



KACHIN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION THAILAND

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Press release by the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)

New report: Bride trafficking to China spreads across Burma

“Sold to China”, a new report by the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand (KWAT), reveals that trafficking of women to be forced brides in China has spread to all parts of Burma in recent years.

According to interviews with 187 trafficking survivors assisted by KWAT between 2019 and 2023, over half came from regions of Burma not adjoining China, particularly Yangon, unlike in previous years when most were from Kachin and Shan State.

Numbers of bride trafficking survivors assisted by KWAT in 2019 tripled from the previous year, before decreasing due to border closures and travel restrictions as a result of the Covid pandemic and escalated conflict after the 2021 coup – during which time women began being trafficked to Chinese-run cybersquat centres in northeast Shan State.

Most of the trafficked brides were recruited in person, by relatives or “friends” linked to the extensive trafficking networks that have developed across Burma and China as a result of decades of bride trafficking.

Most women were offered well-paying jobs at factories or farms in China to lure them across the border before being forced to be brides. Increased smuggling of workers from Burma to meet factory labour demands in China's eastern industrial zones has been a useful pretext for traffickers to entice women to travel.

Women were either sold to prospective husbands soon after crossing the border or were smuggled by car to provinces as far as east as Henan or Shandong before being sold – at costs ranging from 10,000 yuan to as much as 500,000 yuan.

The majority of Chinese husbands were farmers, living alone with their parents. Almost all the forced brides were treated abusively -- kept locked up, forced to have sex, and beaten or otherwise tortured if they resisted.

The most common means of escape for the brides was to run to the Chinese police – sometimes after several years of captivity and having given birth to one or more children.

Before deporting the women, Chinese police kept them in detention for periods of up to a year, usually in jails or care homes, but sometimes in mental asylums.

The report concludes that more and more women are likely to be trafficked given the ongoing demand for brides in China and worsening economic crisis in Burma.

KWAT therefore urges the Chinese government to take more serious measures to crack down on trafficking of foreign brides, and to carry out public awareness campaigns so that local community members and officials stop turning a blind eye to this issue.

The Chinese government is also urged to set up formal channels enabling citizens of Burma to enter China and work legally in all areas requiring foreign labour, so they do not have to rely on smuggling networks making them vulnerable to trafficking.

KWAT also urges the Chinese police to liaise with Ethnic Resistance Organisations when deporting trafficking survivors into areas of Burma under their control.

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