



Palaung State Liberation Front

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Palaung State Liberation Front -PSLF's Political Report to 46th Palaung National Revolution Day *(From January 2008 to January 2009)*

Current Political Situation and Challenges

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) are planning to convene a multi-party election in 2010 in order to shape a facade of civilian government and to protect for military privileges. Then for those who oppose the plan and who fail to follow along the junta's idea are subjected to severe and systematic persecution; including long-term imprisonment and various measures of annihilations. Despite under the international pressure to stop or reform it, however it is now obvious that the military junta will pursue its unilateral road map to protect the military interest and will cleanse all the obstacles on the way-- which literally means eliminating of all oppositions including ethnic resistance forces.

Meanwhile, the military junta pursues unilaterally to legitimize its power-- through getting approval by 2008 May referendum to a coming election in 2010-- and according to its plan, Palaung political groups and local Palaung population are forced to transform into the military handy groups. The Palaung national leaders, whom are once former Palaung State Liberation Organization (PSLO) leaders, were invited by senior junta leaders, especially by Lt. Gen. Ye Myint, in-charge of Military Affairs Security (MAS) for three times and by Brig. Gen. Aung Than Htut, commander of North-Eastern Military Command for five times to their office to encourage them to form an ethnic political party as a model for other ceasefire groups, to contest in the coming 2010 election.

Since November 2008, local Palaung population from villages of Namhsan, Kyaukme, Mongngaw, Hsipaw, Lashio, Mang Tong and Nam Kham Townships have been frequently forced to rally in several meetings by local militia leaders and pro-junta mass organization, Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), to rally support for the junta's agendas; for coming 2010 election, for the other steps of junta's Road map to a discipline democracy. North East Military Command has supported financial and other moral, material backing to U Khun Pwint and U Poe



Kee, local Palaung leaders of USDA from Namhsan and local militia leaders including U Kyaw Ohn and Htun Myat Lay to organize support from the local population to the junta's agendas. The junta's organizing teams of local militia and USDA leaders additionally asked to the villagers to spend for their travel, food and activities expenses during their campaigns and which have imposed more burden to local population whom are already under economic malaise.

Former PSLO leaders and members, who had involved in five decades of armed struggle against the regime, have been increasingly restricted their access to local population since their surrender of arms to the junta in 2000 and the military authorities define narrowly for their political activities. For the reason, the leaders have virtually lost popular appeal and support from Palaung population. Nevertheless, by these actions, the junta seems successful in their divide and rule tactic among the groups; such as former resistance leaders of PSLO, present pro-junta militia leaders, local USDA leaders, and government employees in Palaung region. If we cannot prevent such tactic of the junta, it would lead to disastrous impact to future Palaung national unity and their ethnic identity.

For conversing about giving circumstances in Palaung region, in November 2008, former PSLO leaders met in its HQs of Mang Tong Township and once again in Lashio, and discussed for two weeks on the current political crises and measures to resolve or to make progress on the current challenges they are facing. It is reported that the leaders decided some appropriate measures to tackle the future challenges. Our groups-- PSLF, Palaung youth and women groups-- has sent suggestions and recommendations to the two-weeks long meeting of PSLO leaders, and suggested them to stand firm on the ethnic self-determination rights and to avoid falling the trap of the junta's agendas by supporting its 2010 election and so-called road map.

In the forwarded recommendations, the groups pointed out that the self-administrative area for Palaung nationalities in the junta's approved constitution is perhaps a ploy to divide Palaung people rather than allowing them living united and pursuing for their peaceful development. The self-administrative areas mentioned in the constitution don't cover to all areas where Palaung nationalities are living, but it just limited to only two townships in Shan State. More importantly, in the future self-administrative council of Palaung region, uniformed military men will automatically occupy one-fourth of self-administrative council seats and the condition is unacceptable.

