



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

---

**News Bulletin**

February 28, 2013 / KHRG #14-1-NB1

---

## **Ongoing militarisation prevents Lu Thaw Township IDPs from returning home**

---

*Displaced villagers in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District submitted 16 complaint letters to KHRG, which explain that they are unable to return to their homes until the Tatmadaw bases in the area have been closed. Thousands of villagers were originally displaced during Tatmadaw offensives spanning 1997 to 2008; since then, many of these people have lived in make-shift, temporary housing in the jungle and mountainous areas with inadequate health and education facilities and without access to land on which they would grow food for daily consumption. Excerpts of six of the 16 complaint letters are presented as evidence below.*

---

On July 29<sup>th</sup> 2013, KHRG received 16 separate complaint letters from internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, in which they explain that nearby Tatmadaw bases need to be closed before they can return to their former villages and resume their livelihood activities in safety.

*“Poverty and starvation are running after us every day and every year. Therefore, we are writing this complaint letter to make them move away from our village. Once that happens, we will be able to go back to our village, work on our farm and get enough food to eat.”*

Saw U---, P--- village, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township,  
Hpapun District

*“We can’t bear it anymore. So, we would like to request to you all to make the Tatmadaw [troops], which are based in Htaw Muh Plaw Meh village in Ler Muh Plaw village tract, move away from those villages quickly. We are requesting this in order for us to go back and take care of our lands and other belongings.”*

Saw Te---, B--- village, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District

Cases of widespread displacement were documented in Lu Thaw Township during Tatmadaw offensives in 1997 and between 2005 and 2008.<sup>1</sup> According to the recent complaint letters from IDPs, Tatmadaw soldiers burnt down their villages in 1997, including rice stores and schools,

---

<sup>1</sup> For background information on 1997 and 2005-2008 offensives and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, see pages 22-29 in *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010.

and killed villagers and livestock. This was the first of a series of attacks on their community over the following decade. As a result, villagers fled into the forest and to other mountainous villages, and over time set up basic housing, education and other facilities for their community.

*“The Burmese soldiers entered our village on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1997 and shot their guns so we moved one hour away, where we left our things (materials) and our children at T--- village. Some of the people snuck back into the village. When some of the villagers were not very far away, they saw that smoke was coming out of the village, and they knew that some of the houses and barns in the village were burning. So, our villagers did not know where to find food and were in trouble. ... But, on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2002 at 2:00 pm, one of our villagers was shot by the enemies and died and four people (two people were male and the other two were female) were injured when they went back to harvest [their plantations].”*

Saw E---, B--- village (old village), Ler Mu Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw, Township, Hpapun District

*“When Their Sein’s soldiers [Tatmadaw] came to base their camp in Htaw Muh Pleh, Meh K’Neh village tract, the resident villagers had to relocate. Moreover, Tatmadaw came to our village and harmed us and killed our livestock. They also destroyed our farmlands and land and burnt our shelters so we had to flee immediately.”*

Saw L---, N--- village, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District

Villagers living in IDPs areas in Lu Thaw Township have faced serious challenges due to lack of health care and education services, poor shelters and an insufficient amount of food for daily consumption. Beginning in 1997, Tatmadaw troops began to construct their army camps in villagers’ plantations, slowly decreasing the availability of land to cultivate. As villagers reported in June 2013, they still do not have enough food to eat because they cannot return to their villages and cultivate their plantations.

*“They [Tatmadaw] set up their army camp in many places such as Htaw Muh Pleh Meh village in Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Wah Klay Htu village in Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Pah Ghaw Loh village in Saw Muh Plaw village tract and Pler Hkoh village in Pler Hkoh village tract. Until now, they haven’t moved their base yet. They based their camps in the villagers’ lands, such as Ler Muh Plaw village’s flat field land, Saw Muh Plaw village’s flat field land, Teh Boh Plaw village’s flat field land, Peh Lay Plaw flat field land and Pghah Ghaw Plaw flat field land. These lands actually belong to the resident villagers. The villagers had to flee and lived poorly in other villages, such as Taw Paw Der village tract, P’Nah Aye Per Hkoh village tract and Nah Yoh Hta village tract. Because of the relocation of many villages, their access to land decreased and the population increased. Because of that, the amount of food decreased and there was no more land to work on. The Tatmadaw has had an army base set up there for more than 10 years; the resident villagers do not dare go back to their village. Therefore, I hope that the Tatmadaw based in our area will leave quickly in order for us to go back to work on our farmland and take care of the graveyard to pay respects properly.”*

Saw K---, G--- village, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District

*“We have encountered problems because the Burmese soldiers [Tatmadaw] have not withdrawn yet. [These include issues related to] our staple food [rice]; accommodation; fear of Government soldiers; villagers’ lack of trust in Government soldiers due to past experiences; ongoing landmine contamination; and health issues. [We also face] difficulties*

