

EDUCATION...ADVOCACY...RESEARCH...DEMONSTRATIONS...WORKSHOPS...TRAINING

# ADVOCACY & PUBLIC AWARENESS

EDUCATION...ADVOCACY...RESEARCH...DEMONSTRATIONS...WORKSHOPS...TRAINING

## OVERVIEW:

Young people are a prime target in many of today's civil wars. But their position in society denies them a voice to speak out against these violations of their basic human rights. An important role for young peacebuilders can be to bring these issues to the public's attention at the local, national and international level.

In the CAP Project several of the groups have taken on this task. Their strategies have been tailored to the end objective as well as the nature of the conflict.

## POLITICAL LOBBYING:

In Angola MOJUP has promoted youth's voice through the local media, particularly the radio. To gain attention MOJUP has organized major rallies and youth conferences. In Cambodia CAMP has organized youth marches and rallies to bring attention to their issues.

## DOCUMENTATION:

In Burma-Thailand the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) , a member of CAP Burma-Thailand, organized a research and advocacy project to document the systematic rape of Shan girls and women by the Burmese military. This required a careful recording of these violations as a balance had to be achieved between concern for personal security for the young women and the need to provide irrefutable evidence.

A detailed account of this work is included in the following pages.

## INTERPRETIVE AND ARTISTIC METHODS:

In Colombia the middle and upper level classes have largely isolated themselves from the civil war. Youth at Taller de Vida have used various techniques to break through that barrier and force people to bear witness to the situation of displaced children and youth.

Their biggest success has been through cultural techniques to interpret individual experiences rather than recording events. This has proven to be very successful. This section includes an interview with the participants in this project as they discuss the merits of this tool for public awareness.

## RESEARCH & ADVOCACY

### SPEAKING OUT AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE

#### **The Situation:**

In Burma, especially along the border, many teenage girls and women have been subjected to rape and sexual assault by the Burmese military. These attacks occur in the villages, in the forced labour projects and as people are fleeing to Thailand.

The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) has repeatedly spoken out against this violence against women. This included presentations to the UNHR's Human Rights Hearings in Geneva, Switzerland. While there was a sympathetic response, the lack of documented evidence was a major problem.

#### **The Strategy:**

A research project to document the rape and sexual attacks of females by the Burmese military was organized by SWAN (Shan Women's Action Network) and SHRF (Shan Human Rights Foundation). Their study focussed on the area of Burma where the Shan Nation lives, both in the villages and along the border.

The study was coordinated by a five-member committee and carried out by one researcher with the support of the Shan community.

When the report was released in June 2002, it received considerable international attention. The Burmese military reacted with outrage and held a press conference to disavow the report, saying that Burmese soldiers were too polite and well trained to commit these types of actions.

#### **How did this project promote social justice and peacebuilding?**

This project directly challenges the silence that has surrounded the systematic rape of young women by the Burmese military. The combination of research and advocacy has proven to be extremely successful and the project's stated objective – to gain international attention for this human rights violation – has been achieved. Other ethnic women's groups have come forward and said that they have also suffered from sexual attacks by the Burmese military. The Burmese military are aware that they are being watched and are less likely to act with the same level of impunity.



# **LICENSE TO RAPE STUDY**

## **INTERVIEW WITH MO HOM, PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER**

### **Q. Can you tell me why you decided to do this project?**

**A.** I want the SPDC to see that we know what they are doing. We know about the rapes. It isn't that nobody knows. This is happening in the countryside, in the jungle, in the remote area. But if we speak out about it, maybe other people will hear about it. Maybe the international community will put some pressure on the SPDC. Maybe if the SPDC realizes that people in the world know what they are doing, maybe it will stop them a little bit. That is what I said to the women. I explained this to the women when I asked them to take part. Because the women are so scared.

### **Q. So you spoke to your community before you began the project?**

**A.** Yes, of course. I went and spoke to the people about it to see what they thought – to see whether they thought it was a good idea. They responded really well, saying, “We can help you with this.” So many women have been hurt this way; so many women have been raped. So many have been talking about this problem. They saw this project as being really necessary. Without this kind of support I don't think that the project could have happened.

### **Q. How did you know that this was such a big problem?**

**A.** In 1998 I was working with the Shan Human Rights Foundation to document information about forced relocations in Shan State and also about the situation of internally displaced people and people hiding in Thailand.

