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FROM

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SERIAL: (U)

/***** THIS IS A COMBINED MESSAGE *****/

BODY

(b)(3):50 USC 3024(i)

COUNTRY: (U) **BURMA (BM): THAILAND (TH).**

SUBJ:

THE FEBRUARY 1997 **BURMESE ARMY OFFENSIVE**

AGAINST THE KAREN NATIONAL UNION 6TH BRIGADE (U)

WARNING: (U) THIS IS AN INFORMATION REPORT, NOT FINALLY

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EVALUATED INTELLIGENCE. REPORT CLASSIFIED

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DOI: (U) 970400.

REOS: (U)

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424,1.4 (c)

SUPPOSED WIDESPREAD HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES PERPETRATED BY
BURMESE ARMY SOLDIERS DURING THEIR FEBRUARY 1997 GROUND
OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE KAREN NATIONAL UNION (KNU) ETHNIC
INSURGENT GROUP.

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2. (U) BELOW IS AN "EXECUTIVE SUMMARY" OF THIS DOCUMENT:

"THE 1997 STATE LAW AND ORDER RESTORATION COUNCIL (SLORC) OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE KNU BEGAN ON FEBRUARY 10TH. THE SLORC MOBILIZED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF TROOPS FOR THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE KNU WITH SOLDIERS PRIMARILY FROM THE LIGHT INFANTRY DIVISIONS 22 AND 44 ATTACKING THE PAGE 3 SIXTH BRIGADE AREA. THIS REPORT ADDRESSES HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN THE SIXTH BRIGADE AREA, OR DUPLAYA DISTRICT, IN KAREN STATE. THE KNU HAS DIVIDED THEIR TERRITORY INTO SEVERAL BRIGADES, AND SIXTH BRIGADE COVERS A STRIP OF TERRITORY ALONG THE THAI-BURMA BORDER STRETCHING FROM MYAWADDY IN THE NORTH TO THREE PAGODAS PASS IN THE SOUTH. THE REPORT CONSISTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH REFUGEES WHO CAME INTO CONTACT WITH SLORC TROOPS IN THE KNU'S SIXTH BRIGADE AREA. INTERVIEWS WITH MUSLIMS REFUGEES CONFIRM THAT THE SLORC HAS BEEN CARRYING OUT AN ANTI-MUSLIM CAMPAIGN IN THE DUPLAYA AREA."

3. (U) "ANTI-MUSLIM CAMPAIGN:

IN **BURMA** TODAY THERE ARE ESTIMATED TO BE APPROXIMATELY SEVEN MILLION MUSLIMS. LARGE NUMBERS OF INDIANS OF BOTH MUSLIM AND HINDU FAITHS MIGRATED TO **BURMA** DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD. THE MUSLIM POPULATION IN KAREN STATE NUMBERS IN THE THOUSANDS, WITH MUSLIMS ENGAGING IN A RANGE OF PROFESSIONS FROM FARMING TO SHOP-KEEPING. THERE ARE TWO MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS WHICH WERE ESTABLISHED IN THE EARLY EIGHTIES AND HAVE WORKED WITH THE KNU. THE ALL **BURMA** MUSLIM UNION (ABMU) MAINTAINS ITS OWN BATTALION OF TROOPS AND HAS BEEN FIGHTING TOGETHER WITH THE KAREN

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NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (KNLA), THE KNU'S MILITARY WING, AGAINST THE SLORC SINCE 1983. THE SECOND ORGANIZATION, THE MUSLIM LIBERATION ORGANIZATION OF **BURMA** (MLOB), IS COMPRISED OF MUSLIMS FROM DIFFERENT AREAS IN **BURMA**. IN

THE FEBRUARY 1997 SLORC OFFENSIVE, THE SLORC ATTACKED THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY DIRECTLY. SLORC SOLDIERS RAZED MOSQUES AND DESTROYED COPIES OF THE KORAN, ORDERED CONVERSIONS TO BUDDHISM, AND DROVE MUSLIMS OUT OF KAREN STATE."