*in travelling and buying foods such as salt and fish paste. We have to be afraid of the Burmese soldiers if we go and buy food in Ler Doh [Kyauk Kyi] area and do not trust the Government, as we listened to the radio and heard about how they are treating [people of] the other ethnic groups.”*

Saw D---, Y--- village, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District

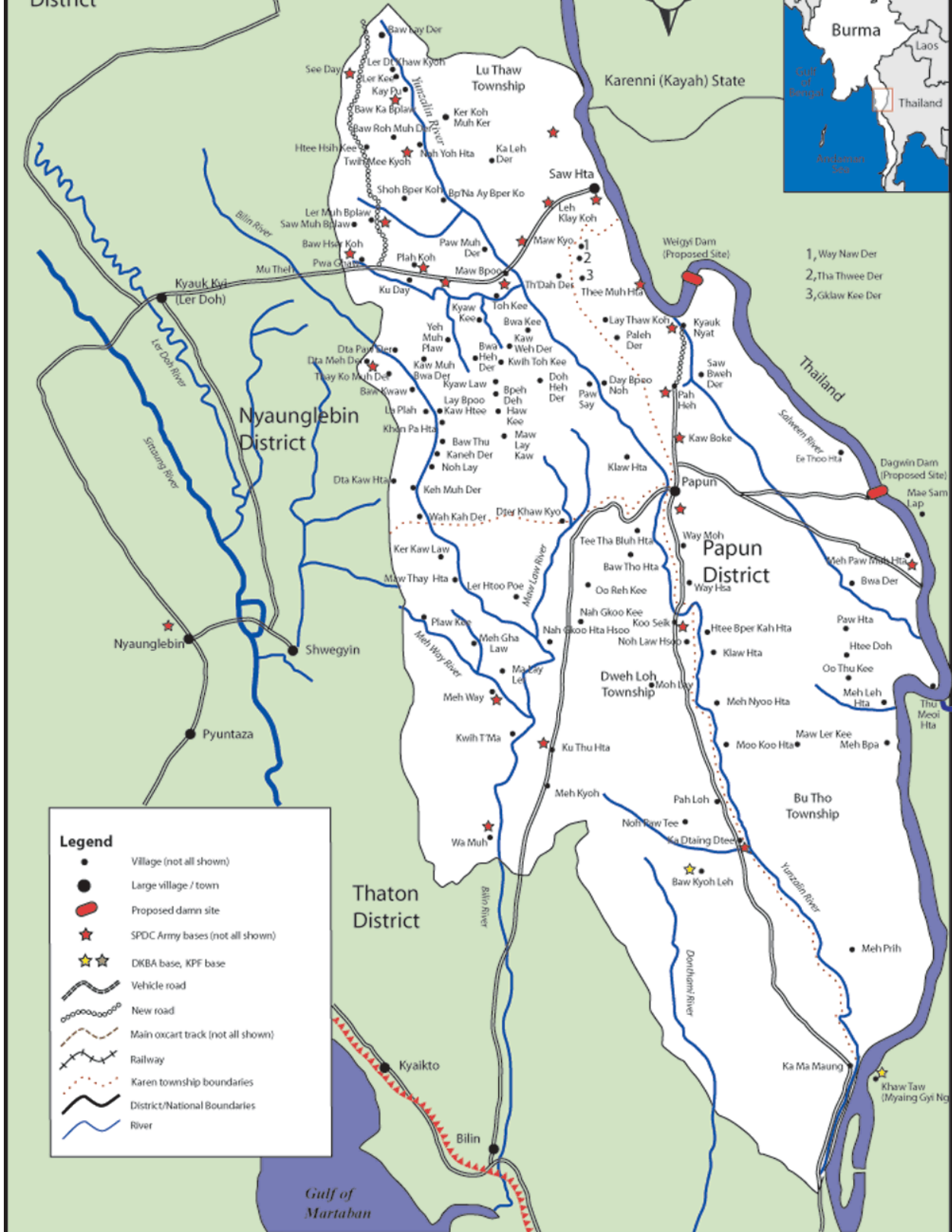
Further background on the current situation in Hpapun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, February 2013,” (February 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to October 2013,” (February 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2013,” (December 2013)  
“Rape and sexual harassment in Hpapun District, June and August 2013,” (November 2013)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Tatmadaw soldiers threaten brickmaker in Bu Tho Township,” (November 2013)

# PAPUN DISTRICT, KAREN STATE

Map by KHRG (Karen Human Rights Group)

Toungoo District



- Legend**
- Village (not all shown)
  - Large village / town
  - Proposed dam site
  - ★ SPDC Army bases (not all shown)
  - ★ DKBA base, KPF base
  - Vehicle road
  - New road
  - Main oxcart track (not all shown)
  - Railway
  - - - Karen township boundaries
  - - - District/National Boundaries
  - River

- 1, Way Naw Der
- 2, Tha Thwee Der
- 3, Giklaw Kee Der

Dagwin Dam (Proposed Site)

Khaw Taw (Myaing Gyi Ng)

Gulf of Martaban