Additionally, Act 196 of the junta constitution mentions barely self-administrative rights of the region and left out its power for legislation of their vital rights; such as exercising their language, literature, customs and outrageously, Palaung minorities

residing in some other ethnic territories could be left uncaring, living under inferior life without adequate protection and preservation of their traditions, the facts are also endangering to preserve Palaung people's ethnic identity. The chapter 11 of the junta's constitution on "emergency situation" emphasizes total control of power by armed forces chief in the state of emergency, including in the self-administrative areas and all members of administrative council in the ethnic areas will be automatically ceased from their position at the time of state emergency. These accounts mean the so-called self-administrative areas are rickety and could not bear advantages to Palaung people lives.

It is reported that the former PSLO leaders, presently standing as Palaung national leaders are struggling hard to shun the military junta's political exploitation and the organization to survive under unjust pressures and oppressions from authorities. Moreover, they are trying hard to gain back popular support from Palaung people, by adopting some relevant actions. They are also reportedly trying to evade pressure from the military to enter in the coming 2010 election.

The junta forced Palaung people receiving approval votes in May 2008 referendum

However the SPDC junta claims more than 92% of popular approval votes to their constitution in 2008 May referendum, it was conducted by vote rigging and unjust means and the referendum was held without international observers. It has no doubt that the constitution could not earn legitimacy from democratic countries and from international community.

Palaung resistance groups had assigned their trusted clandestine members to observe referendum in areas where majority of Palaung population are living, especially in Namhsan, Nam Kham, Kut Kai, Lashio, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Namtu, and Mang Tong Townships and some of their members were even assigned in the poll stations teams to have a close observation. These secret members yet could not stop the junta's forced vote-rigging-practices and robbing votes from the local population. Despite the fact, after the referendum, Palaung groups just could make a report to unveil the junta's vote rigging attempts and malpractices in the referendum.

The poll station officials failed to follow the rules and regulations publicized by the the SPDC's referendum commission and it is doubtful, these officials merely read the whole documents of the rules, regulations and procedures of the referendum. The poll station officials just followed immediate orders from the local and superior military authorities and forcibly robbed votes from the Palaung population. During the referendum, it is found;

- 1) The officials issued ballot cards which were already marked with approval signs,
- 2) The officials voted on behalves of the eligible voters,
- 3) The officials closely watch until into the private chamber for the voters,
- 4) The officials accepted representative votes,
- 5) The officials restricted voting rights to some persons without any reason,
- 6) The officials used intimidation to attain approval votes,
- 7) The officials checked the ballot cards to ensure it is to be the approval votes,
- 8) The officials illegally turned the "no" votes into approval votes,
- 9) The officials falsified the lists of voters although they hadn't attend to the polling stations,
- 10) The officials had failed to open the poll stations until their due times,
- 11) The officials used illegal vote counting methods, and
- 12) In some circumstances, the votes resulted more than its eligible voters.

The officials had employed various manipulative methods to get approval votes in different areas of Palaung areas and the officials had exercised some of the above mentioned methods in one or more places. Although in some relatively fairly free and fair poll stations, it cannot be said as they practiced according to the standards.

Until today, the poll results in referendum haven't been announced publicly in Kut Kai, Lashio, Si Baw, Kyauk Mae, Nam San, Namtu and Mang Tong Township. The local populations actually are not interested even in the referendum, the constitution and the SPDC's road map; perhaps they are busy struggling to cope with ever increasing commodity prices and to meet their ends.

Some of the ethnic leaders who participated in local referendum commission had acknowledged in private meetings with the ethnic leaders that they are not fully enjoy with the junta's constitution, and now they are engaged in dilemma whether to accept it or not. Prior to the referendum, some ethnic group leaders-- such as from Wa ethnic group, Shan, Palaung and Kachin groups-- agreed collaboratively to say "No" to the constitution, but after its approval, they can't get a chance to meet again to discuss future plan to encounter the situation. Poll results showed more of objection votes in Wa and Shan areas, it showed differently in Kachin and Palaung areas, majority voted for "Yes".

After the junta's claim of 92% approval votes to the constitution, the pro-junta groups concluded that their works are successful and some of them have started planning secretly to occupy the leadership positions of future Palaung self-administrative area. According to sources, USDA leader U Khun Pwint, U Nyunt Maung, who are delegate to SPDC national convention, U Kyaw Ohn, U Htun Kyaw, Palaung national leader U Ohn Khaing and other three from the military are said to be chosen for

candidates in the future election for Palaung self-administrative area. It is apparent that 8 out of 10 candidates to administer Palaung region are known widely prior to the 2010 elections as a junta's choice.

