



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

September 26, 2014 / KHRG #14-16-S1

Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, November 2013 to February 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District during the period between November 15th 2013 and February 15th 2014, including violent abuse and tax demands by Second Lieutenant Hpah Tha Beh, also known as Saw Tha Beh, of Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014.

- *On December 30th 2013, soldiers from BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014 who were under the influence of drugs threatened a villager by pointing guns at him.*
 - *On January 13th 2014, Second Lieutenant Hpah Tha Beh violently abused a villager after accusing him of failing to pay taxes demanded by the BGF, breaking the villager's arm and demanding 300,000 kyat from him.*
 - *During the reporting period, the Tatmadaw supplied and repaired army camps.*
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Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (November 2013 to February 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in March 2014. It was written by a community member in Hpapun 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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including 25 photographs.²

Introduction

In Bu Tho Township, some human rights abuses happened during the three-month period from November 15th 2013 to February 15th 2014. The abuses happened in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract and Meh Pree village tract and the perpetrator was the BGF [Border Guard Force].³

¹ 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.

² 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 additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

³ 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 or light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially](#)

Armed groups

In Bu Tho Township, there are three different armed groups: the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], Tatmadaw and BGF. These three armed groups are active in Bu Tho Township. BGF soldiers are only active in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Meh Pree village tract and Kyaw Pah village tract. After the ceasefire talks in 2012, the Tatmadaw's activities have changed a little, they [are less active in the area], but have begun to use the BGF more [instead].

There are two BGF battalions operating in Bu Tho Township; they are BGF #1013 and BGF #1014. BGF #1013 is led by Commander Hla Kyaing and Battalion #1014 is led by Commander Maung Chit.⁴ The two battalions' operational areas cover Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract and Meh Pree village tract. They have two camps which are Meh Seik army camp and Meh Pree army camp. But they don't have permanent camp commanders, so we are not sure who the camp commanders are. On December 30th 2013, BGF #1013 soldiers and BGF #1014 soldiers used drugs while conducting an operation in Meh Pree village tract. While they were [conducting the] operation, they threatened and pointed guns at a villager in Meh Pree [village tract], Saw D---, who is 16 years old and lives in L--- [village]. Because of that D--- is afraid to go far from his village.

On January 13th 2014, a BGF #1014 soldier, [2nd Lieutenant] Hpah Tha Beh [also known as Saw Tha Beh],⁵ who is company commander of Company #3, which is operating in Htoh Hta, T'La Aw Hkoh and T'Khay Hkoh [villages], violently abused a villager from S--- village. One of his arm bones was broken and he [Hpah Tha Beh] also demanded 300,000 kyat (US\$ 309.91)⁶ from him. He also said that Saw P--- [the villager who was abused] had been doing logging and had not paid [the necessary] tax. Hpah Tha Beh's commander didn't punish him despite what he had done. After Saw P--- was abused, he dared not go back to his home, so he just stays with the KNLA and [now he] relies on them.

During the three months, the Tatmadaw sent rations and repaired their battalion's army camps.

As for the KNLA situation, they operate in Bu Tho Township and operate according to orders from the mother organization, the KNU. They are an armed group that doesn't get any salary, so they work together with the villagers and rely on them [for food]. If they [act] against [the will of the villagers] or abuse any of the villagers, they would go to that villager and solve the problems. Whatever punishment their leaders give them, they will try to fulfill it and they don't blame anyone [engage in reprisals against villagers for reporting them].

Villagers' situation

In Bu Tho Township, starting from November 2013 [and continuing] until February 15th 2014, even though the villagers didn't have complete freedom of movement, the situation got a little better following the ceasefire talks. They were able to go [move] around and work on their livelihoods a little better compared to the past. The situation is getting a little better. There was no abuse that made them want to flee to other villages during the three month period.

[becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009.

⁴ Commander Maung Chit, also referred to as Maw Hsee, is the commander of Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District. Maung Chit is not to be confused with Maung Chit Thu (typically referred to as Chit Thu), who is a senior level BGF commander overseeing battalions #1017, #1018, #1019 and #1020 in Ko Ko, Hpa-an District.

⁵ See for example: "Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township," KHRG, January 2014. <http://www.khrg.org/2014/08/14-56-i7/hpapun-incident-report-forced-labour-and-violent-abuse-bu-tho-township-january-2014>

⁶ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the September 9th 2014 official market rate of 968 kyat to the US \$1.

Demands and Taxation

In Bu Tho Township, taxation is still happening. On January 13th 2014, BGF battalion #1014's Company #3 commander demanded 300,000 kyat from S---villager Saw P--- and they said that Maw Kyaw Hla was a logger, and that he hadn't paid the [necessary] tax to them.

Conclusion

The information in this Situation Update was collected during a three month period. I [the community member who wrote this report] haven't started to be active [document incidents] yet, and so I got some of this information from the KNLA and some from the villagers.⁷

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

- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, February to July 2014," (September 2014)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, October 2013," (September 2014)
- "Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 - January 2014," (September 2014)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013," (August 2014)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014," (August 2014)

⁷ The community member who wrote this report also followed up with local villagers in the area to independently verify information regarding the incidents described, and did not simply rely on information provided by the KNLA.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)