



## Interview

October 13, 2014 / KHRG #14-56-A2-I1

---

### Hpapun Interview: U A---, January 2014

---

*This Interview with U A--- describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, between November 2013 and January 2014, including forced labour, arbitrary taxation, land confiscation, violent abuse and explicit threats toward villagers.*

- *The interviewee reports that BGF Officer Tha Beh forces villagers to log, split and porter wood, as well as to make bricks for him. Furthermore, women and children are also required to work for him.*
  - *The interviewee describes an incident in which several tons of his and other villagers wood was confiscated by Officer Tha Beh. The interviewee and other villagers were summoned to see Officer Tha Beh who then punched and hit them. They do not know why Officer Tha Beh violently abused them.*
  - *After complaints were made to Officer Tha Beh regarding his abusive behaviour by a village elder, U A---'s forest land was confiscated. Officer Tha Beh threatened to cut off U A---'s head in front of his fellow villagers if he dared to log in the forest area that was confiscated. U A--- has fled his village out of fear of Officer Tha Beh.*
- 

### Interview | U A---, (male, 51), M--- village, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (January 2014)

*The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Hpapun District in January 2014 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received in January 2014 along with other information from Hpapun District, including seven other incident reports, 45 interviews, two situation updates and 711 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Buddhist

**Marital Status:** Married

**Occupation:** Logging

---

<sup>1</sup> 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

**Position:** Villager

**What is your name?**

U A---

**How old are you?**

51.

**What is your ethnicity?**

Karen.

**Are you married?**

Yes.

**How many children do you have?**

5 children.

**How old is the eldest?**

27 years.

**How old is the youngest?**

The youngest is 17 years old.

**What is your occupation?**

I do logging for my livelihood.

**What is your responsibility [position] in the village?**

I have no responsibility in the village, but I have responsibility in [my] religion.

**Where do you live?**

M--- [village].

**Do you know which village tract M--- village is in?**

Htee Tha Daw Htah village tract.

**Do you know which township Htee Tha Daw Htah village tract is in?**

Bu Tho Township.

**Do you know which district Bu Tho Township is in?**

I don't know in which district.

**Okay, never mind. It is located in Mutraw [Hpapun] District. How many households in M--- village are there?**

I think there are [censored for security] households.

**Can you guess the number of villagers including women, men and children?**

I guess there are [censored for security] [villagers].

**What religions do the villagers in M--- believe in?**

Buddhism.

**Are there any villagers whose religion is Christianity?**

Yes, we have villagers who worship Christ.

**Are there any *kaw la thu*<sup>3</sup> [who live in the village]?**

No.

**What are the occupations of the villagers?**

Villagers are working on farms, hill field farms, cultivations and plantations.

**There are many children [in the village]. Do you have schools?**

Yes, we have [schools].

**How many schools are there?**

One school.

**Is it a [Burma/Myanmar] government school or a villager [independent] school?**

It is a [Burma/Myanmar] government school.

**Do the villagers hire the teachers or does the [Burma/Myanmar] government assign the teachers?**

The Burmese government assigns them.

**How many teachers [are there]?**

Three teachers.

**What about school fees?**

There are no school fees. We only have to pay [annual] registration fees.

**How much [are the annual registration fees]?**

The higher standards have to pay 4,000 kyat to 5,000 kyat (US \$4.04 or \$5.04)<sup>4</sup> and kindergarten costs 2,000 to 3,000 kyat (US \$2.02 or \$3.03).

**Are there any hospitals or clinics [in your village]? Where do the villagers go when they are sick?**

Yes we have a clinic, but we have to pay for the medicine.

**Is the medic male or female?**

---

<sup>3</sup> *Kaw La Thu*, “thu” meaning black, is a S’gaw Karen term which is sometimes used to refer to individuals in Burma/Myanmar who are perceived to have a darker skin colour. In Kayin state, it is often associated specifically with followers of Islam (Muslims), although this association is sometimes erroneous, and Muslim individuals do not typically self-identify with this term.

<sup>4</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the September 29<sup>th</sup> 2014 official market rate of 991 kyat to the US \$1.

Female.

**Where is the medic from? Did the [Burma/Myanmar] government assign her or did the villagers assign her?**

She is from our village and the [Burma/Myanmar] government assigned her.

**Does the [Burma/Myanmar] government pay her salary?**

I do not think the [Burma/Myanmar] government pays her. She is a midwife.

**Is there any town [hospitals] that villagers go to if the midwife cannot treat the patient?**

Ka Ma Maw [town] and Hkaw Taw Bu [town].

**How long does it take to go to Hkaw Taw Bu town and Ka Ma Maw town?**

It takes 20 minutes by boat.

**Is there enough medicine in the clinic?**

There is not enough.

