



Palaung Women's Organization

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Press Statement

PWO condemns Burmese regime's renewed token opium eradication operations in Northern Shan State

February 4, 2010

Since last week, the military regime has launched fresh token poppy eradication campaigns in Namkham and Mantong townships of Northern Shan State, once again leaving most opium farms intact in exchange for massive bribes.

Immediately after the launch of PWO's report "Poisoned Hills," exposing the surge in opium cultivation in these government-controlled areas, military helicopters were seen circling poppy fields near Namkham on January 28. The next day, about 100 troops, police and other local authorities, led by officers of Light Infantry Battalion 144 were sent to destroy poppy fields in the hills south of Namkham town.

However, this fresh eradication campaign has again left most opium fields untouched. Pro-junta militia leader "Pansay" Kyaw Myint, who controls most of the drug-growing villages in the Namkham area, negotiated payment of bribes totalling 100 million Kyat (about US\$100,000) to the military not to destroy the opium crop, which is currently being harvested.

A drug eradication team led by commander Zaw Htun of Infantry Battalion 130, comprised of troops and local militia, has also been searching out poppy fields in Mantong township since the end of January, and collecting bribes from opium farmers. Those unable to pay have been arrested, and some young men forcibly recruited into the Burma Army.

"This shows clearly the systemic nature of the drug problem in Burma," said Lway Nway Hnong of PWO. "Even in the full glare of international publicity, the regime's troops are not prepared to give up their massive income from drugs."

The PWO strongly condemns these showcase opium eradication campaigns by the Burmese military regime, and urges the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to take action over this. We also reiterate the urgent need for political reform and an end to the regime's militarization policies in order to seriously address the drug problem in Burma.

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