



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Shwegyin Township, March to June 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District during the period between March and June 2014, including military activities, mining, education, healthcare, and restrictions on freedom of movement.

- *Since the ceasefire, there are still issues in Shwegyin Township area. Civilians are still worried about human rights violations however the ceasefire has allowed for greater freedom of movement. Mining has become an issue with the river being slowly destroyed and polluted.*
 - *The report shows that children are being hired by Kaw Ghay Htoo to construct a road regardless of their age which includes tasks unsuitable for children. The children, who were seen working on the construction of the road on March 9th 2014, were not informed that they were too young to be carrying out these kinds of jobs and are therefore being taken advantage of by their employers.*
 - *The increased presence of Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #440 and #350 and Infantry Battalion (IB) #30 in Shwegyin Township has caused villagers to become fearful of carrying out their daily activities, as well as restricting the amount of freedom they feel they have to move around the area.*
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Situation Update | Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District (March to June 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 2014. It was written by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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 Nyaunglebin District, including 86 photographs.²

Introduction

In Nyaunglebin District, Shwegyin Township area, since the ceasefire³ in 2012, we still see many problems. [When] we look back to some civilians' situation, they still cannot sleep [in their

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.

³ 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

huts on their farmland, which is usually far from their village] due to fear of soldiers [all armed groups]. Moreover, some civilians are still worrying that the situation will get worse. Likewise, if we look at the human rights violations, they are not investigated. There are still human rights violations. [Some of] the human rights violations are, for example, child right violations, a gold mining project which is ruining the river where the civilians get their water, and the activity of the Burmese government [Tatmadaw] soldiers. These issues cause worry for the civilians and the villagers, but when we look at the civilians' daily routine, they go about their business as fish follow water [as normal].

Civilians work in hilly and mountainous [remote] areas. In the mountainous area of Shwegyin [Township], the main work for the civilians is land farming and hill farming. Before the ceasefire, the civilians were displaced [due to many attacks]. They did not have enough food and were starving. Now, because of the ceasefire, their freedom of movement has become easier and they have more ways to earn their livelihoods. Some youth go into the nearest town for work; some work in the hill areas; some earn their money from driving motorbike taxis; others go to the [nearby] town and work in workshops which include factories, motorbike repair shops and other small business enterprises; some work with the gold miners; and some find ways to work in other countries.

Mining

The mining in the area causes problems, for example the river being polluted and destroyed. In Shwegyin area, there has been mining for two or three years already, but we know that most people in charge of the mining hold hands [cooperate] with the KNU [Karen National Union] and KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], so there is no big collective action by villagers to stop mining. We now know that the KNU and KNLA have plans to solve the problems and we have seen that mining machines have decreased, but the rivers and the streams are still being ruined.

Education

There are eight village tracts in Shwegyin Township that are situated in the hill area. They are Loh Hkee village tract, Ler Wah village tract, Saw Theh Hkee village tract, Htee Wa Byay village tract, Blaw Hkoh village tract, Meh Yeh Hkee village tract, Meh K'Tee village tract and Htee Bwah Loh village tract. There are 31 schools in these eight village tracts. There are two high schools, seven middle schools, one college school, 16 primary schools and five nursery schools. We do not know [exactly] how many students there are, but compared with [students' numbers] from the past it has decreased. The [number of] students is decreasing because they have gone to other [neighbouring] countries. Some left school and now work in labour, some students moved to the flat land areas for further study, whilst others went to the refugees camps [for study].

Healthcare

Regarding healthcare, in Shwegyin Township area there is no sickness that causes critical conditions. In Shwegyin area, there are four hospitals: District Hospital, Brigade Hospital, Shwegyin Township Hospital and [KNLA] Battalion #9 Hospital. The most frequent sickness that occurs is fever. There is no sickness that causes serious concerns for the civilians. However, there is one problem: [business] people coming into the area to do mining and destroying the river which causes problems [for local people] who use the water for their health and for their daily needs [washing].