**How much does it cost if you go and get treatment?**

It [can] cost 40,000 (US \$40.36), 50,000 (US \$50.45), 20,000 (US \$20.18) and 30,000 (US \$30.27) [kyat].

**Thai currency or Burmese currency?**

Burmese currency.

**You said that the villagers are working on farms and hill fields, right?**

Yes.

**How much paddy<sup>5</sup> can a person who is working on a farm save?**

The people who have [bigger] farms [or more than one farm] can save more [paddy] and people who have smaller farms can save less.

**How much paddy can the people who harvest the most paddy save?**

The people who harvest the most paddy can save 300 [big tins, [3,135 kg. or 6,912 lb.]]<sup>6</sup> of paddy or 400 [big tins, [4,180 kg. or 9,216 lb.]] of paddy.

**What about people who get very little paddy [to save]?**

Yes, there are some people who only harvest 10 big tins [104.5 kg. or 230.4 lb.] of paddy.

**Are there any people who cannot save any paddy?**

Yes, we have [some people like that].

**What about people who are working on hill field farming?**

Yes, they can save paddy. Some people can save more and some people save less.

---

<sup>5</sup> Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

**Are there any people who cannot save [any] paddy?**

Yes, there are some people who cannot save [any] paddy [when hill farming].

**There is only farming and hill field farming? Are there any other jobs?**

There are no other jobs. [Some people] grow vegetables [for themselves] and do general work [odd jobs].

**What about logging?**

Yes, some people are doing logging.

**Which river does it [logging] take place close to? [Near] Bo Lo river or Hkoh Lo [Salween] river?**

Hkoh Lo river.

**Is there any agriculture [conducted] along the banks of the Hkoh Lo river?**

Yes, there is.

**What kind of agriculture?**

People grow long beans, [other types of] beans and watermelon.

**Do they grow sugar cane?**

Yes.

**How many viss<sup>7</sup> (1.6 kg. or 3.52 lb.) of jaggery<sup>8</sup> can a sugarcane plantation owner sell?**

Some people can sell 2,000 viss (3,200 kg. or 7,040 lb.) to 3,000 (4,800 kg. or 10,560 lb.) viss, other people can sell 10,000 viss (16,000 kg. or 35,200 lb.) to 20,000 viss (32,000 kg. or 70,400 lb.).

**How much is a viss of jaggery [worth] this year [2014]?**

[It is worth] 500 kyat (US \$0.50) at Ka Ma Maw [town]. People [can] sell it for 1,000 kyat (US \$1.00) here [in Ta La Awh Hkoh village] because it is retail, but they sell it for 500 kyat to their regular customers.

**How much is one big tin of paddy [worth]?**

30,000 kyat (US \$30.27).

**How much is a sack of rice [worth]?**

15,000 kyat (US \$15.14).

**What about [animal] husbandry like rearing buffalos, pigs, cattle and goats?**

Yes, we have some people who rear cattle, goats and buffalo.

**Is there anyone who rears hundreds of it [animals] for commercial purposes?**

No.

---

<sup>7</sup> A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. or 3.52 lb.

<sup>8</sup> Jaggery is concentrated cane sugar.

**What do they [villagers] rear cattle for?**

To work [in the fields].

**Are there any elephants [used] because some people are logging?**

No.

**How is logging done?**

People use chainsaws for logging and drag the posts [lumber] by buffalo.

**Can the villagers log without difficulty?**

This year [2014], there were many difficulties and people could not work without difficulty.

**Has any armed group been to your village?**

The BGF [Border Guard Force]<sup>9</sup> has been [to our village].

**What about the KNU [Karen National Union]?**

Yes, the KNU has been [to our village].

**What about the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]?<sup>10</sup>**

No.

**What about the [Tatmadaw] soldiers of the Thein Sein government?**

They have not been [to our village].

**So only the two groups [BGF and KNU] have been to the village?**

Yes, only these two groups.

**Have these two groups [BGF and KNU] ever met [fought] each other?**

They have never met [fought] each other. They [BGF and KNU] contact [inform] each other before they come to our village [or surrounding area, so that they do] not disturb each other.

**Can they contact each other?**

---

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

Yes, they can.

**Which group comes into the village the most?**

The BGF.

**Which group do you have a good relationship with among the BGF and KNU?**

The KNU.

**Which group do you not have a good relationship with?**

The BGF.

**How are these two groups different?**

I do not know what the difference is, but they [the KNU and BGF] are both [ethnically] Karen and they do not like each other. We can do nothing [about it].

**How many soldiers do the KNU come with when they come to the village?**

They [usually] come with 10 to 20 soldiers and sometimes 30 [soldiers].

**Do they come very often?**

No, they come [maybe] once every 10 or 15 days.

**What is the attitude of the KNU [soldiers] toward the villagers when they come to the village?**

They have a good attitude toward the villagers.

**Do they take chickens and vegetables from the villagers when they come?**

No.

