



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

May 11, 2015 / KHRG #14-63-A3-I1

Hpa-an Interview: Saw A---, May 2014

This Interview with Saw A--- describes events occurring in Nabu Township, Hpa-an District, including drug production, sale and use, land confiscation, arbitrary taxation, militarisation and landmines. Saw A--- describes the treatment of villagers for elephantiasis by the Burma/Myanmar government without informing villagers about potential side effects. Saw A--- also describes the growing drug problem in Nabu Township, and the subsequent economic, social and healthcare impacts. Furthermore, Saw A--- describes villager perspectives on the ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen National Union (KNU).

Interview | Saw A---, (male, 36), C--- village, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District (May 2014)

The following Interview was conducted by a KHRG staff member. It was conducted in May 2014 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Hpa-an District, including six other interviews and 13 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Single

Occupation: Medic

Position: Villager

What is your name?

Saw A---.

Do you have any other names?

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 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.

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.

No.

How old are you?

36.

Are you married?

I am single.

What is your religion?

Buddhist.

Where do you live?

I live in C--- village, Nabu Township.

What is your job?

I am working with BPHWT [Back Pack Health Worker Team] as a health worker.

How long have you been working with BPHWT?

Four years.

Are there any problems that the villagers in C--- village, Nabu Township face?

I think there are many difficulties and it [the list of difficulties] would never end if we counted them [all]. But regarding healthcare, how to say, our place [village] is not very far from a town, but the Burmese government cannot provide healthcare to the rural people. We have to stand on our own [support ourselves]. Some people come to us [BPHWT] when they are sick and some go to other places. The biggest problem is that it is very expensive to go to a hospital. But the cost for women and children is not as expensive like before, because [now] there are some donations for them [from non-governmental organisations (NGOs)]. Sometimes we send the patients to Mae Tao clinic [in Mae Sot, Thailand] and we [BPHWT] treat the patients who are not [too] serious by ourselves. The other problem is that we have seen that many young people in our area are using drugs. Therefore, the parents are upset because of it. People in this area are doing farming, selling dog fruit³ and mining coal [for their livelihoods]. But the situation today is not like before. The paddy is not [growing as much] like before and some people go to Bangkok [now to find work]. The other thing is education. C--- village, Z--- village, Y--- village, X--- village and G--- village are located in H--- village tract and there are three schools. C--- school and X--- school are [Burma/Myanmar] government schools. G--- school is a Karen school [supported by] KED [Karen Education Department]. It was established even before I was born and it has been using the Karen curriculum and it does not take [financial] support from the Burma government. Therefore, the [Burma/Myanmar] government said that the school is a thief [secretive] school and an illegal school. They [G--- school] were pressured by the [Burma/Myanmar] government [to become a Burma/Myanmar government school by saying] where would the students continue their studies after they finished grade four if they do not join the government

³ Dog fruit, also known as jengkol, is a bean containing sulphur and a mildly toxic amino acid. It is native to Southeast Asia and is commonly eaten with rice and fish paste.

school. Regarding healthcare we can say that malaria is decreasing. But as you [the interviewer] know, motorbike accidents are happening a lot.

Is there a hospital in C--- village?

[There is] no hospital, but we have one clinic supported by the BPHWT.

Is there a Burma government clinic [in C--- village]?

The Burma government has one midwife clinic. They call it a rural healthcare centre, but mostly we see that the door is locked [the clinic is closed]. We can also see that many NGOs are coming in.

How do they [NGOs] come in? With the help of the [Burma/Myanmar] government or the Karen government?

