



## News Bulletin

August 23, 2013 / KHRG #13-52-S1

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## Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Te Naw Th’Ri Township, August 2012 to March 2013

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*This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in June 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Mergui-Tavoy District between August 2012 and March 2013, specifically concerning land confiscation and plantation destruction in the region. In this report, two land confiscation cases from Pa Wa region are presented wherein the lands of 70 villagers were confiscated by Ngway Ga Ba Company. Only three villagers received compensation for the land confiscation and the subsequent destruction of their plantations. Moreover, this report also details another land confiscation case carried out by U Than Htay with the goal of planting 1,200 acres of rubber in the region. Following negotiations with Te Naw Th’Ri Township Secretary Saw Htee Wah, he has said that he will give compensation to villagers. Because of the land confiscation and plantation destruction, the villagers lost their livelihoods and had to find work at the perpetrating company or in other locales to sustain themselves. This update also notes the destruction of beh htee<sup>1</sup> in a collaborative effort among villagers, the Karen National Union (KNU), civic officials and the Burma government in Th’Mee La and Koh Daw in Ta Keh region. This situation report also reports on the education, health and the livelihood situations of villagers from the region.*

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## Situation Update | Te Naw Th’Ri Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (August 2012 to March 2013)

*The following situation update was written by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>2</sup> This report was received along with other information from Mergui-Tavoy District, including 2,359 photographs.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Beh htee* is the Karen-language name for *Mitragyna speciosa*. The plant, known in English as kratom, produces a mildly narcotic sensation in users when its leaves are chewed. Kratom is outlawed in Burma and Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

<sup>3</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2013. In the meantime, KHRG’s most recently published field information from Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the report, “Mergui-Tavoy Photo Set: Dam, logging and mining operations negatively impact communities in K’Ser Doh Township, January to April 2012,” KHRG, July 2013.

## Introduction

This situation update reports the situation from August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 to March 27<sup>th</sup> 2013. This report includes the human rights abuses that occurred in Te Naw Th’Ri Township region. This report discusses the Government military [Tatmadaw], which is based in Te Naw Th’Ri Township, KNU, Burmese military police, local forces, soldiers, fire forces, Government [officials] and teachers [in an effort to band together] and destroy the *beh htee* plants in Ta Keh region. This report also includes [information] about land confiscation and consequential problems to villagers’ plants and the villagers’ health and education.

## Burmese military [Tatmadaw]’s activity

There are five regions in Te Naw Th’Ri Township, and they are (1) Ta Keh region, (2) Kay region, (3) M’Noh Roh region, (4) along Pa Wa region and (5) Moo K’Hpaw region. The Burmese government military [Tatmadaw] that is based in Ta Keh region is LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #561, and we do not know the one who leads it, but the military is based in Hton To. This military group is always based there, and during this reporting period they did not have any activity.

As for Kay region, the military group that is based [in the region] is IB [Infantry Battalion] #594 and we do not know the commander’s name. In this reporting period, we did not see any of their special activity. Because this military group is a patrol group, they stay in the monastery or in villagers’ houses. In the past, if the military group stayed in the villagers’ houses, villagers had to be afraid. However, now, we can see that the fears of the villagers are decreasing.<sup>4</sup> This military group is active when their leaders come, and they have to take responsibility for the road security.

The Tatmadaw [battalion] that is active and based in Ma Noh Roh region is LIB #558, and the one who leads it is Battalion Commander Soe Lwin.

Regarding Tatmadaw activity in Pa Wa region, during this time there was no more Tatmadaw activity. There is only militia in the village, and it does not seem that this militia is active either.

For the Tatmadaw activity along Moo K’Hpaw region, IB #101 [is active] and the leader is Than Hlaing Win.

## Destruction of drug (*beh htee*)

The plan started on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 as the Burma government and KNU [Karen National Union] leaders from Te Naw Th’Ri Township gathered themselves and destroyed the *beh htee* in two places, which are Th’Mee La and Koh Daw in Ta Keh Region, Te Naw Th’Ri Township. The Burma government [official] who led the destruction of the *beh htee* was police officer Kyi Lin from Te Naw Th’Ri, and from the KNU side, the one who led [the eradication efforts] was township secretary P’Doh Htee Wah.

