry the soil in a basket, he wouldn't give me work the next day. So I tried to carry the baskets even though they were too heavy for me because I needed a job. If I did not have a job, my family would have nothing to eat. The employer put a lot of wet soil into to the basket and asked me to carry it. I had to carry cement until my back broke"* . She tells of the difficulties her family faced and how she tried to help her family out of poverty after her father passed away.

The family had to move out from the house that the military gave to them after her father died. Her family moved from Shan State to Yangon region. She worked in different factories to support her brothers and sisters education.

*"I got a job in sea food processing factory opened by a Chinese company. It was a pretty good income. But I needed to work day and night. I did not get down time that every human needs, and I did not sleep enough. The important thing was that if I worked overtime I could get more money. At that time, my income was enough for my family, but unfortunately the sea food factory was shut down."*

She faced difficulties after the sea food factory was shut down so one of her friends told her to go with her and sell produce to the foreigners on the ship. She become a sex worker when her friend lied to her about the ship.

*"I worked on a ship as sex worker. After I knew it was to work as a sex worker, I tried to go back. People told me 'If you escape, the employer will kick you out into the sea. If you die no one would know it – the police are not here. You will die'. After they told me that, I was afraid to escape, so I started to work as a sex worker"*.

*"It was good income working as sex worker. I can send back money to my family. I was worked as a sex worker nearly two years."*

"Then my friend contacted me to say that the sea food factory was open again. I went back to the sea food factory and worked there again. When I compare the money that I earn from the sea

food factory with money from working as a sex worker, it's very different. Income from sex work is much better than the factory. And I need to cover four family members daily needs and education."

***"One day one of my customers told me to stop working as a sex worker. I stayed with him for 8 months. He is a sailor. When he went back to work, I was pregnant. At the time, I was too young so I did not know that I was pregnant. Even though I worked as a sex worker, I did not have any knowledge about that. In my mind I only think, I need to get money".*** She continued to work as a sex worker when her husband is far away from. She thought to abort the baby but she was afraid she would be arrested so she did not do it.

***"I did not know about the law. My mother knew that I was working as a prostitute. The police arrested me and I went to jail for a year. My baby was born in the jail."*** No laws protected her, and she did not have knowledge about how the law worked either. When she was released from prison, her family became split up from each other. She moved to the illegal area and started to sell water glory for her family's daily income. However she cannot out from her family's poverty cycle.

When her child was two years old she was faced with financial difficulties so she went back to life as a sex worker to solve her financial problems. ***"I went to the Myeik to work, that's where I got HIV. I have been taking ARV (HIV Medicine) medicine since 2008. Now, my son attends grade 10. I don't want anything to affect my son's progress,"*** she says explaining her current family, and her surrounding situation.

***"People think that women work as prostitutes and so they get HIV disease. Actually we (sex workers) do not spread these diseases to other people. We have clean bodies without disease, but we get it from our customers. Maybe because we don't know how to use a condom. However, we don't aim to spread it to our partners – they come and spread it to us. Before we didn't know that we could test the blood and so maybe we spread it to other people without knowing because we***

***did not know that we have HIV disease. After we knew it, we never aimed to spread it."***

For ordinary women, if they were infected with the disease by their husband, they got sympathy from their neighbour and could share their feelings with their neighbour.

***"Sex workers need knowledge awareness, and they need to work to change the way that society sees them,"*** said Ma Mayrry Ah who works at an INGO which is an organisation working with sex workers. ***"Sex working women infected with the disease are not treated the same as ordinary women. The surround neighbours discriminate against them, and blame them. If we look at the reasons for sex workers working in the sex business, 9 out of 10 (9/10) are people who face family financial difficulties. Sex workers are people who struggle with family livelihood, who were orphans, who were trafficked, who worked in domestic work. We try to help them a lot, but if they do not change their capacity will not improve."***

***"Moreover, if the Myanmar Government pass the Sex Worker Protection law, it will help sex workers, and decrease HIV disease as well. The reason is when sex workers use a condom they can be arrested by the police. Even though the police say that they do not arrest for using a condom, the police arrest the sex worker because they must arrest according to the law. Sex Workers are afraid of this because they are not aware of this attitude so they are arrested by the police. After they are arrested by the police, they stop using condoms even though the police do not arrest them. If they get a right to work transparently and have medical check ups regularly it will be really good for the sex workers. "***