They got permission from the Burma government. But the [Burma/Myanmar] healthcare minister [of Kayin State] does not have a mandate. The superior [chief healthcare minister] from Naypyidaw⁴ gives them instruction. For example, in May and June 2013, people [villagers] had to take elephantiasis medicine and big problems happened.⁵ They [Burma/Myanmar government medical team] informed us and told us to participate with them when they gave out the medicine. They said that they did tests in Mandalay Division and Sagaing Division and they found the results positive [for elephantiasis], therefore people had to take the medicine. And we agreed with this. Our BPHWT also tested people in Brigade #3 [Nyaunglebin District], Brigade #1 [Thaton District] and Brigade #5 [Hpapun District] and we found positive results and we treated the villagers with medicines for the last five years. Some people did not take it, but that is their right. The [elephantiasis] medicine has side effects. Therefore, we asked them why did they not do the test [in Kayin state] before they distributed the medicine. They [Burma/Myanmar government] said it cost a lot of money to do the test. I told them that there are over [censored for security] villagers in C--- village and if you found one positive [result for elephantiasis] then we will take the medicine. The first thing is that they did not do the test [in Kayin state]. The second thing is that they did not provide health education about this disease and the medicine. We [BPHWT] would help them if they wanted to do health education but they did not do it. The most important thing is the third thing. They did not negotiate with the relevant organisations like BPHWT. More than that, they did not inform the KDHW [Karen Department of Health and Welfare] about their activity. Therefore, we did not participate in this activity because the activity did not follow the three rules. I went and met with the secretary and chairman of Nabu Township, as well as the chief of the health department of Nabu Township and explained to them about the activity after I heard about it. Then they wrote a letter to the villagers and met with villagers. They also sent a letter to the health department of Hpa-an [District]. People told me that that letter reached Naypyidaw. So the activity was suspended. It would be like forcing the villagers to take the medicine and we said we are not cows and it did not happen.

⁴ Naypyidaw is the capital city of Burma/Myanmar. In 2005 the military regime moved the capital from Yangon to a greenfield at its present location, 320 kilometers (200 miles) north of the city. See "[Nay Pyi Taw now less of a ghost town](#)," *Bangkok Post*, December 11th 2013.

⁵ KHRG has received numerous reports concerning the distribution of elephantiasis medicine to villagers throughout Kayin state without informing villagers of potential side effects. See "[Hpa-an Interview: Saw U---, December 2013](#)," KHRG, October 2014; "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, September to December 2013](#)," KHRG, September 2014 and "[Field Report: Thaton District, September 2012 to December 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2014. See also "[Burma Govt's Vaccination Campaigns Face Criticism](#)," *The Irrawaddy*, September 2013.

So, treating elephantiasis medicine did not happen in [some villages] in Nabu Township?

Yes, not every village in Nabu Township.

How many villages took the medicine?

We do not know the exact number. They treated five villages in our village tract, but no villagers from C--- took the medicine. Some villagers from the other four villages took it.

What happened to the villagers who took the medicine?

They did not suffer anything like dying, but they suffered from dizziness and some people vomited.

What is the name of the group that provided the medicine?

It was conducted by the health department of Karen [Kayin] State from the [Burma/Myanmar] government side. They work with the village heads and provided the medicine. We heard they got the medicine from the French⁶ and we accepted that the medicine was good, but we did not accept it [treatment] because they did not follow our health policy.

When did they stop treating [villagers with] the medicine?

In June [2014], we heard about this case on the VOA [Voice of America] and RFA [Radio Free Asia]. People also said that the chief of the [Burma/Myanmar government] health department of Karen [Kayin] State, Doctor Win Naing, admitted that they were wrong because they did not follow the [proper] procedure.⁷ Actually they underestimated us. They thought that they can make our Karen to be whatever they want, but their plan was not successful. We do not know if it was a success in the city or not, but it was not successful in the rural [areas].

Are there any more problems regarding healthcare?

The other problem is the amount of medicine that we receive is decreasing because our donors are reducing the support [they provide], but we are trying our best with what we have.

What about drugs?

Karen armed groups had a meeting about drugs at Htoh Gkaw Ko [Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNU-KNLA-PC)⁸ headquarters]

⁶ KHRG was unable to verify what was meant by ‘the French’, whether this was an organisation working in Burma/Myanmar, or aid delivered through the French government.

⁷ KHRG was unable to confirm whether a Doctor Win Naing was either employed as the chief of the Burma/Myanmar government health department of Kayin State, or that he admitted to improper procedures.

⁸ 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.

in the last two or three months.⁹ I could not go to the meeting because I was away. After that we have seen that people [armed groups] are starting to take action. I have seen that they arrested over ten people in Brigade #7 [Hpa-an District] and it included women. Because of that news, drugs are not traded openly in our village like [they were] before. There are people [in Hpa-an District] who sell drugs, and there are people who distribute drugs, and there are the drug users. In the past, people [would just] drink beer during the festivals or ceremonies, but [now] people ask for one horse [one methamphetamine pill] when there is a ceremony. Particularly, most of the people who use drugs are young people. I asked them why they use drugs and they do not have an answer. They are using it for fun. I think an eighth to a tenth of the young people use drugs. Some of them might be addicted to drugs and some of them might not. You know, a tractor is very heavy and it is very tiresome to plough [fields] using it, but some people can plough the whole day by taking *yaba*.¹⁰

When did people start to use *yaba*?