The lessons from the 2008 referendum demonstrate that the junta will also practice vote rigging and manipulations in the coming 2010 election and opposition political parties like the National League for Democracy (NLD) and locally popular parties have thin chance to win in the coming election.

The referendum which was held in the midst of Cyclone Nargis disaster has promised 25% of parliament seats automatically to the representatives chosen by the commander-in-chief and more seats will be seemingly handing to the pro-military political parties in election by vote rigging and other fraudulent practices by the junta's officials and a few seats may go to the opposition, perhaps if they are believed not poisonous enough to against the military. If the resistance groups try to prevent such actions when it closes to the 2010 election, it will be too late and may not be winning. The opposition groups may disclose the junta's ploys and canny methods after the next election, but it may not be contributing to the benefits of the people and will result a major setback to our aim for political reform in Burma.

(The detail report of PSLF on "The Ballots Against the People" is available online at <http://www.palaungland.org>)

SPDC militarization in Palaung region

The SPDC has intensified militarization in Palaung region with the excuses of gas pipeline construction to China, security of dam constructions, prevailing rule of law in Palaung area and for anti-narcotic campaigns. Moreover, the SPDC forces have built some permanent bases in strategic areas and alerted pro-junta militia with the rumors that the Shan guerillas and PSLF may launch an offensive into the area.

Around 1991, during the earlier years of ceasefire agreement with PSLO, only 4 battalions of SPDC forces had based in some important areas of Namhsan, Namtu, Mongmit and Nam Kham Townships and some mobile units covered for some other areas of Kut Kai, Lashio, Hsipaw and Kyaukme Townships with additional about 10 pro-junta militia units.

Then the PSLO was forced to surrender their arms totally to the junta in year 2000 and lately after 2005, the SPDC increasingly position 15 battalions in inner Palaung region, such as in Namhsan, Mongngaw, Namtu, Mongmit, Mang Tong and Nam Kham Townships and about 30 mobile units from Kut Kai, Lashio, Hsipaw, and

Kyaukme based patrol in other Palaung areas. Additionally, the SPDC has been organizing more and more pro-junta militia forces needlessly-- now the number turns more than 50 units-- in Nam Tway, Myo Thit, Ohn Swan, Kyauk Phyu, Kwan Hei, Ngun Sai, Ho Mein and Zel Bangkok village tracts.

The SPDC forces then posted more constantly in Mang Tong, Nar Aw Gyi, and Mai Wi region with the excuse of anti-narcotic campaigns and in Western front of Palaung region, such as in Mang Tong, Namhsan, and Nam Kham Townships, more forces are posted for security of Shweli Dam construction and hydropower project. It is reported that more forces will be assigned long-term for the security of gas pipeline which will connect from the Arakan coast to China's Yunnan province.

Lt. Col. Tin Maung Win, commander of Mang Tong based Light Infantry Battalion (LIB). 130 and another commander of Namhsan based LIB. 324, summoned meetings in end of October 2008 and asked village chiefs from West of Namhsan mountain range area, and pro-junta militia leaders to attend the meeting and during the meetings, the commanders asked the chiefs to provide new Palaung ethnic recruits to the military and to expand more militia forces in the region. The commanders ordered a militia unit be formed with at least 10 well-armed militias and each village in the region must provide 2 to 5 new recruit to the military depending on the village size.

During 2007-08, every Palaung village were asked to provide at least a new recruit to the military compulsorily, but many villages left deaf ear to the order and some village chiefs provide bribe money --about 500,000 Kyats collected from the villagers--to the responsible commanders to evade the order. However, the new round of order this time clearly stated every village must send new recruits to the military by the middle of 2009 and they won't accept money rather than new soldiers. Since after 2005, the SPDC has forcibly recruited almost 200 Palaung ethnic new recruits to the military, trained them and assigned them in other battle fronts of Shan, Karenni and Karen areas by forced.