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# Hell of the grandmother from Northern Shan State

Anna

*"Until now, I have not found the reason that they arrested a me, a 62 years old woman, bashed and beat me with a gauntlet. I lost my front two teeth. I still suffer those pains now."*

*"On 17.11.2011, the military troop KLY (252) arrested Daw Dshwe Yeon during the night time at her home which is located in Northern Shan State, Nant Khan Township, Panlon section" said Daw D' Shwe Yone.*

She had seven children – five sons and two daughters all of whom are married. After her children were married she stayed alone in her house in the village on the top of the mountain. She worked making charcoal and doing hillside cultivation to support her children's education.

*"The soldiers arrested five sons and my elder daughter's husband at night at 11.10 pm. They accused my sons of hiding weapons for the Kachin Independent Army (KIA). In the morning at 6 am, they arrested me, all my grandchildren, my daughter who was pregnant, and they locked us up at Nawara Police station (1). In the evening, my grandchildren were starting to cry because they were hungry".*

*"They pointed guns at us and asked us where the weapons were hidden. They locked up my sons in different prison cells. They locked up my family one night and released us in the morning. They threatened us to not let other people know about things that happen with us" said by Daw D' Shwe Yone.*

After I arrived home, the chairman of my village (village headman) told me that we need to sign an order to release my sons. I am very happy so I follow him to Nawara Police Station without finishing my breakfast. They asked me to sign a white piece of blank paper, without any letter inside the paper. After I signed, they locked me up again.

Her neighbours were moved to other places because when they saw her family members arrested and tortured, they feared that the same would happen to them.

*"I said to the militia 'She only takes care of her grandchildren. She did not go anywhere. What kind of mistake has she done that you guys arrest her like this?' She was very old. Her sons were not working as KIA soldiers. They often come in and out from my house. I knew everything that they were doing for their livelihood. Not only me but also the chairman of village (village headman) knew it. 'You can also ask the village headman. Why do you guys torture women that are your grandmother's age?' said U Maung Than's Pastor of Palaung Ethnic.*

*"They were threatening me to sign the white paper. I told them 'I cannot sign the white paper without describing anything. I will go back go now, and release my grandmother so she can go back with me. They did not release her. I had to come back alone and unhappy"* said by village headmen.

After that torturous hell started again for the grandmother. They said to her *"Your sons said they give guns to you."* I had never seen or touched any guns before. I did not tell lies, I told the truth. They struck me with a gauntlet and a stick, and beat me with the gun. I do not remember how many times as I fluttered in and out of consciousness."

She heard her sons being tortured from the other prison cell.

*"I heard my sons being tortured from the other prison cell. I felt pain when I heard my sons' screams. I asked them to let me stay in the same prison cell with my sons. I told them 'I will stay with them'."*

Her sons were tortured in front of her. She said *"They touched my son with electric wire. The blood was collecting on the floor and become a pond, the whole room was full with the smell of the blood until they moved my son to other prison cell. They moved me to another room and tortured me again"*

She asked the people who tortured her to kill her and release her sons.

She continues her story. *"In the morning I regained*

*consciousness. One of the men asked me 'Don't you want to go back home?' I said 'Yes I do'. He took me out from the prison cell to the back door. He told me 'Don't look back, do not go back by the street way, go the jungle way'. I ran into the jungle and went back to my house,".*

When she arrived back at her house, she heard the news that her elder daughter's husband, her son-in-law was dead.

Later she was arrested again. She was sent to Nah Khan's police station, and then to the Musel's township police station. She was accused of contact with a rebel group, and she was sentenced to two years in prison for this reason.

*"Now my elder daughter is left with five children. She has to struggle alone."* Told to Daw D' Shwe Yone.

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## **Escape from the Hell or A story of a girl domestic worker who was brutally abused**

Kaw Kaw, Yangon



domestic worker  
who was brutally  
abused

***"They threw hot water at me. They cut my nipple with scissors because I slept during the night. They did not want me to sleep."*** She said this while she was crying so heavily I hardly



heard what she said. She seemed to be afraid of people and she held her head down. She could not answer much of anyone's questions. It is difficult to predict how deeply she was traumatized by her experience.

