



Situation Update

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Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, February to June 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District from February to June 2014, including land confiscation, extortion, violent abuse and updates on economic development projects and access to education.

- *Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #434 confiscated villagers' farm lands in Meh Ka Law village tract. General Engineering (GE) Platoon Officer U Htay Aung Kyaw gave permission to U D---, from a different village, to produce bricks on the confiscated land, provided he sold all bricks produced to him.*
- *Captain Khin Zaw Tun from Ammunition Platoon #642 repaired and extended the fence of his battalion, which included two acres of Saw A---'s field. Captain Khin Zaw Tun then leased back the land he confiscated to the villagers. However, most villagers were not able to afford the leasing fees.*
- *On May 5th 2014, two separate incidents were reported whereby villagers' cows were seized by Tatmadaw officers, who demanded 100,000 kyat (US \$100.70) for their return.*
- *On March 2nd 2014, Border Guard Force (BGF) Officer Tha Beh violently abused two village heads from E--- and F--- village, as well as a sentry from E--- village. The F--- village head was shot in the hand by Officer Tha Beh's subordinate officer, injuring Officer Tha Beh in the process. The villagers report that although they previously had to be afraid of Officer Tha Beh, they are no longer afraid as he was transferred to another district after the incident.*

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (February to June 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 one incident report, 13 interviews, 146 photographs.²

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

Tatmadaw Activities

The Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers have modified their battalions and built many buildings for the military in Meh Ka Law village tract, Bu Tho Township from February [2014] until June [2014]. [Tatmadaw] GE [General Engineering Platoon Officer] U Htay Aung Kyaw and LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]³ #434's Commander U Kyaw Min Bone [used soil and clay] from the farms that they confiscated from the villagers to make bricks. U D---, a villager from H---, went to the commander of LIB #434 and asked permission to make bricks [for commercial purposes on that land] and he has to pay [LIB #434] 400,000 kyat (US \$402.82)⁴ per summer. The commander of LIB #434 said [to the villagers] that he is making bricks in order to fund the battalion.



The above photos were taken by a KHRG researcher in Cc--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District on May 3rd 2014. These photos show bricks being made on villagers' land confiscated by the Tatmdaw. LIB #434's General Engineering Platoon Officer Htay Aung Kyaw gave permission to U D---, from H--- village, to produce bricks on the confiscated fields, on the condition that he sold all of the bricks to him, or lose his privilege if caught selling to anyone else. [Photos: KHRG]

Officer Khin Zaw Tun, the captain of the Burmese [Tatmadaw] Ammunition Platoon #642, repaired and extended the fence of his battalion camp and it included two acres of Saw A---'s field, from U--- village. They leased out the farms that they [confiscated back to the villagers], but did not build any buildings on it. Villagers must pay 100 baskets (2,090 kg. or 4,608 lb.)⁵ of paddy⁶ or 50 baskets (1,045 kg. or 1,843.20 lb.) of paddy, [per year, depending on the size of the farm]. The villagers did not work on it [the confiscated land], because they [Tatmadaw] leased it at very high leasing fees.

only to security considerations. For additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

³ 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.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the October 15th 2014 official market rate of 993 kyat to the US \$1.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.



The above photos were taken by a KHRG researcher in Bb--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District on April 19th 2014. These photos show the modification and extension of Ammunition Platoon #642's camp fence, which resulted in the confiscation of two acres of Saw A---'s farming field. [Photos: KHRG]

On May 5th 2014, LIB #431 seized a cow of U Q---, a villager from P--- village, and fined him 100,000 kyat (US \$100.70) saying that they would not allow him to take back the cow if he did not pay the fine. U Q--- had tied his cow at the farm in front of [the camp of] LIB #431. Another cow came and locked horns [fought] with his cow, but when the cows were released they went [over] to the herd of LIB #431 and were captured [by LIB #431]. [On the same day], a military policeman, a subordinate [officer] of the [Tatmadaw] strategic [operations] commander⁷ based in Hpapun Town captured a cow of U L---, a villager from P--- village and also fined him 100,000 kyat. People [LIB #431] will not return back the cow to him if he does not pay the fine. LIB #431 said that the cow had eaten the crops they had planted. [Furthermore, on an unknown date], Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers [from] LIB #434 came back from the Salween River to their [Da Kway Kyaw Nyah army] camp. In that evening, the cattle of Eb---villagers went and ate in the yard of LIB [#434] and three of them [cows] died. People called the vet and he examined them and said that it was poison. Later, two other cows were found dead at the place where the three cattle had died.

[In Bu Tho Township], the Burma military [Tatmadaw] built a new road when they transported their soldiers to the frontline. It damaged the farm drainage of villagers and destroyed the villagers' orange trees and lemon trees .

