



Situation Update

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Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District during the period between November 2013 and January 2014, including military activities, villagers' livelihoods, education, obstacles to free religious practice, healthcare and freedom of movement.

- *The preliminary ceasefire agreement signed in January 2012 has had a positive impact, leading to a reduction in attacks by the Tatmadaw, but military activity such as the manning of checkpoints during the transportation of rations and troops along roads used by villagers is still on-going in some areas. On January 20th 2014, a Tatmadaw soldier pointed a gun at a group of villagers as they travelled home from a shopping trip to Kyaukkyi town.*
 - *Villagers have reported fewer restrictions placed on their freedom of movement since the ceasefire. However, the Karen National Union placed travel restrictions on local villagers, insisting that they were not allowed to travel freely without permission letters. The Tatmadaw questioned villagers as they travelled past Tatmadaw checkpoints and army camps, with villagers from Hpapun District facing more questioning than villagers from other districts.*
 - *Villagers report feeling freer to carry out agricultural livelihood activities due to a reduction in military activity, but some villagers faced food shortages after their paddy fields were damaged by excessive rain.*
 - *Displaced people built a primary school, which they also use as a place of worship, as their original church was burned down by the Tatmadaw in the past.*
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Situation Update | Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District (November 2013 to January 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in March 2014. It was written by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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.¹ This report was received along with 40 photos.

Nyaunglebin District, Moo [Mone] Township situation update

The information in this report was collected between November 19th 2013 and January 23rd 2014. It is about the farmers' situation after the ceasefire² in Nyaunglebin District, Moo [Mone]

¹ 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.

² On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma government in Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State. The exact terms for a long-term peace plan are still under negotiation. For

Township, Saw Hka Der village tract. The issues that I mention in this report are military activity, farmers' livelihoods, educational problems, religious problems, the farmers' views on the current situation, health problems and travelling [freedom of movement].

Military activity

There has been no activity such as attacks or ambushes by the Burma government's army since the ceasefire. They [the Tatmadaw] usually stay in their camp and question [people travelling on the road to Kyaukkyi town]. Anyone who goes down to Ler Doh town has to pass through an army camp called Hsaw Mee Luh camp. On December 2nd 2013, the government's Tatmadaw [soldiers] from Toungoo [District] transported rations to Tha Boh [army] camp [in Mone Township]; they transported four trucks of rations and two trucks of soldiers. There were six trucks altogether; they covered the trucks' roofs with waterproof canvas and we are not exactly sure if they transported only rations or other things too. They did this in order to transport them [the rations and soldiers] to Htaw Moh Pleh Meh [army] camp [In Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District] and [this will enable them to] be active in the upper part of Lu Thaw Township, Mutraw [Hpapun] District. On January 20th 2014, villagers from A--- went to Ler Doh [Kyaukkyi] and [then returned home with the] things [that they had bought]. When they were coming back, they encountered Burma government Tatmadaw [soldiers] that were waiting at Koh P'la Lay Hkoh, and one of the soldiers pointed a gun at one of the villagers from A--- village. [Another] villager who [was travelling in this group, witnessed the incident and] reported it [to KHRG], but did not want to mention their name or village name [or the name of the villager who the soldier had pointed his gun at]. On the same day, January 20th 2014, Burma government Tatmadaw [soldiers] were transporting their rations to Paw Khay Hkoh, [close to] Htaw Moh Pleh Meh with 20 trucks. At that time, the Burma government's Tatmadaw [soldiers] were waiting [for security] every day on some parts of the road. The only thing missing in this report is the battalion name and the commander's name, as the villager who reported this information to me did not know it. I wanted to record his voice [interview] and take a photo of him, but he did not allow it. The only thing that he told me was that, this is the truth and I could note down the information.

Livelihoods

In the year 2013 and this year, in Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township, Nyaunglebin District, the villagers have been able to do hill farming and cultivation more freely for their livelihoods because there has been less military activity and it [the situation] is not the same as before. Some villagers who live in Saw Hka Der village tract moved to A--- [village or village tract], so they were able to work on some of their work places [fields or plantations]. However, some villagers are still afraid and they have not returned to work on their places yet. In 2013, because of unusual weather [heavy rain], the paddy was damaged and some paddy rotted and was no longer useful. Some villagers could not harvest enough rice for the year because the rain destroyed the paddy. They will have to buy rice for consumption in 2014 as they now face a rice shortage and the rice husk price that they have to pay is 5,000 kyat (\$5.13)³ for one basket⁴ [of rice husks].

