



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

---

### **Situation Update**

September 19, 2014 / KHRG #14-10-S1

---

## **Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, September to December 2013**

---

*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District during the period between September and December 2013. It details concerns expressed by villagers regarding the loss of farmland and forest due to infrastructure development, logging and large-scale rubber cultivation, environmental pollution from industrial projects, restrictions on freedom of movement, forced labour, obstacles to education, serious healthcare problems and a general absence of the rule of law. Whilst armed conflict has decreased since the signing of the preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen National Union in January 2012, armed actors continued to operate in Kyonedoe Township, enforcing travel restrictions, demanding forced labour and collecting taxes, as well as engaging in the sale of forest land for cultivation and the drug trade.*

- *Villagers reported that people who rely on hill field farming for their livelihoods face a general shortage of available land to cultivate, after land owners and local armed actors organised the sale of large amounts of land to rubber cultivators from other areas.*
  - *Similarly, large amounts of forest has been lost after local armed actors sold it to cultivators who cleared it to establish rubber plantations, leading to a shortage of natural materials used by villagers in the construction of houses, such as bamboo poles.*
  - *Villagers in Kyainseikgyi Township reported environmental pollution and associated health problems as a result of mining projects and the operation of a kiln in the area.*
  - *Villagers in Kawkareik Township reported serious health problems after taking medicine for elephantiasis distributed by the Burma/Myanmar government, including one case of miscarriage.*
  - *Members of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and Karen Peace Force (KPF) operated checkpoints and collected taxes from travellers.*
- 

### **Situation Update | Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District (September to December 2013)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in February 2014. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with 257 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma/Myanmar 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>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma/Myanmar, 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. For

## Kyonedoe Township

**Period – between September and December 2013.**

**Area – Kyonedoe Township, Doolaya District.**

This report describes the situation of civilians from villages in Kyonedoe Township, including the political situation, [political and social] organizing [by the Karen National Union], healthcare, education and human rights. This is an area where all armed actors including the Tatmadaw, BGF [Border Guard Force],<sup>3</sup> DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army],<sup>4</sup> KPF [Karen Peace Force]<sup>5</sup> and the KNU [Karen National Union] are active.

### The situation of civilians

Karen people are mostly farming, working on plantations and [engaging in] cultivation for their livelihoods. Summer paddy [paddy grown in summer time rather than in the rainy season] is grown in Kyonedoe Township. There was very little rain at the end of the last rainy season, and the water dried up because of climate change and some farms could not be worked on.

Some NGOs came to some of the villages in the area. CWS [Church World Service] provided one basket of paddy seed [of a value of] 5,000 kyat (US \$5.13)<sup>6</sup> to the farmers whose fields were affected by the flooding. The UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] supported agriculture and [animal] husbandry for poor people in order to eliminate poverty. The UNHCR [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] helped the villagers with healthcare and education.

We can say that poor people who do not have land and do hill field farming have almost no land to cultivate. This is because there are many [different] authorities [armed actors] in the area, and the soldiers and some villagers worked together and sold the land to rich people from other areas, and the rich people are growing rubber trees. Therefore, it is hard for the local people to do cultivation and hard for them to find wood, bamboo, leaves for roofing and posts for fencing when they build houses. Now they have to pay 500 kyat (US \$0.51) for one bamboo [pole] and 500 kyat for one fence post.

---

additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

<sup>3</sup> Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "[Inside the DKBA](#)," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

<sup>5</sup> The Karen Peace Force was formed in February 1997 after splitting from the KNU/KNLA and surrendering to and signing a ceasefire with the Burmese military government. The KPF controls some administrative areas in Three Pagodas Pass and operates a number of road and river checkpoints in the area of Three Pagodas Pass. Following repeated rejections of Burmese government proposals to reform KPF into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, substantial elements have since reformed in the Tatmadaw Border Guard in 2010 while others remain independent.

<sup>6</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the 28 July 2014 official market rate of 974 kyat to the US \$1.

There are 75,320.09 acres of forest in Kyonedoe Township and the civilians could not protect it after the emergence of the DKBA, BGF and KPC [KNU/KNLA Peace Council].<sup>7</sup> These armed actors demarcated the forest into plots and sold it to rich people from other places. The civilians dare not say anything because [those responsible] are armed actors. According to the local forestry leader of the KNU [administrative official in the KNU Forestry Department], only one-third of the forest is left [has not been logged].

It was easy to protect the forest when there were only the KNU and the Burmese government [in the area]. Because there are so many armed actors [now], some people said that we would have to call the forest a rubber plantation [because armed actors, villagers and business people from other areas grow so many rubber trees there].