We do not know exactly when it started. People used it a lot in 2008, 2009 and 2010, but the situation is becoming better in 2014. If I am not wrong, almost all the shops between Aw Poh Dam and Kawkareik [Town] sell *yaba*. But we do not know where the drug comes from. Some people said even the [Burma/Myanmar government] police from Kawkareik [Town] come and buy drugs. The Burma government knows about it but they ignore it. The villagers do not know how to solve this problem because they do not have any authority. The villagers dare not say anything because it [the drug problem] is related to the armed groups which split from the KNU [Karen National Union]. The villagers say that they have weapons. People released posters in the villages in the past two or three months. So there are some groups [of villagers] in the village who have to monitor who uses the drug and have to report about it and those who use and sell drugs will be punished.

You said that the people who produce the drugs are the armed groups that split from the KNU? Which groups?

I don't know exactly which group it is, but many people say that it comes from those armed groups that split from KNU, for example DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army]¹¹ and BGF [Border Guard Force].¹²

⁹ KHRG has received reports regarding drug awareness workshops by armed groups in Hpa-an District. See "[Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe, Nabu, Paingkyon and Hti Lon townships, May to July 2014](#)," KHRG, November 2014.

¹⁰ *Yaba*, which means "crazy medicine" in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during World War II to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Vietnam, and in Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, "[Yaba, the 'crazy medicine of East Asia](#)," UNODC, May 2008 and "[Chapter: Drug production, use and the social impacts in southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire](#)," KHRG, June 2014.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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

You mean those who are selling [drugs] have a relationship with the armed groups?

Even though we do not see it with our own eyes, we are a 100 percent sure that they produce it because the drugs which come into our village are from that side [BGF and DKBA controlled areas]. Some people say that an argument happened between the drug producers because of the different price of drugs. One group said to the other group that they sell the drugs for 2,500 kyat (US \$1.94)¹³ [per methamphetamine pill] and the other group sells it for 3,000 kyat (US \$2.91). This is really true. So the situation is becoming better after people started to take action. I heard from one of the top [KNU] leaders that they will take action in this area too. I think it is not easy to take action because we do not have a prison. Who will feed them? Can they do rehabilitation? You must have enough in the budget to do it. How long will we keep the user in prison and how will we punish them? I think we do not have this kind of plan. Therefore, this problem solving is just a temporary [solution]. The thing that we do from the healthcare side is providing health education and telling the villagers what consequences they will have if they use drugs. That is all we can do. We [BPHWT] do not have the authority to take action.

Are there any consequences because of using drugs in Nabu Township?

There are two or three cases in my village that people [villagers] get into other people's houses and sleep with other people¹⁴ and villagers were saying that those who got into people's houses at night are the people who use drugs. The village head had to solve the problem. The other thing is that it affects their health. For example, hypertension and psychological problems can happen to them. The third thing is women are grumbling and saying they cannot control their children anymore. The other thing is having debt. Some people have 1,000,000 kyat (US \$970.78) of debt. The consequences of using drugs are social, economic and healthcare problems.

Do you want to say anything else regarding drug cases?

I do not have anything else to say. We cannot solve the problem. Only the leaders of the armed groups can set up the rules and prohibit people from using drugs. Some people still use them even though people set up the rules. If anything happens, we can help them from our healthcare side [BPHWT]. But it is not good in the long term. It really affects our development. The young people do not have interest in the other things [education, etc.] anymore. We have very few men in our healthcare services. Most of the people we have are women. It is like people stole and destroyed our future.

What about villagers' livelihoods?

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.

¹³ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the January 15, 2015 official market rate of 1029.87 kyat to the US \$1.

¹⁴ In this instance, the interviewee is referring to rape. Culturally, this can be a difficult topic to discuss, and is often referred to through euphemisms.

Some villagers are doing farming, mining coal and [working on] rubber [plantations]. Some people are doing both farming and mining coal. Some people are doing plantation [work] and some people are doing fishing. But the main job is farming.

Do the villagers work as day labour in other places?

