



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Villagers report negative impacts of stone mining on their livelihoods in Kyaik Ma Yaw Township, 2011 to 2014

This News Bulletin describes the negative impacts of a stone mining project, undertaken by Tatmadaw-Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1021-affiliated U Thu Taw, in Ma Yan Kone village, Kyaik Ma Yaw Township, Dooplaya District. The project began in 2011 and was ongoing as of June 2014. According to the KHRG community member who spoke to the affected community, stray pieces of stone from mining have landed in villagers' adjacent agricultural fields, resulting in injuries to cows used to plough the fields. Villagers responded by renting cows from other villagers; however, after those cows and some villagers were injured from the stray stones as well, the community determined it was no longer possible to tend to those fields and did not plant paddy in either the 2013 or 2014 planting seasons. Ma Yan Kone residents have also submitted complaint letters to the local BGF, Burma government Kyaik Ma Yaw Township leaders, a village head and KHRG to request the termination of the mining project due to its deleterious impacts.¹

KHRG received five complaint letters from the resident villagers in Ma Yan Kone village, Kyaung Na Kwa village tract, Kyaik Ma Yaw Township in Dooplaya District regarding stone mining activities. The complaint letters are addressed directly to the Border Guard Force (BGF),² Burma government Kyaik Ma Yaw Township leaders and to KHRG.

The stone mining project is being undertaken in the At Ta Yan Mountain, led by contractor U Thu Taw, who is also known as U Tin Moe Aung. He has been hired by BGF Battalion #1021, which is based in Ma Yan Kone village. The stone mining project began in 2011 and was ongoing as of June 2014. Villagers are gravely concerned for their livelihoods because of the impact of stone mining. Resultant shards of stone have spread widely to other areas, including those within and close to villagers' agricultural land. The stones fall into the villagers' flat fields

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It summarises information from six complaint letters written in May 2013 and received by KHRG in February 2014 and a phone call with the KHRG community member in June 2014. 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. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

² 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 becomes Border Guard Force" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009.

and damage the plantations. The villagers' farming irrigation systems also became blocked when the stone miners laid cement over the road in order for trucks to transport the stone easily.³

Villagers in the area are very concerned about the stone mining, and have faced major obstacles in continuing their livelihood activities as a result. In particular, cows used for ploughing agricultural land were injured when they stepped on sharp shards of stone from the mining, and were no longer able to work. As a result, villagers have needed to incur additional costs by hiring other villagers' cows to continue ploughing. However, the rented cows' feet were wounded for the same reason, requiring the villagers to compensate the owners for those injuries, which has led to some arguments among members of the local community.

Furthermore, villagers themselves were also injured by the sharp shards of stone while ploughing their flat fields. By the middle of 2013, around ten acres of land had already become damaged in the areas close to the mining project. Some people left their land and stopped working altogether.⁴

As the challenges to farming had become insurmountable at the local level, the community wrote letters in May 2013 to the village head and the township leaders, requesting that they negotiate with the BGF Battalion #1021 soldiers on their behalf. The villagers main concern was that, if the stone mining continued, it would be impossible for them to plant paddy. Therefore, they requested that the leaders help them solve the problem and stop the stone mining project as quickly as possible.

According to an update on this situation received in June 2014, villagers in the area were unable to plant paddy in either the 2013 or 2014 planting seasons⁵ due to the negative impacts of the mining project as described above.⁶

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

- *Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire*, (May 2014)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, May to August 2013," (February 2014)
- "Tatmadaw soldiers pilfer villagers' livestock in Dooplaya District, May to August 2013," (November 2013)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyone Doh Township, July to November 2012," (June 2013)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kya In Seik Kyi Township, September 2012," (June 2013)

³ This information was included in a complaint letter received by KHRG in February 2014 from a KHRG community member from Dooplaya District.

⁴ This information was included in a complaint letter received by KHRG in February 2014 from a KHRG community member from Dooplaya District.

⁵ The planting season typically begins in May, June or July of each year, depending on the weather.

⁶ This information was provided to KHRG during a phone call with the community member on June 11th 2014.

