



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

November 28, 2014 / KHRG #14-38-S1

Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, March to May 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, during the period between March and May 2014, including Tatmadaw activities, landmines, and the situation regarding civilian livelihoods, health care and education.

- *Local Tatmadaw units supplied and strengthened military camps and conducted a mapping exercise. They also attempted to engage with local communities by communicating with them via radio and providing food and medical supplies; local villagers did not avail themselves of these supplies.*
 - *Villagers reported that the Tatmadaw was still implementing a shoot on sight policy, and that when travelling they did so in the company of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers or home guards as a protective measure.*
 - *Villagers reported that the presence of Tatmadaw military camps close to their plantations and farms, and landmines laid by the Tatmadaw meant that they could not cultivate their land, and were experiencing food shortages as a result.*
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Situation Update | Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District (March to May 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 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 nine incident reports and 120 photographs.²

1. Introduction

There are 12 village tracts in Lu Thaw Township and two government military roads. There are five village tracts in northern Lu Thaw Township. One road is from Ler Doh to Saw Hta and the other road splits at Der Kyoo and [the different branches lead to] Saw Muh P'law, Ler Muh

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.

P'Law and Hsoo Hkay Poo village tracts, and [the main part of the road] leads to brigade two [Toungoo District].

1. (A) Government military bases

The government military bases are [located in] (1) Paw Khay Hkoh (2) Maw Law Too (3) Der Kyoo (4) Maw Kyaw Hkoh (5) Hter Ner Kyoh (6) Kya Ghaw Loo (7) Hpgha Ghaw (8) Ler Muh P'Law (9) Saw Muh P'Law (10) Hpah Ghaw Loh (11) A--- (12) B--- (13) Maw Hpoo (14) Der Kyoo (15) Ler Kyay Kyoh (16) Kaw Way Kyoh (17) Paw Hee Kyoh (18) Hpla Hkoh (19) Kuh Hkwah Hkoh (20) Kaw Thway Kyoh (21) Saw Hta (22) Thee Huh Hta and (23) Ta Khaw Hta.

1. (B) Government military activities

From March [2014] to May [2014], the government military [Tatmadaw units] that are based in A--- and B--- [villages] sent rations with trucks and horses [to other camps in the area], strengthened their camps, conducted a [mapping] survey of the area and visited civilians. There was an incident [in the past] when [Tatmadaw soldiers] shot a civilian when [the civilian] was crossing the road [the villager may have been trying to avoid having a conversation with them]. They also [recently] left out food like sugar, milk, canned beef and medicines [for local villagers to take, in order to try and forge relations with them], but the civilians did not use any of those. They also tried to communicate with civilians, soldiers and home guards³ via walkie-talkie but they did not listen to them.

2. Civilian situation

2. (A) Livelihoods

All the civilians are farmers. There are no other special business [opportunities] like in other [areas]. The presence of the Burma government military in the area is a big problem for civilians [who are] travelling or working. Those [who are] travelling have to be guarded by soldiers [from the KNLA or home guards] and if the government military soldiers see you they still shoot you. As for work, the plantations are close to the government military [camps] and the villagers dare not work on their plantations and farms. You have to fear that they will shoot you and they have planted landmines [in the farms and plantations]. The reasons that there is not enough rice are that the civilians are [living] in [communities which have no permanent settlements and have to move from] place to place and there is [only a] small area of land to work on, and that white ants [termites] and [other] insects consume the paddy and the land is not productive. The civilians have to face [those difficulties] year on year and it causes the problem of insufficient food. On a day-to-day basis the civilians have to find a way to make an income. If the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council]⁴ was not present in the area and they were able to work on their farms and live in the area freely, there would be prosperity.

2. (B) Health Care

³ 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen State to address Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that *gher der* were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable. For more on the *gher der* see: "[Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#)," KHRG, August 2010.

⁴ In Karen, the Burmese phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) is commonly used to refer to the Burma/Myanmar government or to Burma/Myanmar's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) continue to use that phrase, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011; see: "[Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'](#)," *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011.

As for health care, there are five village tracts in Lu Thaw Township, but there are no clinics except in Ler Muh P'Law village tract and there are not enough medicines in the clinic. Sometimes, the patients have to buy medicine for their illnesses as directed by a doctor. Those who do not have the money have to borrow it and pay it back little by little. Some civilians use traditional medicine like their ancestors used before. The illnesses that occur the most in the area are fevers, hernias, coughs, chest infections, joint pain, eye pain, diarrhoea, itchy [skin conditions] and irregular menstruation.

2. (C) Education

As for the education of the children and youth, the schools were built by religious [associations] and the villagers' contributions [of labour or money], and some [schools] are supported by associations [NGOs]. The teachers that are supported by the associations receive [a salary of] 5,000 [Thai] baht (US \$153.28)⁵ for the whole year. The teachers have to teach and do farming as well. Schoolteachers [normally] cannot live in any kind of school. However, if a teacher is unmarried, it is a little more proper [for them] to stay in the school [because they do not need their own house as they do not have a family]. For those [teachers] who have family [are married] and children, it's more difficult [as they have families to support]. The students have to provide one big tin⁶ [rice] and 50 baht (US \$1.53) [as a contribution towards supporting the teachers]. It is the same amount for primary school and high school. There are also students whose parents cannot afford to send them to school because they have insufficient food and [it is difficult for] some widows [to send their children to school].

3. (D) Landmines

The villagers protect their work places so that the government military cannot destroy [them] and moreover they also try to protect themselves for their security. They use landmines as a strategy to protect [themselves] as there are not many [other] people who are managing security [on their behalf].

4. Radio

KHRG used to provide radios to civilians, and now again they mention that they want to listen to the radio. Because we [villagers] have to listen to other people's radios, [and can] only [receive the signal] from the Pweh Loh broadcast station every evening, we also want to listen to other national and international news as well.

5. Conclusion

This report from northern Lu Thaw Township is an update on the situation in the area over three months. The information is mentioned above. [I'm sure that] there will be many shortcomings with this report; I hope that the leaders [KHRG staff] will receive this information and advise me accordingly.

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

- "Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, November 2013," (October 2014)
- "Hpapun Interview: Ma A---, October 2013," (October 2014)
- "Hpapun Interview: U A---, January 2014," (October 2014)

⁵ All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the October 7th official market rate of 32.62 baht to the US \$1.

⁶ 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.

- “Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, October 2013,” (October 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014,” (September 2014)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)