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4. (U) "SLORC TROOPS DESTROYED SEVEN VILLAGE MOSQUES AND THE SPECIAL COFFIN USED IN EACH MOSQUE FOR CARRYING THE DEAD. IN MOST CASES THE KORAN WAS ALSO EITHER BURNED OR SHREDDED. SLORC SOLDIERS MADE IT KNOWN THAT THEY WERE TARGETING MUSLIMS AND HAVE THREATENED TO KILL MUSLIMS THAT THEY SEE. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN CONFIRMED REPORTS OF SLORC TROOPS KILLING MUSLIMS. MUSLIMS FROM KAREN STATE
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FACE A PRECARIOUS FUTURE. THEY HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THEY CANNOT BECOME CITIZENS OF **BURMA** UNLESS THEY PROFESS BUDDHISM AS THEIR RELIGION."

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5. (U) SUMMARY OF SELECTED INTERVIEWS IS AS FOLLOWS:

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- (U) A. "MALE, KAREN-MUSLIM: I WAS GETTING WATER IN FRONT OF THE MOSQUE WHEN SOME SOLDIERS BROUGHT OUT THE KORAN AND I SAW THEM RIPPING IT UP. THE SOLDIERS SAID: ""DON'T WATCH! JUST GET YOUR WATER", POINTING THEIR GUNS AT ME. I WANTED TO CRY BUT COULDN'T. THEY THREW THE PIECES OF KORAN ON THE STREET. WHEN THE MUSLIM WOMEN ON THE STREET SAW THIS, THEY CRIED AND FELT SUCH PAIN. THE SLORC SOLDIERS SAID, "DON'T CRY! THIS IS NOT A MUSLIM COUNTRY! THIS IS A BUDDHIST COUNTRY! GO AWAY!" AN OFFICER FROM THE 202 TACTICAL OPERATION COMMAND (TOC), 22ND LID TOLD ME: "MUSLIMS CANNOT STAY. IF YOU ARE MUSLIM YOU MUST LEAVE." ANOTHER SAID: 'MUSLIM CANNOT STAY HERE, YOU MUST CONVERT TO BUDDHISM AND PUT AN ALTAR IN YOUR HOUSE.'" THIS INDIVIDUAL WENT ON TO TALK OF CASES OF BEATINGS, THEFT, EXTORTION, **FORCED LABOR**, KIDNAPPING, AND MUSLIMS BEING FORCED TO EAT PORK."

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- (U) B. MALE, KAREN-CHRISTIAN: "SOLDIERS APPEAR TO

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HAVE BEEN GIVEN CARTE BLANCH TO TAKE OR DESTROY ANYTHING IN SIGHT. THE SLORC TROOPS TOOK ELEVEN VILLAGERS, LATER THREE WERE RELEASED AND SENT BACK TO THE VILLAGE WITH SLORC SOLDIERS. WHEN THEY ARRIVED, THE SOLDIERS TOLD THOSE THREE TO CALL EVERYONE HIDING AROUND THE VILLAGE AND SAID THEY MUST COME BACK BY 2 P.M. THEN THE SLORC SOLDIERS SAID, 'TOMORROW THE VILLAGERS MUST PORTER RICE TO MAW LA AYE. IF THEY DON'T ARRIVE THERE BY TOMORROW EVENING, THE SOLDIERS WILL KILL THOSE EIGHT VILLAGERS UP THERE.'"