There are eight polling stations in Hpapun area for the 2015 [election]. The Burma military [Tatmadaw] took over eight polling stations.⁸ The soldiers, their wives and [eligible] children have to vote for the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party]⁹ according to the order [by the Tatmadaw].

They [Tatmadaw] will not return the land that they confiscated from the villagers [in November 2008]. They [Tatmadaw] asked the village head of R--- village to sign on behalf of [all of] the farm owners [stating] that they agreed [to give the land to the

⁷ The strategic operations commander heads the strategic operations command (SOC), usually comprised of three to four battalions and a headquarters for defensive operations.

⁸ The researcher did not specify what is meant by 'took over eight polling stations'. KHRG was unable to follow-up with the researcher before the publication of this report. However, KHRG will publish an update as soon as the information becomes available.

⁹ The Union Solidarity and Development Party (*Pyi Khaing Pyo* in Burmese, *Pa Ka Hpa* in Karen) is the successor of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It was officially registered as a political party on June 2nd 2010 and is headed by Burmese President Thein Sein.

Tatmadaw]. The commander of Ammunition Platoon #642, Commander Yaung Ni, wrote the subject in the consent note by himself on November 11th 2008.

Agreement signatory – November 11th 2008:

We agreed and signed in the following that the fields are confiscated by Ammunition Platoon #642 as Tatmadaw land.

Number-U Paing#/Name	Acres of confiscated
1. U Y---	4.00
2. U J---	4.00
3. U Z---	3.84
4. U X---	4.92
5. U N---	2.44
6. U K---	3.00
7. U T---	3.48
Total	25.68 acres

He [Commander Yaung Ni] wrote down the information step by step then asked U W---, the village head, to sign on behalf of the farm owners in the list and said that it is the agreement of the land owners. Actually, the farms owners did not know anything [about it]. U W--- told me about this information and showed me the document and I copied it down.

Violent abuse

On March 2nd 2014, [Officer Tha Beh¹⁰ from the] BGF [Border Guard Force]¹¹ punched Saw Aa---, the village head of E--- village, beat a sentry from E--- [village] and punched the village head of F--- [village].¹² The soldier [of Officer Tha Beh who was standing] behind him shot the village head [from F---] because that village head was going cut him with a knife and the village head's hand was broken [from the gunfire]. That soldier also [accidentally] shot the leg of his commander [Officer Tha Beh]. The villagers had to be afraid of Officer Tha Beh before his leg had been hurt. The fear of the villagers has been reduced after he received this injury, [as he has been transferred to another district].

The situation of the Burma government

There are many development [initiatives] that the Burma government has done for the villagers in Bu Tho Township. There is hydropower, road construction and wells have been dug. Some of this development activity has benefited the villagers, some of these

¹⁰ KHRG has received numerous reports involving human rights abuses involving BGF Officer Tha Beh, including violent abuse, forced labour, explicit threats and arbitrary arrest and detention. See "[Hpapun Interview: U A---, January 2014](#)," KHRG, October 2014; "," KHRG, September 2014; "[Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014; "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014; and "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to November 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2013.

¹¹ 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.

¹² For more on this incident see "[Hpapun Interview: U A---, January 2014](#)," KHRG, October 2014 and "[Hpapun Incident Report: Violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, April 2014](#)," KHRG, November 20, 2014.

are done to make face [obtain favour from the villagers] and some of these are for making money.

The Burma government installed water pipes in V--- village because the village faced water shortages. [However], they laid the pipe down in the farm of the villagers. The villagers took it [the pipe] out while they were working on their farms because the water cannot flow [drain] easily. Actually U Poe Kyah, from Daw Na Nyaing Chan Yay company, could lay down the pipe outside of the farms. It will cost more if he did it and he will not make any profit, but he just finished the job to get money.

The [Burma/Myanmar] government built an [electric] machine well for O--- village because the village also faced water shortages. They [Burma/Myanmar government] already dug the well, but they have not bought the machine for pumping out the water yet. [So], the villagers do not use it. The leader of Daw Na Nyaing Company said that he could only do it [dig the well without buying the pump] because the [Burma/Myanmar] government only provided [a] very small [amount of] money [for this well]. The [Burma/Myanmar] government provided 400,000 kyat (US \$402.82) to Saw Hpah Lo, a villager from Klaw Day, which is near H--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, to build a drainage [pond]. The [Burma/Myanmar] government gave it to U S---, the [village] administrator, and he only gave 150,000 [kyat] (US \$151.06) to Saw C---. The villagers did not ask for this money [to build a well]. The government gave it [unasked, for only] to make face [obtain favour from villagers].