Because the KNU has signed the preliminary ceasefire with the Burmese government, for the development of the region the KNU allowed the government to construct and repair bridges and three concrete vehicle roads in Brigade #6, Dooplaya District, between Than Phyu Za Yap and Hpa Ya Thone Su, Kyainseikgyi and Kyeh Don, and Kawkareik via A' Zinn to Paing K' Ler and Taung Ka Lay. When the companies came and worked on the three roads, they widened the narrow parts of the roads and straightened the curved roads [constructed new sections of road to cut across particularly curved sections of the existing road in order to shorten it]. As a result, the farms and plantations of some villagers were destroyed. Some of the owners of the land that was destroyed said that they would be very happy if they received proper compensation.



The above photos were taken by a KHRG researcher at Kaw Sai village, Kawkareik Township, Doopalaya District on December 28<sup>th</sup> 2013. They show vehicles belonging to the Mya Kan Tha company engaged in the construction of a stretch of road from Kawkareik to A' Zinn. [Photos:KHRG]

Civilians can travel more quickly, transport things and trade more easily because of the construction of the three new roads. However, some of the travellers and traders are disappointed because there are many check points [and they have to pay to pass the check points]. Some villagers made up a humorous poem to describe their experience of check points:

12 inches = 1 foot  
Every three feet = one check point

<sup>7</sup> The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Gkaw Ko, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2007 and subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform its forces into the Tatmadaw Border Guard. See: [“KPC to be outlawed if it rejects BGF,” Burma News International, August 30<sup>th</sup> 2010.](#)

Between here and Kawkareik = 12 check points<sup>8</sup>

Some villagers and the village administrators said that they do not dare to report human right abuses and the problems in the villages as they do not have extra heads [a darkly sarcastic expression meaning they don't want to risk speaking out for fear that their heads may be cut off]. Armed conflict is the only [kind of problem] that has decreased during the ceasefire, and the villagers still have to pay tax and do *Loh ah pay*.<sup>9</sup>

Some villagers reported that the number of young people who are using drugs is increasing because there are many organizations [armed actors involved in the drug trade].

There is a lot of mining happening in Noh T'Kaw [Kyainseikgyi] Township in Dooplaya District and many [mining] companies are coming in. In particular, mining that produces antimony in Ta Mo Theh village pollutes Win Lon stream because polluted water from the mine flows into the stream. Moreover, a kiln that was built by a Chinese company emits smoke into the air when it is running and people get dizzy and have headaches when they breath it, and people get diarrhoea when they touch the ashes produced by the kiln.

Nine villages from that area [Kyainseikgyi Township] rely on the Win Lon stream [for drinking water]. Villagers who do not have wells use the water from the Win Lon stream. Moreover buffalos, cattle, pigs and other animals from the villages along the stream drink water from the Win Lon stream in the summer time. The village administrator of Win Lon reported on November 11<sup>th</sup> 2013 that the villagers worry that the [animals] will get diseases if they drink water from the stream often.

## **Education**

The villagers built schools by themselves and hired teachers by giving them 40 to 60 baskets of paddy for one year because they realize that education is vital. [Community founded] schools in some villages have to join with government schools, otherwise they [the students] cannot attend middle school because the government does not recognize them [the local schools established by villagers]. The government does not recognize the people who pass tenth standard in KNU schools or people who pass tenth standard in refugee camps on the border. The teachers that are appointed by the government get a salary but the villagers have to provide them with rice, cooking oil, salt, coal, curry, travel [expenses when they attend training or meetings], sickness [expenses to pay for medicine] and everything. Both teachers hired [by the villagers] and those appointed by the government [and sent to teaching posts in different areas of the country] have to attend training or sit exams once every three or four months. [The training sessions or exams] take between two days and one month [to complete], and because there are no teachers to replace them [while they are in training or sitting exams] it disrupts the education of the students. The students have to pay school fees and fees for other things in some government primary schools even though the students get free books and pens provided by UNICEF [the United Nations Children's Fund].

The schools built by the villagers by themselves and the teachers hired by the villagers receive stationary, sports equipment and money for the teachers from the KED [Karen Education Department].

## **Healthcare**

---

<sup>8</sup> The mathematical logic is not coherent, but the poem expresses a humorous frustration that there are such a large number of checkpoints in the area.

<sup>9</sup> *Loh ah pay* is a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

Healthcare is very important for the civilians. The government appointed [local village heads] as village administrators and assigned medics to some villages. Sometimes patients from the villages receive medicine for free and sometime they have to pay money, because the government does not provide all medicines for free.

WHA<sup>10</sup> from the side of military government led by Doctor Saw Moe Myint Win distributed elephantiasis medicine to 1,144 villagers from 254 households from 25 villages in Kyeh Don Sub-Township, Kawkareik Township on September 9<sup>th</sup> 2013. The last day of the vaccination was September 19<sup>th</sup> 2013. Doctor Saw Moe Myint Win and his superior medics together with teachers from the villages distributed elephantiasis medicine to the villagers in that area. They informed the villagers via the village tract leaders [who then informed] the ten households leaders<sup>11</sup> [and then the ten households leaders informed the households they represent]. They said that people who have heart disease, patients with gastric illnesses, pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses should not take the medicine.<sup>12</sup> There was no equipment for [diagnostic] examinations. There was only one pot [of water] and one cup [which the villagers had to share] to take the medicine, [which had to be swallowed in pill form].