The villagers in B--- village, Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township, Nyaunglebin District, do not trade. They only have small [plantations of] betel nut, dog fruit and cardamom in the village

updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website](#). For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

³ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the 11 July 2014 official market rate of 974 kyat to the US \$1.

⁴ A basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg. or 46.08 lb. of paddy, and 32 kg. or 70.4 lb. of milled rice. A basket is twice the volume of a big tin.

and do farming and hill farming. There is no way to make a lot of money. They are alive [living in the village] and they work like [their Karen] ancestors in ancient times, and live peacefully and quietly.

Education

Education in all of Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township, Nyaunglebin District is not good enough because the Burma government [Tatmadaw] was active many years ago [engaged in armed attacks] and villagers were displaced.⁵ As a result, there was no stable place to set up a school and the children who should have been studying were not able to study. But, in 2013, a primary school was built in B--- village. It has four standards [grades] and there are 25 students and two female teachers. B--- School was established by B--- Church members and the students' parents. The students' parents provide the school expenses. There is no other kind of support. There is only some KED [Karen Education Department]⁶ support, but it is not enough and it is just a little helpful. A school teacher's yearly salary is 250,000 kyat (\$256.67) and ten big tins⁷ of rice. The students have to buy the books themselves and some books are supported [paid for] by the KED. Some students complete fourth standard. To continue their education they have to go to other places and some people go to the [refugee] camps [in Thailand for further education]. Some students have to quit school and help their parents because their parents cannot afford to send them to school. Some parents can afford to send them [their children] to school but they have to be away from their parents [because the higher education schools are away from their homes]. They do not have people to take care of them closely and they do not have an aunty or uncle [in the place they are supposed to study] to depend on. Now, the situation is not the same as before. Now, things are changing and bad things [social problems] are increasing. Parents are worried for their children who are studying away [from home] and [possibly] engaging in bad habits. [Their parents worry that] their [children's] lives will be a failure. Because of things like this, there are children who have to quit school.

Religion problems

There are problems with religion because the farmers in in Nyaunglebin District, Moo Township, Saw Hka Der village tract region were displaced in the past. Since then, they still dare not go back and they are still not able to rebuild their church. Now, the church members are not able to rebuild their church because the Burma government's Tatmadaw soldiers burned down their church and school. Now, there are no [opportunities] to gather together and say prayers together. Now, they [displaced villagers] have built a primary school and they gather in the primary school to worship every Sunday. The school was built with pieces of bamboo and the church [they used to have before they were displaced] was not a hut [like the school building]. There are only a few church members. Some [displaced villagers] live at the sources of rivers and some villagers live in the valleys. The village also is not the same as in ancient times, and [now] there are only one or two houses in a village. Some people go and live in their huts in their betel nut plantations. Burma government soldiers did this [caused disruption in the villagers' lives]; it caused the problem and violated the farmers' right to [freedom of] religion. They [the

⁵ The researcher is explaining that, due to armed conflict, villagers were displaced to many different areas and therefore were unable to develop their school system.

⁶ The Karen National Union's Education Department. The main goals of the KED are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture. During the civil war in Burma the KED became the main organisation providing educational services in the KNU controlled areas in Southeast Burma. The KED also previously oversaw the educational system in the seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, however in 2009 these activities were restructured under the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE). See "[Conflict Erupts over Govt teachers deployed to KNU areas](#)," Karen News, August 20th 2013 and the KRCEE website: "[Who Are We](#)," accessed February 6th 2014.

⁷ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb. of paddy, and 16 kg. or 35.2 lb. of milled rice.

villagers] still have to be afraid and worry as the Burma government's Tatmadaw [soldiers] are still active. In the coming year, they [villagers] intend to rebuild their church beautifully with timber, but they need support for building the church.

Indigenous people and villagers' perspective on the current situation

Indigenous people are not satisfied with the current ceasefire, as they are worried that in the future the rights violations will be worse. The farmers in Moo Township, Saw Hka Der village tract said that the ceasefire has been established, but the Burma government's Tatmadaw have not withdrawn their soldiers. Moreover, they have sent more soldiers, military materials [ammunition] and strengthened their bases so that they [indigenous people] have concerns about it. They will be the first to face problems and will be the worst [affected] if something [conflict] happens. They said they are simple people and they always have to worry. The biggest concern of the indigenous people in Saw Hka Der village tract has been mentioned above. They hope that all the problems will be dealt with systematically, and they will be helped with the problems that they face. And their concern is that if they go down to Ler Doh town [they will face problems], [because] they heard the Burma government's Tatmadaw say that they have serious hatred for [KNLA's] 5th Brigade.⁸ This is because, after the preliminary ceasefire was signed, other [KNU] districts established liaison offices [to communicate with the Burma government], but 5th Brigade did not establish an office. When one villager traveled to Ler Doh town, Tatmadaw soldiers said to the villager that, "they [KNLA 5th Brigade] remain resistant because of their location nestled between the other districts [in a hard to reach area]." So, [the Tatmadaw] is not satisfied with [5th Brigade] because there is no cooperation between the two armed actors. The indigenous people have concerns that [the ceasefire will break down and] fighting will happen again.

