

Hse Mae, a 20 year old Karenni (Myanmar) refugee girl living in Thailand

About 240,000 Karenni live in the territory called Karenni State, or Kyah State, in southern Myanmar, along the border with Thailand. There, the military forces of the ruling regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), are engaged in a conflict with the Karenni Army that has dragged on intermittently for decades.

Thousands of Karenni refugees have fled to the Thai-Myanmar border with stories of mass forced relocation of village populations and other forms of human rights violations by SPDC troops. Hundreds of villages have been forcibly relocated, particularly those between the Pon and Salween Rivers.

By the time the refugees arrive at the border, they are often exhausted and seriously ill due to their long journey. They tell of their experiences of being used as forced labour, and of the living conditions in the new relocation camps where there is a lack of food, shelter and medicine.

Women, particularly young girls, are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse during these tense times. Hse Mae, is a 20 year-old Karenni girl from Daw Leh Ku Village. When the government soldiers came to force the villagers to relocate, she remained with her foster mother who was 70 years old. The soldiers randomly arrested villagers who could not escape. Hse Mae was caught by the soldiers and this is her account of what followed:

"I did not understand the Myanmar language so I did not know what they were saying to me. However, I understood a little bit from their mime and body language that they would kill me if I attempted to escape. The soldiers kicked me with their military boots on my chest and my legs. I could not stand up due to the beating all over my body. You can see the scars on my body as a result of it. Then they tied a rope to my neck, hands and waist and to a tree. At night the soldiers came and gang-raped me. I could not remember how many. I screamed and asked for help, but in vain. When I refused their will I was beaten up. They punched and slashed my face. It occurred every night until I escaped after ten days."