At the time I heard a lot about rape cases, especially during the forced locations. Every month we had two or three rape cases. In 2001 I started to work on the state violence by the SPDC of women who live in Shan State and from this we began our research about the raping of women by the SPDC.

### **Q. What were the first steps?**

We were able to obtain information from the monitoring reports of the Shan Human Rights Foundation Monthly Newsletter.

These reports provide statistics – how many, where and descriptions of how it occurred. Through these reports 145 cases have been reported.

Then during 2001 a reporter and myself did a series of interviews with women. We wanted to find out information that the statistics could not provide. We wanted to know about their feelings; their family's support and the community's response. We wanted to know more about what happened to them not just the statistics.

In our work we received support and assistance from other groups. For instance the Lahu Women's Organization (LWO) helped me to document that situation. It was easier for them to talk to the women in their language. We created a series of questions that they translated and used as a guide when interviewing the women.

### **Q. How did you approach the interview with these women?**

**A.** We had to go slowly. I would begin by introducing our organization and myself. We would ask them generally about the human rights violations, about everything: forced labour, forced relocation, so many things. As our discussion went along we might say, “How about rape? Has this been happening to women as well?”

Their response depended on how the women felt about themselves and about us. They might say, “Rape – we don't have that.” And I had to accept that, I had to recognize that they were not ready to say anything about it. I did not push them, I just continued the conversation, went on to other topics. Then when we were finished I thanked them and said good-bye to them. Even though sometimes I knew that a woman there had been raped.

The first time they usually didn't reveal information. It would take two or three times. Then maybe, some women might speak up or say that they wanted to talk with me privately. So we would have a small interview together. Just maybe two of us because they didn't want their friends or family to know about it. It can be difficult to have this kind of information because you know how important it is to protect their privacy.

**Q. So many women were reluctant to openly admit that they had been raped?**

A. Yes, sometimes they tell someone in the family; other times they tell no one. For instance if you were interviewing five women maybe only two would speak out. And some of them would say, “Oh this is what happened to a friend of mine.”



Other times you might have an interview with five women and only one woman would be open to speak with us, to say that she had been raped. The others might say that they know someone this happened to, or that it happened to their friend or other women in the village.

They did not want to say that it had been them. And the information might be very specific so you wonder if it might be them but they don't want to say this.

I heard that it is the same with some of the interviews that were done with women who had been raped in Bosnia. They are afraid to say it – and I would never force them, that is very important. It is also important to protect their privacy and to keep things secret if that is what they want.

**Q. Yes, I agree. But did it create any difficulties for your study?**

A. Yes. For example, that is one reason we have to be careful when we get confirmation or double check about the facts of the case. Other human rights violations we can double-check more easily, but with raping it is much more difficult.

I checked the military base number, the name of police and also their rank. But I didn't confirm the rape case directly with people in the community because I was worried about the privacy for the woman and the difficulties she might face. I would not do that to them. It is such a big decision to speak out. If they have the strength and courage to speak out I must respect their situation and need for privacy. But anyhow, we have our networks within the community so we can indirectly crosscheck the information.

**Q. What measures did you use to protect the women's privacy?**

A. We asked for their names but we agreed that we would not put their real names in the report. We just created names – we take care about the families' security too. I worried that if we put the real name the SPDC might want to investigate and they could go to see their parents. So we had to be very careful. We use the name of their village or their town, but we agreed that it was not a good idea to use their name or their parents' name.

**Q. Did women talk about the long-term effects for them?**

A. Yes, the women talked about this. For example there was one woman who was engaged but after she was raped the engagement was broken. In another case the family didn't accept her anymore, they said that she was a prostitute now.

In the Shan Nation it can be very difficult. Even though the men who rape have a gun and force the woman, they still cannot accept it. One girl who was in high school after she was raped her family deserted her, they took very little interest or care in her. So she became very depressed and couldn't do her exams. That kind of thing happens a lot.

**Q. This must be very difficult for you to hear, that women are hurt two times.**

A. Yes. Sometimes I just listened, I didn't write down anything. Because it is very emotional; there are strong emotions. Even for me, after listening to them.

Even though I am not a survivor after listening to them I almost feel like I am. Everything stays in my mind, even to now, and I have so many feelings.