The Burma government created *Mya Thein Yaung*, [a project] to loan money to poor people. Each village tract received 300,000 kyat (US \$302.11). Regarding the loan, the villagers have to form a committee and then the [Burma/Myanmar] government will give the money to the committee. The people who borrow the money must have two people who guarantee them, otherwise they will not receive the money. The people who can work, [own property or a business], will get more money than people who cannot work, [day to day labourers], who will receive less money. They will have to pay back [all] the money [plus interest] to the [Burma/Myanmar] government once per year and then they can borrow it again [next year]. [Each month] they have to pay 1.5 kyat (US \$0.0015) as interest [per 100 kyat borrowed]. The government will not keep the money, [instead] this money must be used for development projects in rural areas. They [Burma/Myanmar government] have not provided the money yet. Arguments have occurred among the villagers [about how much everyone will receive]. The villagers said that the Burma government is making the villagers fight each other. The [Burma/Myanmar] government said that they will do this to eliminate poverty, but poor people can only borrow the money if they have people to guarantee them and they can only obtain a small amount of money.

The Burma government is doing development projects in Bu Tho Township and they built a bridge in Meh Klaw village tract. The Burma government built a bridge behind H--- village. [When] they dug the soil [up] it went into the drainage [ditch] of Saw Ma---'s field, a villager from G--- village, but they did not remove the soil [from the ditch]. Now it is the time to scatter [sow] the paddy seed, but he could not do it yet because his drainage is not good. Some farm owners [who also had soil in their ditches] hired people to clean out their drainage [ditches] for them on their own.

The [Burma/Myanmar] government collected census [information] in Bu Tho Township. Before they collected it, they told the villagers to tell the truth otherwise it would affect the villagers' [level of government support]. They provided training for teachers on how to collect the census [information]. They [Burma/Myanmar government] had paid for the cost of food [for the census collectors], but [the collectors asked] the villagers to provide them with food and the villagers had to pay the cost of food when they came and collected the census [information]. They [census collectors] were also ordered to go from

house to house and collect census [data], but instead they would [order] three or four houses to gather in the same place and collect the census [data that way].

Education

The Burma government schools in Bu Tho Township said that the students do not need to pay school fees. Some students did not receive textbooks and most of the students who were late [to register] for school did not receive books. The Burma government schools in Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas said that they will raise the Burma [national] flag [outside, in front of the school] but the KNU did not accept this. The parents of the students have to hire the teachers by themselves if they want the Karen language to be taught in Burma government schools.

The situation of the KNU

The leaders of the KNU in Bu Tho Township knew that the Burma government will start the *Mya Sein Yaung* [loan] project, which is [a project to] loan money to the villagers. Therefore, they [KNU leaders] met with the villagers at Ea--- school, in Ba--- village to make it not to become a problem for the villagers [regarding who gets how much money].

Other organizational activity

The KCCSC [Karen Communication, Cooperation and Supporting Community]¹³ visited Ea--- village, in Meh Klaw village tract. They met with the villagers to enable the Karen people who are scattering around [the world] to join hands together. The Karen Women Organization [KWO] provided packages to pregnant women and mothers with small children. [The Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW)], the health department of the KNU, provided medicine to the villagers in Htee Ta Daw Htah village tract in March [2014]. The KDHW built a hospital in Ba--- village tract for the villagers to be able to come to the hospital on time and get medicine when they feel sick.

The situation of the civilians

In Meh Klaw village tract, the villagers gathered together and held a village tract meeting with unity and elected new village tract leaders. It is time for the villagers to scatter [plant] the paddy [for growing season]. The Burma government did development activity and built a bridge at H--- village. The [moved] soil blocked the drainage of the villager's farms when they ploughed the land. Therefore the village cannot scatter [plant] the paddy seeds yet because they cannot get water [access]. It is time to start working in farms in Meh Klaw village tract. But the villagers cannot start working yet because the legs and hands of buffalos and cattle are affected [with disease].

Conclusion

The incidents [above] in Bu Tho Township from February [2014] to June [2014] involve the situation of Burma [Tatmadaw] soldiers, extortion, violent abuse and destruction of land. The Burma government is doing development projects, loaning money, collecting census [data], preparing for the 2015 election and their purpose is that former soldiers become village tract administrators and follow the orders of the military.

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

- "Hpapun Interview: Naw A---, January 2013," (December 2014)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to June 2014," (December 2014)

¹³ KCCSC is a small community based organisation (CBO) based in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border that provides services to the Karen community in Thailand and Kayin state.

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, March to May 2014,” (November 2014)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, April 2014,” (November 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, February and March 2014,” (November 2014)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)