Human rights violations in Palaung region

Since there is intensifying militarization in Palaung region-- with total of 15 infantry battalions and more than 30 mobile military units--more human rights abuses, such as torture, harassment, summary arrests, summary executions, murders, and sexual violence, are committed against the Palaung population by soldiers. Moreover, the SPDC troops have committed forced marriages to local girls, confiscation of lands, crops and properties, forced plantation of project crops, forced labor in construction of military infrastructure, roads in development projects and forced labor in military

farms. Forced extortion of money and taxes from the local by the junta's forces also imposed big burden to the people living in Palaung region.

By order of Brig. Gen. Aung Than Htut, commander of North Eastern Military Command, Palaung villagers were conscripted for forced labor from earlier month of 2007 to until 2009, to construct road connecting Mang Ton-Mongmit and road connecting Namhsan - Mongmit. Villagers were asked to work for 3 miles to 5 miles of road, depending upon the village size. Although the road construction were claimed for local development, however, they were for basic infrastructure initiating to gas pipeline to China and for transportation of construction materials to Shweli dam and hydropower project sites.

Moreover, the SPDC authorities confiscated many acres of arable lands and thousand acres of tea gardens for military bases and for their development projects, as some landlords received little compensation, while majority of farmers left unpaid for their land loss.

The PSLF estimates the SPDC authorities had confiscated more than 100, 000 acres of land from local Palaung, Shan and Kachin nationalities living in Nam Kham, Muse, Kut Khai, Lashio, Hsipaw and Kyaukme Townships, for various reasons; such as expansion of military bases, its self-sufficiency agricultural farms, for road construction, for local development projects, and for large contract farms of cronies companies and Chinese businessmen.

Increasing militarization in Palaung region means more burdens to Palaung population, since the villagers are asked regularly for forced labor for building of military camps, camps' security fences, and portering for military's logistics and voluntary sentry in military camps. The military regularly conscript motored carts, cars, motorbikes, horses, and bullock-carts from local people for transportation of military personals and their logistics. When the military conscripts vehicles, they barely issue fuel for the engines and the vehicle owners have to spend for fuel most of the time.

Likewise the villagers are called upon for forced labors; they are regularly forcedly summoned for political rallies, where the pro-military USDA leaders sermonize them to support for coming 2010 election, and for the junta's road map to democracy. The political rallies were held in villages of Namhsan, Kyaukme, Mongngaw, Mang Ton, and Nam Kham Township, and the local villagers not only need to show up themselves at the meetings, they but also have to provide cars, transportation and foods to these political organizers.

It is reported that in last May referendum, the authorities similarly collected 1,000 to 1,500 Kyats per household for the expenses of referendum in Mang Ton and Namhsan Townships. The local villagers were asked to share for the state's functions, since the commission provided only 120,000 Kyats to a poll station and it was not enough for actual costs, such as daily wages of the poll station officers, for security and transportation, and other treatment to inspecting officials. The other Palaung villages also confirmed that they were also asked to contribute for the referendum's expenses as well.

Although the SPDC has forced the PSLO to surrender all of their arms, the Palaung people could not enjoy their dream of peace, stability and development until these days. In contrary, the Palaung people meet more sufferings, hardship, oppression and human rights violations committed by the SPDC military forces, pro-junta militia and USDA members, and other administrative officials.

Opium growing and drug trafficking problems in Palaung region

Recent media reports have expressed that opium output in Palaung region tremendously increased with the consent of military authorities and the SPDC authorities launched anti-narcotic campaigns in Lashio and Kut Khai from November 2008 until early 2009 to cover up the unpleasant incidents. However, many opium fields left untouched because of widespread corruption by authorities and mutual interests between the drug lords and the military commanders. Small opium fields planted by small Kachin and Palaung peasants were particularly destroyed during the operation and many larger fields owned by drug lords are remained intact and many fields are now about to extract the products. According to opium farmers' estimate, there is about 4,000 acres of opium fields grown in Palaung region in 2008-09 and the authorities have enjoyed lucrative bribes since their beginning of farming. Ironically, the authorities also enjoy more bribes during the time of anti-narcotic campaigns.