Most of the villagers go to Bangkok in Thailand. I do not know whether people go and work in Burma or not. You will not see many young men and women in the village. In some houses you will only see children and grandparents when you go and visit them. They say their parents go to Bangkok when you ask them where their parents are. Some people who are educated work as teachers and some people work for the government. Some people work with NGOs like Save the Children.

When did the villagers start to go and work in Bangkok?

A long time ago, I cannot remember when. People went to Bangkok illegally in the past. Today people apply for passports and go to Bangkok.

Have you seen any land confiscation in Nabu Township?

Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)¹⁵ #548 and LIB #549 are based in Nabu Township. I cannot remember the name of the battalion commander. Now he is retired. There is a *t'la aw*¹⁶ forest in Nabu Township and villagers keep it for firewood. It belongs to no one. The other thing is they collect the leaves for roofing. But almost the whole forest has become rubber plantations today. A major [from LIB #548 or #549] sold that land. There are over 300 acres of land. I cannot remember how many acres of land. Over 30 people bought the land from him. Some people bought two or three acres of the land from him and some people bought 40 acres to 50 acres. It was 50,000 kyat (US \$48.61) for one acre. The major got a lot of money. The major divided the forest into plots and sold it. He said that he will make a land title for those who buy the land, but he disappeared when he went back [home]. It [land confiscation] happened in 2007 or 2008.

Who bought the land?

Karen villagers [bought the land]. The other thing is that Tatmadaw LIB #548 and LIB #549 confiscated villagers' land around T'Nay Hsah village, but I do not know how many acres. We were walking across the fields and we saw that the paddy fields there were very good and people told me that the fields belong to the Tatmadaw. They said that those fields were the fields of Karen villagers, but the Tatmadaw confiscated it from the villagers. They have not returned the fields to the villagers. I think the villagers submitted this case to the government. They [the Tatmadaw] also extended their camp and grew rubber trees.

When did they [Tatmadaw] come to that area?

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ *T'la aw* trees are teak-like trees with large leaves, which are traditionally collected by villagers and used to make thatched shingles for the roofs of houses.

[They came a] long time ago, even before we were born. In the past many *Kaw La Thu*¹⁷ lived in T'Nay Hsah village. But after the fall of Manerplaw,¹⁸ the DKBA and Tatmadaw came in and drove them out.

Where have they gone?

They went to Mae La refugee camp and some of them have resettled in western countries now. There were Muslim mosques, but people demolished them.

Who demolished them?

The Tatmadaw.

Do the villagers face restrictions of movement and do they have to pay tax?

I do not understand all [about the taxation process]. But the BGF recruited more soldiers in 2011. Two people from each village had to go and people drew lots. People had to serve three years and I do not know how much money they had to pay if they do not serve. Some people run away after three years and some people continue. They [the BGF] recruited soldiers again in 2012. Sometimes some of the [BGF] soldiers came back to the village and asked for money from the village head. They asked for 10,000 kyat (US \$9.72) or 20,000 kyat (US \$19.44) from the village head and the village head asked why are they asking for money, because they already get a salary. One monk complained about it to the leaders of KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] Battalion #101 and to the KNU headquarters. Then the people [KNU] came and solved the problem. At the same time they [the BGF and KNLA] agreed to do the demining. Therefore people dare to travel; people dared not travel for two years.

When did it [demining] happen?

It happened in 2011 and 2012.

Who planted the land mines?

The BGF planted them.¹⁹ The *day poe* [little brother]²⁰ who came with me, stepped on the BGF landmine in 2011 or 2012. He came back from Bangkok because flooding happened in Bangkok.²¹ He has three siblings. His mother is a widow. People who went ahead of him did not step on it, but he stepped on the landmine when he went to the field to harvest.

¹⁷ *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.

¹⁸ Manerplaw was the former headquarters of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), which fell to the Burmese State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1995, allowing the SPDC to strike a serious blow to KNU operations in Kayin State.

¹⁹ KHRG is unable to confirm whether the BGF planted the landmines.

²⁰ *Day poe* is a Karen term of respect for a younger man that translates to “little brother,” however it does not necessarily signify any actual familial relationship.

