



## Network for Environment and Economic Development (NEED)

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### **NEED welcomes COHRE's Housing Rights Violator Award to the SPDC**

The Network for Environment and Economic Development (NEED) would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the comprehensive and pertinent report "Displacement and Dispossession: forced migration and land rights" written by COHRE on the various land, housing, and property rights issues in Burma. NEED is a core member of a network of civil society-based organizations working on housing, land, and property rights in Burma. As a representative of this network, we would also like to applaud the nomination of the Burmese government as a winner of the Housing Rights Violator Award. We feel that the SPDC is very deserving of such a distinction.

For years, the SPDC has been the perpetrator of land confiscations all across Burma. The land has been confiscated primarily for either military purposes, to accommodate the ever increasing militarization in ethnic areas; and for big business, such is the case with confiscating land for plantations. As stated in "Natural Light", a journal issued by NEED in April 2007, "in a country where 68% of the population is dependent on the land as a primary means of livelihood, it is easy to see that there can be, and indeed are, severe impacts" from land confiscations.

As an organization, NEED, and the network it represents, is attempting to find solutions to the realities of unlawful land seizures in Burma. One initiative performed with the help of COHRE is an ongoing forum that brings members of Burma's civil society together to discuss the occurrences and impacts of land confiscation. To date, there have been two such workshops, with a third planned for early 2008. The multi-ethnic forum has outlined the need for adequate land documentation and increased awareness of basic human rights as key factors in providing a solution. It is these two areas that the Housing, Land, and Property Network feels that can have the most immediate impact, and are our current areas of focus.

We believe it is of the utmost importance to address as soon as possible the issues of land confiscation, forced evictions and all violations of housing, land, and property rights in Burma. At a time when the world is watching Burma more than ever before following the recent crackdown on peaceful demonstrations, NEED hopes the international community will proactively attempt to stop the ongoing human rights violations and devastation of Burma's environment and natural resources. Moreover, we wish to see the world community work in tandem with civil society organizations in starting to prepare for Burma's much needed democratization process.

Indeed, it might not be the last time Burma is considered for such an award. The reality described in COHRE's report is likely to remain a pressing concern for many years to come.

For questions or more information, please contact me using the numbers or e-mail provided above

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