Many tea growing farmers turned into opium farmers for their survival and because of less return from tea products, however, their opium fields are destroyed by authorities in the name of anti-narcotic campaigns, despite most of them were asked for ransom and bribes for growing opium. Since there is no alternative means for their livelihoods, the situation forced them into deep poverty and desperate living.

Nevertheless opium production has increased or decreased in Palaung region, drug abuses, trafficking and drug related consequences are constantly increasing unto uncontrollable level. In every village of Palaung, rates of drug abuses on heroin, amphetamine and raw opium are terribly increasing and many youth, perhaps 80% of population, have fallen into the victims of narcotics, since drugs are readily and easily

available in the villages. Many drug users prefer to heroin and secondly to amphetamine and most of the drugs are smuggled from China and Thailand border, sources said.

Drug dealers are one way or another related to local authorities, militia leaders, and military leaders and no effective sanctions are seen against them. Relating to drug addictions, crimes rates are mounting dramatically in the region, since most addicts who need money have committed thefts, robberies, selling and taking loan from their properties, and violence related to drugs. It is disturbing since Palaung youth are seen as falling victims of drugs and show no interest in their future development. Although UNDOC reported that the drug trafficking and uses in Palaung region are declining in a report prior to their departure in return of getting favor from the junta, the realities are different and found worrisome for the future of the Palaung region.

Economic and social conditions

For rapid deterioration of economy in Burma, tea trading has been effectively slow and prices have been stumpy since 2008. Majority of Palaung population depend on tea growing farms and low tea sales make them into desperate situation. More importantly, some Chinese businessmen close to the military authorities have constructed tea factories in the region and attempted to monopolize the market, which makes small tea-growing farmers into desperate situation.

Similarly, the SPDC authorities imposed new restriction limiting trading of rice, bean and pulses, maize beyond the 24 miles check-point of Mandalay, in order to prevent exporting major food items and the policy also forces majority of population in Northern Shan State into starvation. The situation is increasingly worsened in remote mountainous areas and many Palaung families live without access to medicines and staple foods.

The World Food Programme (WFP) had previously assisted foods to the poor population in Palaung areas, but after cyclone Nargis struck into Irrawaddy delta in May 2008, majority of its assistance have given priority to respond the emergency situation in Irrawaddy delta and less supply goes to Palaung areas lately. The starvation in Palaung area forced many villages in long-term food shortages and many families cannot afford their children sending to school.

Per usual, the SPDC has neglected education and health development of Palaung people, the social situations are deteriorating profoundly. In Nam San, Mang Tong, and Nam Kham Townships, school drop out rates are increasing among children and incidence of infectious diseases, such as malaria, cholera is common in the area.

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), which are previously assisting to Palaung population such as Save the Children (UK), WFP, British Embassy, Japanese Social Relief organization has moved their focus on the Nargis victims and Palaung people found they are in neglect and helpless.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Under brutal and harsh rule of the Burmese military, social, economic, education, health, culture and literature, and basic public infrastructure status are deteriorating daily the junta is prohibiting Palaung people to turn this situation right and to craft for their better lives. Nowadays, Palaung region has been rapidly regressing comparing with some other regions of the country.

For that reason, patriotic Palaung people living whether in Burma or abroad, Palaung national leaders, Palaung colleagues from the struggle must exert their efforts extensively for Palaung national liberation, development of Palaung people and should seek the right strategy, tactics to implement these objectives and must unite and follow unanimously under the collective leadership. The PSLF, Palaung Women Organization (PWO), and Ta'ang Student and Youth Organization (TSYO) have committed mobilizing Palaung people for these objectives and pledged to implement these tasks with their maximum efforts.

Moreover, Palaung resistance groups will join hand in hand with ethnic and democratic forces working for ending military dictatorship in Burma, prevailing democratic rights and national liberation in Burma. Acknowledging the tremendous tasks, all leaders, members, and all organizations must unite their efforts sincerely and take their political responsibility to fight the final fight **to oppose the constitution will impose a slavery system under military dictatorship and to smash coming 2010 election.** The Palaung resistance groups finally and sincerely suggest that we all should prepare all steps necessary for the final struggle and to intensify our challenges against the military rule in Burma.

Central Executive Committee
Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF)
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