**What about beating, tying [up] and slapping the villagers?**

No.

**How many soldiers does the BGF come with when they come to the village?**

There are about six or seven people [soldiers].

**Are they living in the village or are they from outside and come into the village?**

They do not live in the village, but they live outside of the village and summon [villagers for meetings or] sentry [duty].

**Do they have a camp outside of the village?**

No.

**Where do they live?**

They live here sometimes and there sometimes [always moving].

**Are they staying very far away from the village or close to the village?**

They stay not very far from the village. They rely [live] at the school and monastery.

**Are they living in the monastery?**

Sometimes they live in the monastery yard and sometimes they live on the plains [fields].

**Who is the officer [in charge] of the BGF [battalion] that lives near the village?**

Officer Tha Beh.<sup>11</sup> People also call him Ta Thoo.

**Has he ever come into the village?**

He comes sometimes.

**What is his attitude toward the villagers when he comes to the village and when he summons the villagers?**

His attitude toward the civilians is not good. He does not smile and he always brings a stick with him [to hit villagers with].

**Did he build a camp to live at [next to your village]?**

He has no camp [next to our village].

**What do the villagers have to do for him because he has no camp?**

The villagers have to split firewood, make bricks and porter wood. The villagers have to do everything for him.

**Why do the villagers have to porter wood for him?**

Because he [Officer Tha Beh] asks them.

**Does he do logging?**

Yes.

**How do the villagers porter wood for him? By elephant, cattle or buffalo?**

Villagers porter [wood] using buffalo, ox-carts and cars, but elephants are not included. People carry it [wood] as well.

**People have to porter it [wood] for him every day?**

Yes.

**How many people have to go [work for Officer Tha Beh] every day?**

Over ten people.

**Does it include women and children?**

Yes, sometimes it includes women and children.

**Oh! He asks the children?**

---

<sup>11</sup> KHRG has received numerous reports involving human rights abuses committed by BGF Officer Tha Beh, including violent abuse, forced labour, explicit threats and arbitrary arrest and detention. See "[Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 – January 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.

Yes.

**Does he ask old people over 60 years [of age]?**

No old people.

**How many carts have to go to work [for him] per day?**

About six or seven carts per day.

**What about cars?**

One car.

**From which villages does he order the carts and car to work for him?**

M--- village, X--- village, Y--- village, Z--- village, D--- village and T--- village.

**Does he order any other villages?**

No.

**Does he pay the villagers [who work for him]?**

No, he does not give [any money as compensation].

**When did he start asking the villagers?**

He started asking before January [2013].

**Is he still asking the villagers to work?**

Yes.

**If the villagers who are working are hungry, does he provide food for them during working time?**

He provides food sometimes and sometimes he does not provide [food].

**Does he show a good face [smile] to the people who work for him?**

No.

**Does he [medically] treat the villagers who work for him if they get injured?**

No, he does not treat [them].

**What do the villagers have to do?**

The villagers have to make bricks, do logging and cut bamboo.

**How do the villagers make bricks?**

The villagers have to smash the soil into powder and then fire it [in a kiln].

**What do the villagers have to do with the wood?**

The villagers have to split the wood. He confiscates the wood that is split by the villagers, pretends it is his and then sells it.

**Do villagers have to log the wood [trees]?**

Yes, the villagers have to log the trees, split them, and then carry [transport] it with their own cattle and buffalo.

**How do they use the car?**

The villagers carry it [lumber] until they [reach the] vehicle road and then transport it with ox-carts and a car.

**Where does he [Officer Tha Beh] sell it [the wood]?**

He sells it at Ka Ma Maw town and Hkaw Taw Bu town.

**How much does he sell a ton of wood for?**

He sells a ton [of wood] for 300,000 kyat (US \$302.72).

**How many kinds of wood does he produce [process and sell]?**

He produces ironwood<sup>12</sup> and *Hkaw* tree.<sup>13</sup>

**Does that include teak?**

[No], teak is not included.

**How much is a ton of ironwood [worth]?**

It is [worth] 600,000 [kyat] (US \$605.45).

**Thai currency or Burmese currency?**

Burmese currency.

**Does he [Officer Tha Beh] provide proper payment [wages] to the people who he asks to work for him?**

No, he does not pay the people.

**How does he behave in his relationship with the villagers?**

His behaviour is not good.

**Does he beat, punch and scold the villagers?**

Yes, he beats and scolds the villagers.

**Does he beat and scold the villagers when they are logging [for him]?**

He does not beat people [during work time] but he does scold [them].

**You said that he confiscated people's [villagers'] wood [that they have felled and processed]. Whose wood did he confiscate?**

He confiscated the wood of Saw I---, Saw L--- and my wood.

**What is your name?**

U A---.

---

<sup>12</sup> Ironwood is a general term that refers to wood that has a reputation for hardness. It may encompass a large variety of species of tree.

