



# Chin Human Rights Organization

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## **PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Burma's Chief Minister of Chin State Orders Forced Labour**

[Chiang Mai, Thailand] The Chief Minister of Burma's Chin State has ordered forced labour in the capital Hakha, the Chin Human Rights Organization has learned.

For the past month civil servants in Hakha have been forced to perform manual labour to clear various areas around the town, including the site of a Union Government guesthouse which is being rebuilt, and the roadside that leads up to the Burma Army base of Light Infantry Battalion 266 on top of Rungtlang or Mount Rung.

A civil servant, who cannot be named for security reasons, told CHRO that Chief Minister Hung Ngai has threatened the civil servants with a salary cut if they fail to perform the labour every Saturday morning. The civil servant added, "It rained very heavily the last two Saturdays, but we still had to do the work. Some people even got sick as a result."

In late July, Hung Ngai also ordered more than 100 ordinary residents living around the State Parliament building in Hakha to clear the compound of the Union Government guesthouse. The residents were threatened with a monetary fine of 3,000 kyats if they failed to show up for work. A local man forced to participate told CHRO, "They called us for forced labor when we should be working for our own survival. I had to miss out on work for my livelihood that day because of the forced labour."

CHRO has also documented incidents of portering in Falam and Thantlang townships in recent weeks. On 8 August, three high school students were forced to carry very heavy loads for an army unit from Light Infantry Battalion 266 a distance of 18 miles, from Congthia village to Thantlang town.

These latest orders come after the International Labour Organization's (ILO) official awareness-raising workshop in Hakha in May about the illegality of forced labour, attended by more than 160 people, including general administrative officials, judges, police, and Burma Army personnel.

CHRO's Program Director Salai Za Uk Ling said, "All officials in Chin State have been made aware that forced labour is illegal, and that those who order it are liable to be punished under the law. Chief Minister Hung Ngai should be setting a positive example to the officials under his command. Instead, he seems to consider himself above the law and is confident that he can act with total impunity."

Yesterday, the authorities in Burma announced the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission, whose members are former diplomats, retired civil servants and professionals drawn from various fields including law.

Salai Za Uk Ling continued, “This seems like the latest move by Thein Sein’s administration to convince the international community that it is making positive changes. But we have yet to see any concrete improvements in the human rights situation on the ground in Chin State. Are we really going to see the new human rights body investigate and hold powerful ministers like Hung Ngai to account? We believe that a UN-mandated independent, impartial Commission of Inquiry into grave human rights violations in Burma is the only way to end the culture of impunity.”

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#### **Notes to editors:**

1. The photos show civil servants working to clear the site of the Union Government guesthouse in Hakha, which is being rebuilt. The red building in the background is the Chin State parliament building, where Hung Ngai has his office. Please cite the Chin Human Rights Organization as the source.
2. A January 2011 report by Physicians for Human Rights, *Life Under the Junta: Evidence of Crimes Against Humanity in Burma’s Chin State*, found that almost 92% of people surveyed had been subjected to at least one incident of forced labour in the year before February/March 2010. See [www.lifeunderthejunta.org](http://www.lifeunderthejunta.org)

#### **About the Chin Human Rights Organization**

The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) is a non-governmental, non-profit advocacy organization legally registered in Canada. It was formed in 1995 on the India-Burma border by a group of Chin activists committed to promoting democracy in Burma, and documenting previously unreported human rights abuses being perpetrated against the Chin people by the Burma army and local authorities, instruments of the State. CHRO is the primary rights-based advocacy organization for the Chin.

#### **About the Chin people of Burma**

Around 500,000 ethnic Chin live in the northwestern area of Chin State in Burma. The Chin are ethnically very diverse. The six main tribes of Aso, Cho (Sho), Khuami (M’ro), Laimi, Mizo (Lushai), and Zomi (Kuki) can be further broken up into at least 60 different sub-tribal categories. The Chin speak more than 20 mutually distinct languages. Despite such diversity, the Chin are unified through a common history, geographical homeland, traditional practices, and ethnic identity. The missions of the American Baptist Church starting in the late 1800s served to further unify the Chin people through religion. In a country that is predominantly Buddhist, the Chin are around 90 percent Christian with most belonging to the American Baptist Church.