Healthcare

There are no clinics for healthcare in Nyaunglebin District, Moo Township, Saw Hka Der village tract and it [medical treatment] is difficult to find. The villagers have to go and buy medicine in Ler Doh town. Sometimes they have to go and buy it in Meh Nuh Hta [village] and sometimes if there are people who bring medicine for sale, and we [villagers] buy it from them if we [villagers] need medicine.

There is only one hospital in Ta Keh Poo and there is no other hospital in the mountainous areas of Nyaunglebin District. I witnessed illnesses, such as running noses [common cold], feeling sick and diarrhea during the period between November 21st and 1st January 2014 in B---village, Saw Hka Der village tract, Moo Township, Nyaunglebin District. These things usually happen to the children and the parents typically feed [give] medicine to the children, but they do not recover quickly. I could say that every child in that area has to deal with these illnesses. Some children have to be given medicine through a drip [for energy] and one [bag of medicine delivered by an intravenous] drip costs 4,500 kyat (\$4.62). It costs 350 kyat (\$0.36) for little [minor] medicine like [an injection of vitamin] B1 or B6. It is difficult if we [villagers] need these medicines because there are no people who bring the medicine [for sale]. The medicine that comes from Burma is not as strong as the medicine from Thailand, so [people] do not usually buy [medicine] from Burma, and prefer to buy medicine from Thailand. [Villagers] use more medicine from Thailand than medicine from Burma. [Villagers] have to go either to Ler Doh Hospital or Ta Keh Poo Hospital in Nyaunglebin District for serious diseases. It is a long distance to the hospital, and [the villagers] also have to spend money [for the trip] but the villagers in Saw Hka Der village are united and help each other as much as they can whenever they [someone is] having a difficult time.

⁸ The community member is referring to the Karen National Liberation Army's 5th Brigade area, which comprises the same geographic area as Hpapun District.

Travelling

Since the ceasefire, travelling has become a little easier in Nyaunglebin District, Moo Township, Saw Hka Der village tract because the [Burma] government's Tatmadaw [soldiers'] activities in the area have decreased. Our Karen leaders did not want people [villagers] to travel freely and they [Karen leaders] said, "*Anyone who goes down to Ler Doh Town for any reason, such as to buy things [from the town] or visit their relatives, has to get a permission letter [from the KNU]. If they do not get a permission letter they cannot go to the town.*" [The villagers] have to go and apply for the permission letter in Moo Township. The [villagers] have to travel for one day. Some villagers were able to go to Ler Doh town even though they did not have a permission letter. Some people want to go [to Ler Doh town] but they dare not go. To [go to Ler Doh town] to buy food for themselves, they have to go and get a permission letter. Consequently, it is difficult for them and they just buy things [food] in that place [in their village]. Many people [villagers] go down to Ler Doh town, but Burma government [soldiers] do not question them. Sometimes, if they see one or two people [villagers] they question them a lot and check their identification card and permission letter. Moreover, they check their bags as well.

If the people who live in Saw Hka Der village tract go down to Ler Doh town, they have to go through Hsaw Mee Loo [army] camp. When people travel down to Ler Doh or Tow Aoo, if they pass through Hsaw Mee Loo camp, they [Tatmadaw] usually question everyone and ask which district they are from. [They ask] which village the [travelers] live in and the district in which the village is located. If they [Tatmadaw] question them and they find that they are from 5th Brigade, they question them a lot. If they are from 3rd Brigade, they question them less [than travellers from 5th Brigade]. If they [Tatmadaw] question [the travelers] and find out that they are from 5th brigade, they question them a lot [more than other travelers], as the 5th Brigade leaders' situation and [the brigade] location are different from other districts.⁹