²¹ From July 2012 until January 2012, Bangkok was subject to severe flooding during the monsoon season. With large swathes of Bangkok under water, thousands were forced to flee, killing more than 500 people and leaving an estimated US \$45 billion recovery. See “[Thailand floods: Bangkok ‘impossible to protect’](#)” BBC, October 2011; “[In the flooded Thai capital, residents are now refugee.](#)” The New York Times, November 2011; “[The World Bank supports Thailand’s post-floods recover effort.](#)” World Bank, December 2011.

People [BGF soldiers] planted the landmines in the paddy field?

No, on the way to the field. The person [BGF soldier] who planted the landmines also stepped on a landmine.

Were there any landmine incidents in 2013 and 2014?

We have incidents where people's cows stepped on landmines in 2013. Many of my cousin's cows stepped on landmines.

How many cows?

I did not ask her how many cows. As far as I know, five people lost their legs because of landmine [incidents] and there are two or three people who did not lose their legs, but lost their eyes [or eyesight] because of landmines.

When did these incidents happen?

[They happened] in 2011 and 2012. Even Burmese villagers stepped on landmines. They used the road near our village when they imported cars [illegally from Thailand] because they said they have to pay more tax if they used the other road. One Burmese [man] stepped on the landmine and died in 2011. People said that the Burmese [man] is from Thin Gan Nyi Nyaung [Town]. He was only 17 or 18 years old.

Did the BGF inform the villagers when they planted the landmines?

No, they did not. They do it by themselves.

Why did they plant landmines?

They planted the landmines to stop the KNU from coming to the [BGF] base.

How many schools are there in H--- village tract?

There are three primary schools. X--- school, C--- school and Y--- school. We did not have enough teachers in the past, but the [Burma/Myanmar] government assigned teachers and gives them a salary. But the villagers still have to provide coal or rice to the teachers, just like in the past.

Do they teach Karen language?

Only C--- school teaches the Karen language. C--- school is not a government school, it is a Karen school. They [the villagers] established the school on their own and they connected to the KED later. In the past they tore [off] the letters and the logos of the donor organisations in the books that they received from KED. But they can use it openly today.

Why did they do this?

They were afraid that the [Burma/Myanmar] government would give them trouble if they saw it.

Where do the students continue to study after they have finished primary school?

Some people continue their study at [Burma/Myanmar] government schools. I have not seen many people who went to high school. As far as I know, there is one or two people from our village tract who attended Hpa-an University. More people go to school today. People stopped their study after primary school in the past. C--- school is teaching Karen language and the other two schools do not. The teachers from the government side said that the C--- school is a thief school and an illegal school. They said “*Where will you go after you finish grade four?*” But some people go to refugee [camps] to continue their studies. The Burma government is stricter today. You will not get transcripts if you do not join the government school. And you will not be able to continue your studies. Therefore, C--- [school] teaches how to read and write Karen and the other two schools do not.

Which refugee camp?

Some people go to Umpiem refugee camp and some people go to Mae La refugee camp.

What do you think about the ceasefire²² process between the KNU and the Burma government?

How to say, if the governments really want peace they should not come from the back door, they should come from the front door.²³ What they said and what they did were not matching. Fighting does not happen here, but fighting happens elsewhere. They said this thing when they came to KNU, then they said different things when they went to DKBA and Shan. Fighting still happens. No Tatmadaw camps were withdrawn from Karen [Kayin] state. The nationwide ceasefire was planned to be signed in August [2014] but [now] postponed to September [2014]²⁴ then the year is almost gone. Will it happen in 2015? The other thing is there are many refugees in refugee camps. None of them were sent back yet. Another thing is the government said that they have freedom of media and you can say what you want and you can write what you want. But they arrested many people.²⁵ They will not arrest people if people do not harm their policy. And there are many demonstrations. But in reality we do not feel the peace yet. They received a lot of support from the EU [European Union] and Japan, but we have not received anything. Nothing changes in our village. But one thing is we can travel more freely [now]. But still people ask for money [from us] when we are traveling. It is good if

²² 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.

²³ Here the interviewee is trying to express that in order for the ceasefire to work, the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU must be transparent, coming through the ‘front door’, so villagers may see what they are doing.