- (U) C. "MALE, KAREN-CHRISTIAN: THE SLORC WENT AROUND THE VILLAGES AND WHEREVER THEY FOUND RICE ON THE FARMS OR IN THE FIELDS, THEY TOOK IT AND CLAIMED THAT IT NOW BELONGED TO THEM. MOST OF THE KAREN PEOPLE'S RICE
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FIELDS ARE IN THE JUNGLE ON HILLSIDES, AND THEY KEEP THEIR RICE IN BARNS IN THE BUSHES. THE SLORC CAME AND TOOK ALL THIS RICE ON TRUCKS TO SELL IT ELSEWHERE. THEY ALSO TOOK THE VILLAGERS MACHINERY FOR GRINDING RICE, AND EVEN TRIED TO SELL IT TO ME. THE SLORC SOLDIERS STOLE THE BULLOCK CARTS AND TRIED TO SELL THEM. THEY STOLE A GENERATOR AND SOLD IT. THEY TOOK ALL THE WOOD AND SOLD IT. THEY WERE ALSO LOOKING FOR TOBACCO. AND NOW EVERY HOUSE MUST GIVE 250 KYAT (US \$1.55) PER MONTH TO THE SOLDIERS. SOMETIMES IF THE SOLDIERS STEAL THINGS AND THE VILLAGERS REPORT IT TO THE LOCAL SLORC OFFICER, THE OFFICER PUNISHES THE SOLDIERS. EACH SOLDIER IS TRYING TO MAKE MONEY FOR HIMSELF. IF A MAJOR IS AROUND, THE SOLDIER MUST GIVE HIM SOME OF THE VALUABLES, BUT THE SOLDIERS ARE ALSO DOING A LOT OF STEALING BEHIND THE MAJORS' BACKS. IF THE MAJOR IS NEARBY, THEY BEHAVE OK, BUT IF HE IS NOT AROUND, THEY ARE NOT GOOD. OVER HALF OF THE SOLDIERS ARE CHILDREN. MANY ARE ONLY 15-16 YEARS OLD. THEIR SALARIES ARE ONLY 700 KYAT PER MONTH. SOME SPEAK KAREN AND **BURMESE**. I THINK THEY BECOME SOLDIERS BECAUSE THEIR ARE NO JOBS IN THE CITY. THE SLORC OFFICERS ASKED THE VILLAGERS ABOUT KNU LEADERS - WHAT THEIR NAMES WERE AND WHERE THEY ARE. THE SLORC OFFICERS TOLD THEM THAT ONLY HALF OF THE KNU SURRENDERED, BUT HALF ARE STILL OUT THERE. IN KAW DU VILLAGE, THE SLORC KILLED TWO MEN BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE KNU. O

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NE MANS THE VILLAGE GATE AND THE OTHER ONE HAD BEEN ILLEGALLY SELLING LOTTERY TICKETS. THE KNU HAD PUNISHED HIM BY MAKING HIM ACCOMPANY THE TROOPS AND HELP THEM WITH DAILY CHORES. I FEEL REALLY SAD ABOUT WHAT THEY (SLORC) ARE DOING RIGHT NOW BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE GETTING HURT, AND LOSING ALL OF THEIR POSSESSIONS. I THINK THAT THERE WILL BE A GREAT PROBLEM WITH THE RICE SUPPLY BECAUSE THE VILLAGERS THERE HAVE TO BUY BACK ALL THEIR RICE FROM THE SLORC. EVEN THOUGH THE RICE ORIGINALLY BELONGED TO THE VILLAGERS, THEY TOOK IT AND SOLD IT BACK TO THEM ANYWAY. BUT THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO HELP THE SITUATION"