Human right violations

On March 9th 2014, in Hkoh Hpeh village, Shwegyin Township, we [the researcher] saw that children, women and a few men were constructing a car road. Burma/Myanmar has signed that

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.

they will not violate children's rights,⁴ however on March 9th 2014, the road construction, led by [the construction foreman] Kaw Ghay Htoo consisted of children who should be studying. They are not old enough for this kind of hard work, for example carrying rocks [for covering the road] and digging the soil. They [the employers] do not explain to the children that they should not be doing this kind of job due to their age, [instead they] employ them anyway. This is a violation of children's rights, they should be receiving an education but we have seen that they are working instead. When the plans were made to start constructing the road, the KNU forbade them from constructing the road, but they did not stop [constructing the road] and people saw that Kaw Ghay Htoo's workers were still working on the construction. The KNU asked them to apply for permission for the construction along with the reason why they are doing the road construction. We know however that they did not go [to apply for permission] according to the process and continued to work. During March 2014, we knew that the KNU set up a peace committee who came [to the area] and collected information about the road process and took photos [of the road construction].

Activity of Burma/Myanmar soldiers

After the ceasefire, the military activity in Shwegyin Township between March 1st 2014 and June 20th 2014 has improved. However, when looking at government soldiers who still have activities such as military rotation, they still move around without informing the KNLA and also transport military tools into our area [Shwegyin Township]. The Tatmadaw and the KNLA have promises and agreements, but they do not always fulfil these promises and agreements. The [Tatmadaw] military [battalions] that are usually active and situated in our area are LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]⁵ #440, LIB #350 and IB [Infantry Battalion]⁶ #30.

The military activity [information] that we collected occurred on April 7th 2014. [Tatmadaw] LIB #440 placed one platoon⁷ of their soldiers secretly in Pa Le Lel Kyin and Kwin Thiat hill side by the road. For the soldiers that were secretly placed, we received the information that they would shoot at the KNLA if their soldiers came down [by the road]. On April 14th 2014, Tatmadaw LIB #440 arrived in Tha Baw Poo village with 15 soldiers and on April 15th 2014, they arrived in Aoo May Hkyaw (Khaw Htoo Kaw) and fired their guns five times; people did not know why. This is an example of a group of Burmese soldiers that move around and do not let the other battalions know.

On June 4th 2014, the Burma [Tatmadaw] soldiers from LIB #350 rotated with LIB #419, they took over [as security for] Kaw La She camp, Thay Say Meh Soh camp and Hkoh Hpeh camp. On June 11th 2014, two subordinates of LIB #440 and their deputy commander arrived to [meet with] a KNLA officer at [the base of] the [KNLA] Muh Ka Paw military company. They [Tatmadaw] carried guns [and did not inform the KNLA in advance]. On June 12th 2014, LIB #440 patrolled the area and they did not let the civilians or KNLA soldiers know. They came with 40 soldiers and their unknown battalion commander; they went to the area between Kwee Tha Raw and Paw Da Law [called] Ler Htaw Lay.

[In order to get] this information we cooperated with a soldier from the KNLA and some [information] was received from villagers. This is the Burma government soldiers' activity in our area.

Civilian situation under military activity

⁴ Burma/Myanmar is signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁵ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties

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⁷ A platoon is made up of three sections, 30+ men (one section or basic army unit consists of 10-11 men).

[When] we look back to some civilians they still have fear [of military activity] during the ceasefire period because they have seen military violence first hand. Some have heard the information on the radio and others have seen these [military] activities [with their own eyes] and they worry that the fighting will happen again. They believe that if the fighting happens again they will be in worse poverty than in the past. Villagers socialise with both groups [Tatmadaw and KNLA because they are in a mixed control area]. So, if it [fighting] happens again they will not be safe. In the past they usually faced [problems]. For example, if they [the Tatmadaw] could not arrest the individuals who were against [the military or the military rules] they would cause trouble for their relatives, friends and the person who would usually go out or eat [food] with him. For these reasons, the civilians are still afraid and it is a problem for them to talk and move freely.

Conclusion

The information mentioned above from the Shwegyin [Township] area, Nyaunglebin District, concerns the situation update of the Burma government's [Tatmadaw] soldiers activities, the civilians education situation, healthcare, their work and the human rights violations as I mentioned above from the period between March and July 2014. After analysing the information, if the situation stays like it is, it will be difficult for our civilians to get full rights. Likewise, as we are the news collectors [researchers], we felt that we have our own weakness and we wish that the leaders will lead us so that we can reach our goal: our people regaining their full rights.

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

- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi Township, July 2014," (October 2014)
- "Nyaunglebin Field Report: Human rights conditions during the ceasefire, January to December 2013," (September 2014)
- "Nyaunglebin Interview: Daw U---, December 2012," (July 2014)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, November 2013 to January 2014," (July 2014)
- "Nyaunglebin Interview: A---, December 2012," (July 2014)

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)