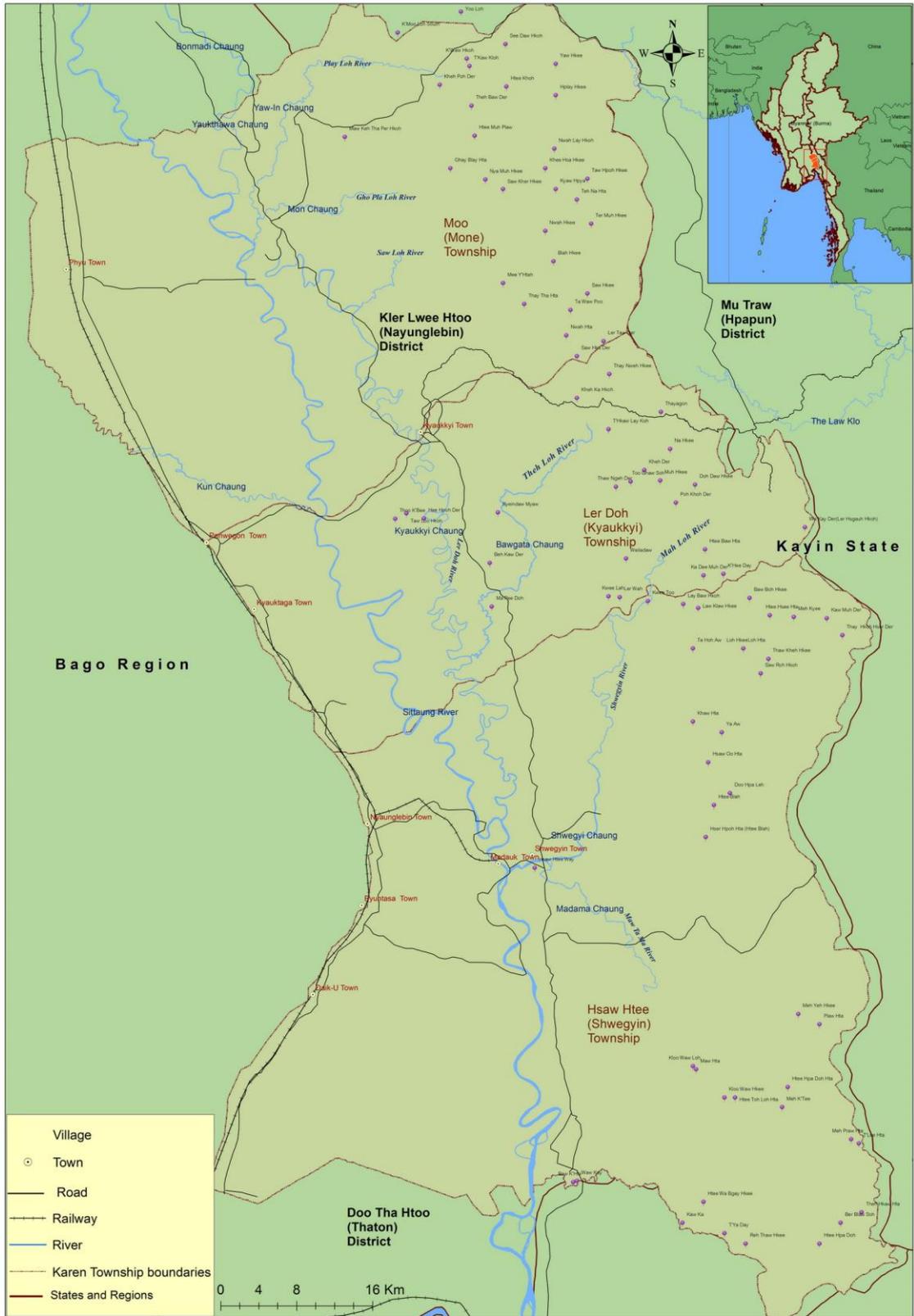
In this situation report, I reported the information mentioned above and I cannot say what problems will happen in the future. We cannot say exactly if the situation will get better or worse in the future. I mentioned what I saw happening and what I understood during a three-month period of time and the problems that the villagers had to face. The information that I have mentioned was [written] when I visited my mom; the situation that I saw and some villagers reported to me I wrote up as a situation update. It is not the special information that I [usually] collect [it was information gathered opportunistically during a visit to my mom].

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

- "Nyaunglebin Interview: A---, December 2012," (July 2014)
- "Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire," (July 2014)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi Township, January to June 2012," (June 2014)
- "Chapter: Drug production, use and the social impacts in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire," (June 2014)
- *Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire*, (May 2014)

⁹ As explained above by the community member, this is because there is no liaison office in Hpapun District and the mountainous environment of the location provides a natural defence against attack.

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)