Regarding this plan, because there were two places of *beh htee*, they had to divide up into two groups in order to destroy the drugs. Group #1 destroyed *beh htee* in Th’Mee La and group #2 destroyed *beh htee* in Koh Daw. The number of people from group #1 who

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<sup>4</sup> Although the cause for this decrease is not entirely clear from the community member’s report, evidence suggests it might be a result of the January 2012 ceasefire between the Burma government and the KNU.

destroyed *beh htee* totalled 272 people. They started destroying *beh htee* at 8:45 [a.m.] and they set fire [to the plants] at 10:00 [a.m.]. The owner of this *beh htee* is U B--- from X--- village. For group #2, they had to go and destroy [*beh htee*] in Hpeh Koh Daw village tract, and there were 166 people total. They started destroying the *beh htee* at 9:00 a.m. and finished at 11:30 a.m.

As their [villagers'] *beh htee* was destroyed, in order not to face [financial] difficulty [with the loss of the crops] and to be able to find another job, Burma government police officer Kyi Lin said that he will help the first person, U B--- from X--- village with 20.8 million kyat,<sup>5</sup> (US \$21,074), and for the person from Y--- village he will give 2.08 million kyat (US \$2,107.40). Regarding this information, I went and got it on my own.

### **Land confiscation**

Starting from February 26<sup>th</sup> 2013, I received information about the rich people's (Ngway K'Ba) Korea Company, whose coordinator is (Daw Nah Rih), confiscating the villagers' land and destroying the villagers' land, including their plantations, in L--- village, Pa Wa region, near the coast, Te Naw Th'ri Township. This company confiscated the villagers' land and destroyed the villagers' land and plants, but they did not give compensation.

Regarding [the villagers to whom] the company paid the compensation for destruction of the civilians' land and plants are;

- (1) In 2011, they gave 160,000 kyat (US \$162.10) of compensation to *Hpah Tee*<sup>6</sup> P--  
- for a five-acre-paddy field
- (2) In 2012, they gave 75,000 kyat (US \$75.99) of compensation to *Hpah Tee* Q---  
for an eight-acre-paddy field
- (3) In 2010, they gave 80,000 kyat (US \$81.05) of compensation for *Hpah Tee* S---'s  
cashew plants that provide fruit and two acres of four-year-old betel nut plants

Regarding the people whose land was confiscated and destroyed, but were not given compensation are:

- (1) 11 acres of *Hpah Tee* T---'s pasture land
- (2) 17 acres of *Hpah Tee* P---'s pasture land
- (3) *Hpah Tee* U---'s paddy threshing ground
- (4) *Hpah Tee* V---'s paddy threshing ground
- (5) *Hpah Tee* W---'s paddy threshing ground, and these grounds were destroyed as  
the sand falls into the land [the threshing ground was destroyed by development  
projects].
- (6) *Hpah Tee* Y---'s cashew plants and three acres of land
- (7) *Hpah Tee* Z---
- (8) *Hpah Tee* C---
- (9) *Hpah Tee* G---
- (10) *Hpah Tee* E---
- (11) *Hpah Tee* F---
- (12) *Hpah Tee* D---
- (13) *Hpah Tee* J---
- (14) *Hpah Tee* M---

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<sup>5</sup> As of July 12<sup>th</sup> 2013, all conversion estimates in this report are based on the official market rate of 987 Kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>6</sup> 'Hpah Tee', meaning 'uncle', is a familiar Karen term of respect attributed to an older man; it does not necessarily signify any actual familial ties between the 'uncle' and the villager who wrote this report.

- (15) *Hpah Tee K---*
- (16) *Hpah Tee H---*
- (17) *Hpah Tee W---*
- (18) *Hpah Tee Ht---*

We got the information about this company because they destroyed over 70 villagers' land, including [the land of] the [ethnic] Burmese people. The people, to whom the company has not given the compensation yet, said that the company would give them compensation during this year. Regarding the people whose lands were destroyed, some of them do not have another job, so they have to go and work at the company. Some people go and work at another company and some people have to go and work in other places. This information is accurate information because we got the information from an L--- villager.

