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Burmese Army defectors testify to continuing impunity for rape

Three soldiers who defected from the Army of Burma's junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), at the Thai-Burma border on January 17, 2003, have testified to Shan Women's Action Network members that their commanding officer boasted to them about raping women.

The soldiers, aged 17, 19 and 26, who had defected with their weapons from Company Two of Light Infantry Battallion 226 across the border from Piang Luang in Northern Chiang Mai province, testified that their commanding sergeant Myint Htay had boasted to them last month about having raped "five or six" women in Shan State.

The three soldiers, all forcibly recruited into the SPDC Army within the past year, had been stationed at the border for only a few months, after undergoing training near Kengtung.

"If officers feel comfortable boasting to their troops about raping women, it is clear that the culture of impunity for sexual violence in the Burmese Army is still in place," said Hseng NOUNG of the Shan Women's Action Network.

The soldiers, one of whom was only 16 when arrested at a bus station in Central Burma and forced to enlist, also said that there were child soldiers as young as twelve stationed at the SPDC Army camp opposite Piang Luang.

For further information, please contact:

Nang Hseng NOUNG at: 66-9-851-9510

Nang Charmtong at: 66-1-885-4347