

A Child's Fate

There are more than 300,000 child soldiers in the world today. Some of them are less than ten years old. They have no opportunity to play, study or to simply be children.

There are many reasons why children become soldiers. Often they simply feel that they do not have any other opportunity. As long as there is war and oppression in our world, there will probably be child soldiers.

The following story was submitted by Burma Issues. In this story, a young Karen boy tells in a simple, yet moving way how and why he became a soldier. There is much we can learn from his story.

My name is Saw Paw Eh. My ethnic nationality is Karen and I am 15 years old. I was born in Pa Klu of Pa-an District Burma and have five brothers. Presently I am a member of the Karen National Police Force (KNPF).

My parents once lived in Pa Klu Village, but I was born in the forest because the Burma Army's activities and oppression forced my parents flee and hide away in the forest.

I joined the revolutionary group and now work with the Karen National Police Force. I joined the KNPF three years ago and when I am here my friends call me Hto Po (Little Bird). The name of my mother is Naw The Bo and my father is Saw Pamaw Ngwe. Sometimes my parents return to visit Pa Klu village, but now the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) frequently enters Pa Klu village, so my parents dare not to visit the village often.

No one forced me or requested me to join the police force. I came by myself, but before I came here I asked the permission from my parents and they let me come.

I never have gone to school so have never studied. I once had the opportunity to learn but I did not want to study. I saw the Burma Army oppressed my parents, my aunt, my uncle, my friends and torture the villagers. I hate them and I hate to see what they have done to us, so I decided to join the force and encounter them till the end of my life. While we were in the forest they opened fire on us and we had to run for our lives. My father was there, he went hunting at that time. When the Burma Army entered the place they took all our belongings, killed our animals and burned down our huts. I was very small at that time and I remember nothing but my mother told me about that when I grew up.

I never experienced fighting with the Burma Army. This summer (2002) the DKBA attacked Pa Klu village, but no one was hurt. I do not enjoy the army very much but I have to bare this burden for my people. I went to many places and I visited the refugee camps too. I saw many young people studying in the schools. I hope they will work for their people after they finished with their studies. I never study. I'm not educated so I do

not want to see educated youth do the bad things. I hope to see them lead their people's struggle and save their people from hardship and oppression.

I am not literate and when I have a responsibility to do something I think that I could not do it, but I try my best. I never studied in school but I can read and write a little. I learned from my friend.

My parents had to pay many taxes before I joined the armed forces. After I joined the armed forces they still had to pay but the tax was reduced to half. I joined the armed forces because of my personal commitment.