



Situation Update

September 11, 2014 / KHRG #14-36-S1

Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, January to June 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District between January and June 2014, including military activity, arbitrary taxation, education, NGO activity, healthcare and villagers' livelihoods.

- *Expanding rubber plantations are decreasing the amount of free forest areas for villagers and livestock to use. Villagers use these forested areas to obtain food, bamboo and firewood.*
 - *Many Burma/Myanmar government clinics in Kyonedoe Township do not have enough medicine and villagers with serious health issues must go to the nearest hospital where they have to pay higher fees for treatment, medicine and electricity and water usage. They must also bring their own bedding when receiving treatment at Burma/Myanmar government hospitals in Kyonedoe Township.*
 - *Villagers raised their concerns that officers in Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1021, situated in No Lon village, are involved in gambling and arbitrarily tax gambling business owners.*
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Situation Update | Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District (January to June 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Dooplaya District, including other five incident reports, 11 interviews and 38 photographs.²

Civilians' situation

The basic livelihoods for civilians are mostly farming and plantation [work]. There are hill farmers in the region, but because the [free] forest area is getting smaller, there are less hill farmers [than in the past]. The hill forest areas that villagers have usually cleared each year for [planting paddy] have now become new rubber [plantations instead]. This

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

is a problem for not only hill farmers [who can no longer rely on those forested lands] for [food], wood, bamboo, firewood and charcoal, but also for the wildlife and pets, as people [villagers] are expanding [their rubber plantations].

The forest provides us with wood and bamboo. It is not easy to freely cut bamboo for fencing and making bamboo trestles for [growing] gourd [anymore]. We have to pay 300 to 500 kyat (US \$0.31 to \$0.51)³ for an arm sized [piece of] bamboo that is longer than [your] finger tips to [your] elbow, ten times over.⁴ Some farmers do not have land to graze their cows or buffalos. If they [buffalo or cows] eat a rubber tree they have to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$5.13) [as compensation]. Only [buffalos or cows used for cultivation] remain; people use them for ploughing and have to sell their other [livestock, as they do not have land for grazing]. As the [global] climate changes, unusual weather and deforestation [have occurred]. Farms are producing less paddy⁵ and unworked [and unproductive] farm lands are increasing.

Civilians [who live] hand to mouth and civilians who have [not produced] enough rice [for the year] buy [rice] close to the [Kyonedoe] town and the youth go to neighbouring countries, like Thailand, for work and send money back to their families. They [families] use it for paying taxes, giving donations, for social occasions of joy or grief, for healthcare and for other general expenses. During the preliminary ceasefire,⁶ it has been easier to travel, but there are many taxation checkpoints. It is annoying when travelling and burdensome [for the travellers].

Healthcare

There are some medics [sent] by the [Burma/Myanmar] government that come to villages [in Kyonedoe Township], and there are clinics in some villages that civilians from other nearby villages [go to for medical treatment]. But there is not enough medicine and if the disease is strong they have to send [the patient] to the closest hospital. When a [patient] goes to the hospital it is not free. They have to bring their mat and pillow, and they have to buy rice and a variety of other goods for their own use. They have to pay fees for electricity, medicine and water usage. For their [daily] food, they [villagers] have to pay for it by themselves. The poor cannot afford to go to the hospital, instead they heal themselves using traditional ways. There are some villages that appoint a local mid-wife [nurse] who gives out anti-malaria vaccine medication. There is also the group FBR [Free Burma Rangers] from the KNU [Karen National Union] side⁷ who travel around from region to region twice a year and provide support, medical treatment and help [villagers] with medication. The most prevalent diseases are malaria, distended stomach and upset bowels. [Villagers] suffer from hypertension, cough and runny nose, backaches, back pain, scabies and skin diseases. There is also malnutrition which affects children.

³ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the September 2, 2014 official market rate of 974 kyat to the US \$1.

⁴ The researcher is referring to a cubit, which is a standard unit of measurement for the length of bamboo poles. A cubit, commonly referred to in Karen as the length from one's fingertips to one's elbow, is about 45.7 cm. or 18 in. In this case, the researcher refers to bamboo poles which are longer than one cubit, ten times over, which would be over 457 cm. or 180 in. in length.

⁵ Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.

⁶ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For 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.