### **Confiscation of villagers' land and destruction of the villagers' plantation**

Starting from March 13<sup>th</sup> 2013, we received information about a rich man, U Than Htay, 52 years old, [who] came into Blih [Mergui-Tavoy] Town and planted rubber in Te Naw Th'Ri Township, Pa Wa region, near the coast, Sh--- village [Chaung Kauk Naung Hpyu river] in 2011, and he confiscated villagers' land and destroyed plants but he did not give compensation to the villagers. Than Htay has a desire to plant a 1,200-acre rubber plantation in that area.

Related to land confiscation and destruction of the plantation, [the land that was destroyed was comprised of] (1) Saw Ch--- ['s land], (2) eight acres of Naw Hs---'s farm, (3) five acres of Hpah Tee St---'s farm and (4) four acres of Hpah Tee Lh---'s farm, [including] 20 coconut plants and over 10 cashew and rubber plants, were destroyed. The people whose lands were confiscated and plants were destroyed were not given any compensation.

Regarding this issue, Te Naw Th'Ri Township Secretary Saw Htee Wah came and negotiated on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2013, and U Than Htay admitted that he would arrange [compensation] within a few days. For the villagers whose land he has confiscated and plantations destroyed, at present, they have to find work in other places for their livelihood and do odd jobs. An Hl--- villager gave me this information.

### **Education**

During this year, when we look at the situation of education, it has not changed a lot. As we know, when you register [for school] it is free, but the amount of the school fee has not decreased. When we look at the Te Naw Th'Ri Township, now, the parents cannot send their children to primary school, so they [children] just have to live idly.

For middle school, we see that children passed 7<sup>th</sup> standard, and parents cannot send them [to school] because they have to fulfil their needs at home [on account of financial hardship, as they cannot afford the school fees]. For high school, we can see that [the students] who attend 10<sup>th</sup> standard cannot pass the exam within one year, and they also have difficulty taking the exam a second time because of the household and financial needs. In Te Naw Th'Ri Township, there are few people who passed the 10<sup>th</sup> standard and college.

### **Healthcare**

In Te Naw Th’Ri Township, people who face health problems are only a few. The illnesses that we mostly see are (1) malaria; (2) anaemia; (3) long coughing; (4) coughing and illness; (5) pink eye [conjunctivitis], for this disease we see it mostly in children; and (6) sore and swollen eyes. During this year, regarding the diseases that they get, we see that because the situation gives a chance for the backpack team [Backpack Health Worker Team] to come and take care of the patients, and also set up a clinic [because access to the region is less restricted than in previous years]. Therefore, they [villagers] do not face diseases that are so serious that they can cause death. In previous years, we could see that people who got sick had to go to the other places to have medical treatment. This year, we can see that there are not a lot of people who face serious health problems.

## **Livelihood**

When we look at [the situation] during this year regarding the civilians’ livelihood, travelling and living places have changed. In the previous years, the civilians who had to go and work outside of the village had to be afraid and needed to write recommendation letters in order to get permission to work. But, this year, the villagers who went and worked outside of the village did not need to [get] recommendation letters and did not need to be afraid, and they even rarely come back to the village [to sleep in their farms, which was previously prohibited by Tatmadaw-area authorities]. Regarding their livelihood, the difficulties they are facing that we see are weather conditions and creatures such as wild pigs, monkeys and squirrels. During this whole year, we did not see civilians face serious food problems like in the previous years. At the same time, there are also changes when we review the situation. There is also natural destruction [environmental degradation caused by] monkeys, squirrels, wild pigs and weather conditions. Even though they have to face natural destruction, they do not face difficulties as serious as in the previous years.

Further background on the current situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Mergui-Tavoy Photo Set: Dam, logging and mining operations negatively impact communities in K’Ser Doh Township, January to April 2012,” (July 2013)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw E---, July 2012,” (March 2013)
- “Complaint letter to Burma government about value of agricultural land destroyed by Tavoy highway,” (July 2012)
- “Mergui/Tavoy Interview: Saw K---, April 2012,” (July 2012)
- “Tenasserim Situation Update: Te Naw Th’Ri Township, May to September 2011,” (December 2011)