**Q. When you did your interviews, did you organize it as a series of questions or as a conversation?**

A. As a conversation. In my experience, this is the best way. Then you can go with what they are thinking and saying. It is more natural and makes them more relaxed.

I needed help from the community leaders. For example, I got a lot of help from a headman who had been helping people coming across to Thailand. He knew their situation. Before I did an interview with the women I met with him first to get information from him. The women trust him so it was important for me to work with him as an intermediary. The women are very scared.

**Q. So you went to the headman first?**

A. Yes, sometimes he would help me to identify the women and sometimes he would use his network. He would tell his network to send four or five women to me. After that I would have to find who was willing to speak to me about rape cases.

**Q. Did you normally speak with women individually or in groups?**

A. Usually individually. Sometimes a woman might want to bring a friend with her. It was really up to them – whichever way made them feel more comfortable. I didn't find group discussions as good because they are shy to speak in front of each other. And also if there are several who want to talk at a certain moment, it can be difficult. You may miss the chance to get the information.

**Q. Where did you conduct your interviews?**

A. I did some interviews in the IDP area inside the Shan State but not very far inside, more on the border on Shan side. There is an internally displaced person's camp on the border and I went there.

**Q. How were you able to identify women in Thailand?**

A. For me it was relatively easy. As I said earlier, I had done research work before with the community so I know them personally or through my job they know me.

**Q. I know your report has received a lot of attention. Can you tell me about this and also the reaction of the women?**

A. There has been so much. It has been covered by many journalists. We have five in the team and we help each other with all the requests and questions we have had.

I took the report with me to the women and showed how I had changed their name and also how good the report was. I told them about the response to it, that the international community was bringing pressure on the SPDC. The women who could read were able to look at the report. Because some of the are migrant workers they move around a lot to get work so sometimes it can be difficult to find them. But I did what I could so that they could see the report and see how their contribution had made such a big difference.

After the report came out, we had to go to the women again because we had to take the journalists to them and also representatives from the US government.

**Q. What has been the reaction of other women?**

A. After our report many women came to speak and to say that they had been raped as well. About 14 so far. These rapes had occurred one or two years ago. We haven't put them in the report yet.



We have also heard from women from ARAKAN State who are refugees in Bangladesh. They released a statement saying that their women had been raped by the SPDC as well. They did an interview on the radio saying that they were hoping to do a similar investigation about their women. Also the Karen women. They all say that the same thing has happened to them.

**Q. Has anyone questioned the truth of your report?**

**A.** So many people have done that. They say, “How can you know the name and position of the men who have done this?”

And we say, “Well they are stationed in the area or the village and these villagers worked for them as forced labour or forced porter or if they were patrolling in the area there would be a local guide or translator for them. So people know the name very well.”

Sometimes the head village man would also know. The SPDC men have a gun, a car, a uniform and they have a tag on their shoulder. Women who cannot read can ask others to tell them who is that man. – What is the number for that man. So that is how the women know exactly who it is.

**Q. How has the SPDC responded?**

**A.** At first they said, “No this is impossible. It did not happen. Our soldiers are well trained and well educated. They would not do this.” And they would say how Burma is a Buddhist nation and that they are kind people. But they have no proof against us. Now they are saying that they are going to send an

investigation to the border area. This worries us. But we have someone from the US Government who is investigating the cases on the border. She has spoken to some of the survivors and has said that she will try to find a way to help them and to punish the ones who have done this. This makes us feel very good, that someone is standing up for us.

**Q. Are women worried about anonymity?**

**A.** Yes, because the SPDC soldiers in the area know them very well. Sometimes we have given the name of the family or the name of the headman. So we are worried about that.

Now we have so many things to do. We have more work with the women. They want to see the report. They still have many emotional problems.

**Q. And for you?**

**A.** After the report came out, I was very tired. But still I cannot rest.

The last two or three days I feel that I am being watched. I worry about my family who are still living inside. I am worried about what the SPDC might do to them, the problems they might create for them.

For myself, I decided I would do this, so if anything happens to me, that is okay but it is different if it happens to my family.