15 years old Ma Than Than Aye lost her mother when she was young and she stayed with her father. She has 4 siblings and she is the youngest among them. Her life in hell started 4 years ago when a monk from a monastery in La Ha, North Dagon, Yangon helped her find work as a housemaid through her father. Her father U Htun Thein with a sad face said ***"A monk from that monastery told me that one of his female donors, Daw Aye Aye Win, was in need of a housemaid. She has a granddaughter and took my daughter to her house as a companion for her granddaughter. I allowed my daughter to go because the monk himself guaranteed it. I went to see her only one time in year 2014 within 4 to 5 years. At that time, my daughter did not look happy. She told me she wanted to come back. We did not get any wages for her work because the house owner is the female donor of the monk."***

So far, Ma Than Than Aye said she got 10,000 kyat one time and 5,000 (around \$5) for another time only, in 5 years of working as a housemaid. She was tortured after 2 months of her arrival at Daw Ay Aye Win household, who live in Taw Win housing (Dagon), Yangon. She did not get any benefits.

With a very soft voice with head held down she said ***"They give me a room at the back of the house where there is nether blanket nor pillow. I had to sleep just like that. They hit my head with steel cooking spoon."*** When looking at her head where we can hardly find hairs and saw the scars and some of them were treated but the whole head were full of different kinds of wounds. ***"They beat me until it bled. So treated my wounds by putting salt in them."***

7 people live at Daw Aye Aye Win house and among them the 2 women who beat her with chains, steel cooking spoons, and cut her with scissors, her whole body was full with all kinds of wounds and scars. They did not give her any food and furthermore they accused her of stealing food to eat. Because

of that they pulled her little finger with pliers. We can see that her little finger is windling.

***"They did not give me any food to eat for a whole week to 10 days. If I told anyone on the outside about this, they said they would ask me to compensate for the things that were broken or destroyed because of me. My hands are numb because they pulled with pliers and from beating. Because of that if I try to hold something, I drop and break things. Even if I tried to escape, they threatened me that everyone in this area is their people."*** she said.

One of her teeth was broken because Daw Aye Aye Win son-in-law kicked her in the face. She ran away because she could not bear or endure the abuse. She was not able to see or visit her family for five years. When she ran to the township section leader house and with the help of township section leader, on July 14, she could get contact with her uncle Ko Myo Oo.

Ko Myo Oo said ***"She ran from the 41th section and hid at one of the houses, and the house owner saw her bleeding. They worried about her wound and went to report it to the township section leader. With the contact of the township section leader, she came back to our place and with the help of the section leader, we reported the case to the police after taking her to the hospital"***.

The Township chairperson of the executive committee of National League for Democracy (NLD) of South Dagon, U Nyi Nyi said ***"We filed a complaint with 4 sections of act. Section (325) on Punishment for voluntarily causing grievous hurt, section (354) on Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty, section (506) on Punishment for criminal intimidation and section (294) Obscene acts and songs. The case is charged at North Dagon police station on 20th"***. U Nyi Nyi said if the police ignored this complaint, he will continue to prosecute the case according to the justice law based on the desires and feelings of the survivor herself. ***"We will report to the International Labour Organization. Moreover, we will inform the case to the Ministry of Home Affair. We will inform to all organizations working with***

***children. Then, there should be a law that will prevent these kinds of cases from happening in the future."***

In Burma, there are similar cases of underage maids being abused in all regions of the country. He continued to explain that ***"We will conduct discussions with international workers association"***. U Nyi Nyi said at the press conference that he will circulate this case to 500 networks within his social networks and as for the press conference so the information will be circulated to 200 networks. ***"We heard that this kind of case happens in 4 different areas. There are many similar cases like this happening to our young girls, where they aren't seen or heard by anyone. How many of them are being tortured or abuse invisibly? How many of them are dead – where no one knows?"***

The member of the executive committee of National League for Democracy of Dagon said that even though this inhuman treatment case was reported to the police, no action has been taken until today.

Ma Than Than Aye who was both physically and mentally suffering could only give a few answers while she was bombarded with questions.

While there is no mother to care for her and her father was occupied with work, now she is living with her uncle U Myo Oo. U Myo Oo said that she felt safe living with him and the family. She is feeling at ease. Although Ma Than Than Aye is still a child, it seemed like she can somehow forgive those who committed these sins against her. ***"I felt really painful. I don't want to go back to that place but I don't want to do anything against them."***