This photo was taken by a KHRG researcher in Y---village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District on October 4<sup>th</sup> 2013. It shows Daw U---. She was four months pregnant when she suffered a miscarriage three days after taking medicine for elephantiasis. She had been told by the ten households leader that if she refused the medicine, she would be ineligible for treatment at Kyaikto town hospital. She stated that the government medic who distributed the medicine did not tell her anything about possible side effects beforehand. [Photo:KHRG]



This photo was taken by a KHRG researcher in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District on October 11<sup>st</sup> 2013. The girl on the left suffers from heart disease and is chronically ill. A government medic who was distributing elephantiasis medicine to local villagers forgot to ask her about the state of her health before providing her with the medicine. She took the medicine, but due to her heart condition, it caused her to pass out shortly afterwards. [Photo:KHRG]

The ten households leaders had to distribute the medicine to those who could not come [to receive the medicine initially]. Some people who took the medicine felt dizzy, vomited and felt itchy, [the side effects also reportedly included one case of] miscarriage and [some] some men's testicles became swollen as a consequence. People from Kyonedoe Township suffered the same things after they took the medicine. A malaria elimination team of the government came and distributed mosquito nets for free but they asked for 500 kyat (US \$0.51) from the villagers as a transportation fee for each mosquito net.

<sup>10</sup> It is unclear what this acronym refers to.

<sup>11</sup> 'Ten households leader' is a common term used to refer to villagers who are chosen by their communities to help manage the civil affairs of 10 or so households in a village. They work closely with the village head.

<sup>12</sup> However, some villagers claim that they were not informed about the possible side effects of taking the medicine before it was distributed.

A Back Pack Health Worker Team, the FBR [Free Burma Rangers] and a malaria elimination group from the KNU come [to the village] twice per year. Also, CIDKP [the Committee for Internally Displace Karen People] and KORD [the Karen Office of Relief and Development] help the villagers when it is necessary. They distribute medicines and mosquito nets for free.

## **KNU**

The KNU could not establish a township level administration in this area. So they are operating as an organizing committee. They have nine members in the organizing committee and they are each given responsibility for one department. As for the military, there are three platoons of the KNDO [the Karen National Defence Organization]<sup>13</sup> and they are given responsibility in three different places. They are working together with the [KNU] administration group and they report what they need to the district office and brigade office.

## **The military and the BGF**

The movement of government soldiers [from the Tatmadaw] in Kyonedoe Township is decreasing. BGF Battalion #1012 set up their base camp in Noh Lone village and they also built a small camp in Htee Hu Than village. There are 20 government soldiers [the Tatmadaw] who always stay with the BGF soldiers in the Noh Lone camp. People do not see them doing anything to benefit civilians. Mostly they run gambling games during *Ar Wer* days<sup>14</sup> and collect money from that.

## **DKBA**

The DKBA is traveling and operating in this area. We do not see them doing anything to benefit civilians. They are collecting tax from saw mills, cars [which pass checkpoints], 50,000 kyat (US \$51.33) for one phone, 100,000 kyat (US \$102.67) [to be allowed to own] one elephant [for one year], 100,000 kyat for one wild yam stove, rubber plantations, and they collect money from [travellers at] check points.

## **KPF**

The KPF are not very active and they do not do anything that benefits civilians. They set up checkpoints and collect tax [from travellers who pass the checkpoints].

## **KPC**

There is no KPC battalion [based in this area]. There are [individual] members of the KPC [who live in the area] and they are doing nothing that benefits civilians. They are just like the superior soldiers of the KPF and the DKBA, and have relationships with rich people and sell land.

## **Conclusion**

---

<sup>13</sup> The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

<sup>14</sup> '*Ar Wer*' is a term used to describe special days, hence the expression '*Ar Wer* day.' *Ar Wer* day events typically involve celebrations to mark a special occasion such as the building of a new pagoda. Sometimes, people also engage in illicit activities such as gambling and drug use on *Ar Wer* days.

Social problems, land problems, judicial [problems], and killing cases are occurring in the Kyonedoe Township [KNU organizing committee] area as there are many armed actors. Therefore, the rule of law and security for the civilians is weak. The problems that are happening now are very difficult for the responsible people to solve.

Further background reading on the situation in Dooplaya District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, January to June 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Dooplaya Incident Report: Villagers subjected to forced labour and degrading treatment by the Karen National Defence Organisation, March 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik, Kyonedoe and Kyainseikgyi townships, March to May 2014,” (August 2014)
- “Dooplaya Interview: A---, September 2013,” (July 2014)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yaw Township, November to December 2013,” (July 2014)

### Dooplaya District



### Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)