## RESEARCH & ADVOCACY: REPRESENTING DISPLACED PEOPLE

*“Theater and video is what you can use  
to put outside what is inside”*

### **The Situation:**

Colombia is composed of many different realities. For rural and poor people it is a country filled with anxiety and violence. They live inside battlefields as the FARC, paramilitary and government troops carry out their endless struggles for power and control of the country’s resources. For the middle and upper middle class, however, the reality is quite different. Inside their comfortable city apartments, restaurants and private schools they are largely shielded from the horrors of this civil war. They look with amazed disdain at the rough looking populations of displaced families who pour into the outskirts of the country’s large cities.

Aside from the difficulties of coping with new and strange situations, displaced young people feel judged and dismissed. They feel belittled by people who have no appreciation for the realities of their lives or understanding of what the war is doing to a huge sector of the country’s population.

### **The Strategy**

Youth at Taller de Vida organized three initiatives:

#### **1. DRAMA PROJECT**

With the support and guidance of a professional theatre director the group created a play about the experiences of displaced families arriving in Bogotá. The play has been performed many times in Bogotá to an enthusiastic response. Through support from Terre des Hommes this play toured Germany.

#### **2. STUDENT EXCHANGES**

“Students from the poor schools have been going to visit students in the better off schools. They’ve been putting on theatre about the experience of youth and then they sometimes make friends with the students at the schools in the rich neighbourhoods. Then they invite the students from the rich neighbourhoods to come to their schools; so they’re forming friendships and sometimes the rich young people help out.”

Taller de Vida

#### **3. VIDEO PROJECT**

“One project that the youth are really doing well at, and that they’re really enthused about is making videos. They have a video camera and film, and the government television channel, which broadcasts in Bogotá, is allowing space every Saturday to show their videos. The videos are on the problems of youth, particularly displaced youth.”

*Taller de Vida*

#### **How did these projects promote peacebuilding and social justice?**

The aim of this project is to promote understanding and to build alliances amongst sectors of Colombia’s youth population, something that will be important if this country is ever to oppose the forces that currently divide the population .

The following pages provide additional information on the drama project.





### **DEATH WALKS SWIFTLY**

Black Person: If death grabs my arm  
Chorus: Grab its hair  
Black Person: If it holds onto my foot  
Chorus: Hold onto its head  
Black Person: If death takes my arm  
Chorus: Take its other arm  
Black Person: And then when the morning comes

Chorus: **Dancing around, dancing around in circles  
Dancing around, dancing around in circles**

Black Person: If death enters my house  
Chorus: Throw yourself out the window  
Black Person: If I leave but it follows me

Chorus: **Run to the river and throw yourself in  
Run to the river and throw yourself in**

Black Person: If I meet up with death  
Chorus: What a fear! What a horror!  
Black Person: I will tell death that I am at the other corner

Chorus: Already killed Already dead

Black Person: So death can't find me  
Chorus: Death is hiding, death is looking for you  
Black Person: If death asks for me

Everyone: **Say: I don't know him, I don't know him.**

# THEATRE AS A ADVOCACY TOOL

## DISCUSSION WITH DRAMA GROUP, TALLER DE VIDA

### **Q. How did you create your play?**

**A. Johanna:** Theatre was an idea from long time ago. We began by us telling each other our life stories. The play started from these stories. Someone would describe something and then we would say, “OK, why don’t we show that in the play?” At first it was difficult because we had to dedicate ourselves, be responsible, give a lot of ourselves. It’s not easy to do a play. We had to give the best of ourselves to get it right.

**Gladys:** We live in a country where it’s hard for someone who has been displaced to get acceptance. People don’t understand what it is like to have somebody tell you to leave your place or you will be killed and then to arrive in a town where you don’t know anybody and just be there, all by yourself, no friends. They don’t understand that if this happens, you get down, you get depressed. You lose hope.

Theatre gives you the possibility to say: “This happened to me and I don’t want it to happen anymore. Because I know how hard it is.” Theatre helps you feel better because you say what you feel and you realize that it is not just you, it is the whole country.

**Carlos:** I feel deeply about our play because it is the story of my life, it is what happened to me. For me it was the chance to show all the things that happened to my family, to describe this to others at no risk. Because if you give a speech about what happened to you, if you talk on the TV or radio and give names, you can be killed for that. But in theatre you can do it. It is a cruel truth told in an artistic but strong way.