<sup>13</sup> Hkaw tree is a type of hardwood that is often used in Burma/Myanmar for constructing buildings.

**Is that all?**

Yes, that is all.

**How many tons of wood did Officer Tha Beh confiscate from you?**

15 tons.

**How much is it worth?**

It is worth over 4 million kyat (US \$4,036.63).

**How much does the wood of Saw I--- worth?**

It is worth over 1 million kyat (US \$1,009.08).

**Anyone else?**

Saw L---'s wood is worth over 1 million kyat.

**Why did he [Officer Tha Beh] confiscate your wood?**

I do not know why he confiscated the wood. He asked for a tax on the wood and I gave him 300,000 kyat (US \$302.72). He tried to make a problem [with me] after I gave him the 300,000 kyat and he hit me. We did not know anything [about why this happened]. He [just] summoned us [to where he was staying], did not ask any questions and then beat us.

**How many times did he hit you?**

Two times.

**What did he use to hit you?**

He beat me with [a] bamboo [stick].

**Then?**

He hit my son-in-law five times.

**What is the name of your son-in-law?**

His name is Saw O---.

**Which part of his [Saw O---'s] body did he hit?**

He hit his hip and calf.

**What about you?**

He hit me once on my hip and once on my hand and then he punched me about five or six times.

**Are there any other people he has hit?**

He punched Saw E---'s father and one of his teeth was broken.

**What is his [father's] name?**

Saw F---.

**One of Saw F---'s teeth was broken because Officer Tha Beh punched him?**

Yes.

**Did he beat him with a gun?**

No, he punched him with his hand.

**Anyone else?**

[There is] another person from M--- village but I do not know his name.

**Did he beat him?**

He punched him.

**Why did he punch him?**

I do not know. He made no mistake, he was forced to serve as a sentry [for the BGF]. Officer Tha Beh wants people to come early [for sentry duty] but he did not, therefore, he punched [him].

**Sentry as in a messenger?**

Yes, messenger.

**People [Officer Tha Beh] punched him because he was late?**

Yes, he was late and Officer Tha Beh punched him.

**Was he injured?**

Yes, he was injured a little bit.

**Any other violent abuse that he [Officer Tha Beh] did?**

There is no other [violent abuse], but he did scold and threaten people that he would beat them.

**When did he punch you?**

In January 2014.

**Where did he punch you?**

He punched me at K--- field.

**Is K--- field located near your village?**

Yes, it is near.

**East or west [of your village]?**

East.

**East of M--- village?**

Yes, east of M--- village.

**Can you see it [from M--- village]?**

Yes, we can see it.

**He [Officer Tha Beh] punched [you] in the morning or in the afternoon?**

In the afternoon.

**What time?**

At 3:00 pm.

**Do you know the battalion [number] of Officer Tha Beh?**

He is from Officer Maung Chit's<sup>14</sup> battalion.

**Is Officer Maung Chit his battalion commander?**

Yes.

**What is the religion of Officer Tha Beh?**

He believes in Buddhism.

**How old is he?**

Over 40 years [old].

**How many [years old]?**

47 years old.

**Is he Karen, Shan or Burmese?**

He is Karen.

**Is there anything else that Officer Tha Beh does in the village?**

He is still making trouble, but [there is] no more violent abuse.

**I have asked you so many questions, but would you like to say anything else about something I did not ask?**

I want to talk about the part of the forest that I bought which is close [to other] people's farms. The village elder [that I bought the forest land from] talked [complained] to Officer Tha Beh [about his abusive behaviour]. He [Officer Tha Beh] then confiscated it [the forest area from me]. Officer Tha Beh told me not to log trees from that forest [area] and that he would shoot me with gun if I log trees from that forest [area]. [If I did log trees], he would tell people to come after me and he said that he would cut off my head in front of the villagers and then take it [my head] around the village.

**He said it like that?**

Yes, he said it like that. That is all.

**Are living in your village [now]?**

No, I am not living in my village. I am living in S--- village now.

**You do not dare to go back to your village?**

Yes, I do not dare to go back to my village because I am afraid that he will cut my throat. He has a gun and I have no gun. So I do not dare go [anywhere] near him.

---

<sup>14</sup> Commander Maung Chit, also referred to as Maw Hsee, is the commander for Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District. Maung Chit is not to be confused with Maung Chit Thu (typically referred to as Chit Thu), who is a senior level BGF commander overseeing battalions #1017, #1018, #1019 and #1020 in Ko Ko, Hpa-an District.

**Would you allow me to use this information you gave to me and submit it to the media?**

Yes.

**Thank you.**

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, February to July 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, October 2013,” (September 2014)
- “Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 to January 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013,” (August 2014)
- “BGF and KNLA grenades injure villagers and their children in Papun District,” (July 2013)

# Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)