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- (U) D. "MALE, KAREN, CHRISTIAN: THE CHRISTIAN
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MINISTER WAS ARRESTED BY THE SLORC, AND THE SLORC SOLDIERS SAID 'IF THIS MINISTER TRIES TO ESCAPE, WE WILL KILL ALL THE VILLAGERS.' ANYONE WHO HAD A BULLOCK CART HAD TO USE IT TO TRANSPORT GOOD FOR THE SLORC. A PERSON FROM KAMAR KLER VILLAGE WENT TO PAH GLAW KHEE VILLAGE AND SAID THAT THE SITUATION THERE IS WORSE THAN IN OUR VILLAGE. ONE MUSLIM FAMILY WAS HIDING IN THE WOODS AND THE BABY CRIED. THE SLORC SOLDIERS FOUND THEM AND BROKE EVERYTHING IN THE WOMAN'S BASKET AND TOOK THE BABY AND RIPPED IT IN HALF WITH THEIR BARE HANDS. ANOTHER GIRL FROM THAT VILLAGE WAS FOUND DEAD WITH HER CLOTHES CUT OFF. I KNEW ((JAW TU THAW)) FROM KROH DOH VILLAGE. HE WAS A RETIRED KNLA SOLDIER. HE TOLD THE SLORC SOLDIERS THAT HE WAS RETIRED, BUT THEY KILLED HIM ANYWAY. THEY KILLED HIM IN FEBRUARY, BUT I DON'T REMEMBER THE EXACT DATE. MY UNCLE IS THE HEADMAN OF KUI KLUH VILLAGE, VERY NEAR THE THAI BORDER. THE SLORC CAME AND ACTED VERY NICELY. THEY PAID 1000 KYAT FOR A PIG THERE. IN OTHER PLACES THEY JUST STEAL THE PIG. THOSE WHO LIVED NEAR THE BORDER WERE LUCKY, BECAUSE THEY COULD ESCAPE. THOSE FARTHER IN ARE MUCH WORSE OFF. NEAR THE BORDER, THE SLORC SOLDIERS BEHAVE ALL RIGHT, BUT THOSE INSIDE ARE TERRIBLE. THEY DON'T WANT THE THAIS TO KNOW THEY ARE BAD. THE SLORC SOLDIERS AT THE BORDER ACT VERY NICE, BUT YOU HAVE TO GO INSIDE TO THE VILLAGES AWAY FROM THE BORDER TO KNOW HOW TERRIBLE THEY ARE."

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6. (U) "SOLDIERS OUT OF CONTROL: THE SLORC SOLDIERS LOOT AND PILLAGE PARTLY BECAUSE THE SLORC PAYS ITS SOLDIERS SUCH LOW SALARIES. ORDINARY SOLDIERS RECEIVE ONLY 700 KYAT (US \$4.25) A MONTH WHICH DOES NOT COVER EVEN THEIR MOST BASIC NEEDS. MOREOVER, OFTEN THIS AMOUNT IS TAXED BY THE HIGHER RANKS. IF THE SLORC CANNOT REWARD THEIR SOLDIERS WITH WAR BOOTY, THEY FEAR THAT THE RANK AND FILE WILL TURN AGAINST THEM. MOST SOLDIERS BECOME SOLDIERS BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF OTHER AVAILABLE JOBS. THE OFFICERS ALLOW THE SOLDIERS TO TAKE OUT THEIR ANGER AND FRUSTRATIONS ON THE HELPLESS VILLAGERS RATHER THAN HAVE THEM CHALLENGE MILITARY RULE. THERE APPEARS TO BE PAGE 7

NO CODE OF CONDUCT TO WHICH SOLDIERS MUST ADHERE. SOLDIERS ARE RARELY PUNISHED FOR ABUSES AGAINST VILLAGERS AND IN SOME CASES ARE ENCOURAGED BY THEIR OFFICERS TO STEAL, RAPE, AND MURDER. THE LAWLESSNESS OF THE SLORC SOLDIERS IS WHAT SCARES THE REFUGEES MOST AND WAS THE PRIMARY REASON WHY REFUGEES DID NOT DARE TO GO BACK TO THEIR VILLAGES."

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- END SUMMARY

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AND PORTERING WILL CONTINUE. SECONDLY, BECAUSE KNU FORCES HAVE CHOSEN TO CONDUCT GUERILLA WARFARE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE **BURMESE** ARMY (BA), THE BA WILL CONTINUE TO RESPOND IN KIND WITH BRUTAL AND SWIFT RETALIATION AGAINST VILLAGES AND VILLAGERS SUSPECTED TO BE SYMPATHETIC TO KNU FORCES. MANY VILLAGERS MAY FIND THEMSELVES CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, LIABLE TO BE PUNISHED WITH PORTERING OR FORCED EXPROPRIATIONS OF PROPERTY FROM FORCES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CONFLICT.

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