**Haidy** (Taller coordinator) I remember when we started collecting stories it was painful; we cried a lot. But in a way, it was getting free of this emotional weight. There was a lot of solidarity and it permitted a strong friendship between young people there. Taller de Vida was criticized a lot for this play. People said, “No, it’s too strong. They would have the youth do a play of fairy tales, not the reality.”

**Carlos:** Normally an actor must get prepared to do a part. But in our case, we didn’t have to get in the character because we already were that character. Instead, they had to stop us from being too strong because of our memories. This can be tough – to go back to the past, remember what they did, how they killed your family.

**Gladys:** When we showed the play in Germany we began with an introductory part. Each one of us lay down on the stage. Everything was quiet. Then one by one we got up and identified our parts, gave the name, what that person did and what her part was in the play. I remember one time when I was talking about my part – in the play I am a displaced woman whose husband beat her – in that moment I suddenly realized how important my character was. I realized that she represented not just an individual but also many people, about what is happening in our country. It was very important for me.

### **Q. How did audiences in Germany react to your play?**

**A.** There were three categories of response.

The first were people who knew something about the situation. For instance, we had several audiences of young people who were learning Spanish. They had been reading about Colombia and were sensitive and concerned about a country where young people live with political and social violence. They were very receptive to the play. They asked, “How is it possible for young people to be part of the paramilitary?” Young people from protestant churches were very sensitive – many cried.

Then there was another audience – those who didn’t know anything about Colombia or have too much Spanish. They weren’t so good. They laughed when they saw army officers. They shouted “Bin Laden”. They were not concerned.

Then there was the third public: other refugees. They were from Uganda, Bosnia, Turkey, and Iran. We only did one show with them; it was in Essen – a place with many refugees. It was different for them. It wasn’t anymore a play about Colombia – we were building a story about violence in the world. It was about the meaning of being a refugee, the pain of that, being far from your country. You could feel everybody’s pain.

*Carlos:* There is a time I will never forget. It started at the beginning of the play, when we were introducing our characters. My character is based on a very well know paramilitary officer who lived near my home. He was very cruel – he used to play football with the head of the people he killed. I hated myself for being this character, for doing on stage what they do in life.

During this performance, when I appeared on the stage, they started shouting at me all sort of things like “son of a bitch”, and other things, because they were seeing in me the person that killed their family and people. There was a young man from Palestine. At the end of the play, Ruben had to go to the bathroom to talk with him and be with him because the man was so shocked that he got sick.

Later I was with him. He didn’t speak Spanish and I didn’t speak German so it was just being together and shaking hands many times. But it was good – we went to dance and also played soccer the next day. His story was terrible. When he was young, one day he had been out playing with friends. When he went back home all his family was dead. While he had been playing they had been killing his family. He had to seek refuge in Germany because they wanted to kill him as well. When he saw the play, he remembered.

*Estella:* After each show, I could feel the emotional stress. We tried to talk a lot. Especially when Carlos tells the story again and again – the story of what happened to his family. I was worried – is this helping him or hurting him? For the rest of us, it related to our lives, but it wasn’t our life as it was for Carlos. Every time I asked him, “Do you want to do it again? Can you do it again?”

*Carlos:* In this war there are two groups of people who are hurt by the war. Many people are displaced because their land is taken from them or because they flee the violence. Then there are others – those who work for the community. They get killed. They are hated by the armed groups because they want to keep the community weak and afraid so they can rule. So the armed groups kill people who work for the community. This is what happened to my family.

The armed groups have a way of thinking about this. They see that traditions are passed inside families. For instance, if a carpenter dies, someone inside his family will probably take up his work. They think the same way about community leaders. If in a family there are community leaders, they want to get all the family, so nobody is going to continue this work.

For me to tell the story of my family in this way helps people to understand this. Yes, it is difficult because I loved my older brother. And also about how my fingers were cut. No one is going to feel happy about that, but now I am able to talk about it. Sometimes I can even do a joke about how my fingers were lost.

My brother died, but I’m not going to die. I’m taking the best of him. I want people to understand what we must do to get over these obstacles, not to drown in the sorrow of it. I have to represent the dreams of my brother and others who have died. That’s how I think. That’s why it’s not difficult to talk about it.

*Johanna:* I admire how Carlos tells his story even though it’s painful to hear it. But it’s right to do it. It gives us strength and feeling to go on fighting for a different future.