⁷ FBR operates independently of the KNU, however, as they are comprised of Karen aid workers they are often mistakenly referred to as a KNU organization.

Education

Mostly, civilians want their children to have an education, be able to write and read, as well as to be good at math. But some children are not able to go to school because they have to help their parents at work, as their livelihoods are inadequate. There are also some [children that have] completed primary school and their [parents] cannot afford to send them to school. Those who [prefer not to work with their parents] go to Thailand for work. In some villages, the [Burma/Myanmar] Government has appointed male teachers. In some schools, they distribute notebooks freely, but they [children] have to pay for some of the textbooks. There are also times when [villagers] have to pay for meal expenses [for teachers, when they go] back and forth [from their home villages] and sometimes if they are sick.

For self-reliance [independent] schools, the KED [Karen Education Department] from the KNU supports the male and female teachers with pocket money for stationary, sport materials and books for the students. For the students whose [parents] cannot afford to send them to school in town, they [parents] send them to refugee camps [in order to study]. It costs less, even though after they complete the tenth standard, it is difficult for those students to work in their village because the [Burma/Myanmar] government does not recognize the education quality [from the refugee camps]. In some [Burma/Myanmar] government schools they [students educated in Thailand] also face such problems.

Burma government and Border Guard Forces (BGF)⁸

In Kyonedoe Township, [I] can say that there was no Burma government [Tatmadaw] military activity. The Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1021 Commander is Saw Pa Lu, and their headquarters is situated in No Lon [village]. There are some BGF groups moving around. That BGF battalion [#1021] has not done anything beneficial for the civilians yet and some subordinate officers gamble and [arbitrarily] tax [gambling] businesses. There was no [Tatmadaw, BGF or KNU] military activity [in Kyonedoe Township]. NGOs arrived in some villages and provided child [healthcare and education], anti-malaria medicine, as well as [implemented] granary and pig husbandry projects. Based on the number of households in some villages, they [the village leaders] collected 200 baskets (4,180 kg. or 9,216 lb.)⁹ of rice and said that they would lend to it to villagers who do not have enough rice. [In the following year] they [those who took rice] would have to give back a little more than the amount [of rice] that they borrowed.

Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)¹⁰

⁸ 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.

⁹ A basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg. or 46.08 lb. of paddy.

¹⁰ 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/Myanmar 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/Myanmar 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.

In Kyonedoe Township, DKBA Officer Aung Yin's Company¹¹ is active. I can say that that they contribute nothing to the good of civilians. We also know that they collect tax from lumber saw owners, village telephone providers and rubber plantation owners, as well as collect money [from villagers] at their [DKBA] checkpoint.

Karen Peace Force (KPF)¹²

There was no KPF activity. [I] have not seen that they contributed to the good of the civilians. [I] also know that they opened checkpoints and collect tax [from travellers].

Karen Peace Council (KPC)¹³

There is no KPC military camp in Kyonedoe Township, but there members, such as company commanders, battalion commanders [who live in the area]. [I] can say that there is nothing that [KPC] contributes to the good of civilians.

Conclusion

Currently in Kyonedoe Township, there are no direct human rights violations against civilians, but civilians have had to suffer indirectly. Organisations [armed actors] have sold village forest areas [to businessmen] that the villagers have forbid [logging in]. They [businessmen] open gambling dens and there are more youths that use drugs. There are many armed groups and it is difficult to decide which armed group to rely on [for justice]. The rule of law in the area [is not strong], there are less [information and media] campaigns [about Burmese issues], and the voice of civilians is weak. According to the [Karen] people's will, there must only be Karen armed groups [for Karen people]. Having many [Karen] armed groups is just like [having] a rabbit per bush.¹⁴

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

- "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 Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Kyonedoe township, October 2013 to January 2014," (July 2014)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, January to August 2013," (July 2014)

¹¹ This report received by KHRG did not provide Officer Aung Yin's Battalion number. At the date of this report's publication, KHRG was unable to determine this information.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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 30th 2010.

¹⁴ A rabbit per bush is a Karen figure of speech that, in this context, refers to the fracture of Kayin State by different Karen armed groups. Rather than being a united Kayin state (bush) with many different rabbits inside helping each other, there are many rabbits (Karen armed groups) each with their own bush.

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)