²⁴ The 6th round of ceasefire talks between the National Ceasefire Coordination Team, a coalition of armed groups in Burma/Myanmar, and the Burma/Myanmar government were held in September 2014. However, they failed to reach an agreement on a national ceasefire agreement. In March 2015, the Burma/Myanmar government and 16 ethnic armed groups agreed to a draft of the ceasefire agreement, although it received criticism from experts in the region. See “[Myanmar government, rebel groups fail to finalize a cease-fire pact](#),” Radio Free Asia, September 2014; “[Govt, ethnic reps agree to talks in mid-March](#),” The Irrawaddy, March 2015; and “[Myanmar government and rebels agree on ceasefire draft](#),” Al Jazeera, April 2015.

²⁵ In early 2014, several journalists were arrested in Burma/Myanmar. In January and February 2014, four journalists, as well as the CEO of the Unity journal were arrested by the Burma/Myanmar government for reporting on an alleged chemical weapons factory in Burma/Myanmar. In April 2014, a freelance Mizzima journalist was arrested after helping organise a protest calling for the release of the six individuals previously arrested. See “[Journalists detained for reporting alleged chemical weapons factory](#),” The Irrawaddy, February 2014.

the peace talk is going well and we hope for the best. The government will just do what they want. Maybe we will have a new government in 2015, but it will not be the government that the civilians want. They cannot solve the land problems, mining problems and Rakhine²⁶ and Muslim case easily. We do not need to be happy very early. For me I do not [feel] happy [optimistic] very early. I will not clap my hands yet.

Have you seen any military movement after the ceasefire?

Oh! You do not need to ask about it. You can go and see it by yourself if you do not believe it.²⁷ In the past their camps from Thaw Leh Htah forward [along the river] were bad, but they modified it today. There were many checkpoints if we go down from Myawaddy and they reduce it. That is right. They do not check [stop] people anymore, but they are still living there. The Burmese are Burmese.²⁸ We have not seen any sign that they [the Tatmadaw] will withdraw their troops. According to the information that we heard from our friends from Brigade #2 [Toungoo District], Brigade #3 [Nyaunglebin District] and from all the brigades, they have the same situation like us. For example, we heard that they [the Burma/Myanmar government] came and built hospitals in Klaw Ga Di village and Shan Ywa Thit village. But they do not allow Karen to build a 50 bed or 100 bed hospital in Paingkyon Town. I was fined by the [local police] check point two times. I heard about it from the other people, but now I faced it myself. The first time was when I sent a patient from Noh Boh Kloh village to the hospital [Mae Tao clinic in Thailand]. I forgot my identification card. They [the police] thought that I came back from Bangkok. I told them I came back from Mae Tao clinic. I went there on Friday and I came back on Tuesday. I told them I cannot remember my ID number but I have the phone number of the village head. But they said that I was lying and told me to pay 1,000 kyat (US \$0.97) to the immigration [officers] and 1,000 kyat to the police. Altogether, 2,000 kyat (US \$1.94). Then I came back again after two or three weeks and I forgot my ID again and I had to give 4,000 kyat (US \$3.88). The people who have to suffer are those who come back from Thailand. They have to pay at least 1,000 kyat or 2,000 kyat.

Who asked for the money?

The immigration and police officers. Some people complained about it to the [immigration and police] offices. Some people tear their ID cards. It happened last year. One woman had an ID card but people [the police at the check point] asked her for money [anyways], therefore she tore her ID [card] and threw it away and problems happened.

Do you have anything else to say?

²⁶ The community member is referring to ongoing tension and violence erupting as of June 2012 primarily between Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim communities in Rakhine state. See "[All You Can Do is Pray](#)," *Human Rights Watch*, April 22nd 2013. Later in 2012 and in 2013, further waves of unrest and violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims have occurred across other areas in Burma/Myanmar, including notably in Meiktila, see "[State of emergency imposed in Meiktila](#)" *BBC News*, March 22nd 2013 and in Okkan, see "[Anti-Muslim Violence Tears Apart Communities Near Rangoon](#)," *The Irrawaddy Magazine*, May 2nd 2013. In 2012 and 2013, KHRG received several reports of discrimination against Muslims occurring in Karen State Districts, see "[Incident Report: Religious discrimination and restrictions in Papun District, September 2012](#)," KHRG, March 2013, "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, September to December 2012](#)," KHRG, March 2013.

²⁷ For more information on militarisation in Kayin State after the 2012 preliminary ceasefire see, "[Ongoing militarisation of Burma/Myanmar, since the January 2012 ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union \(KNU\) and the Burma/Myanmar government](#)," KHRG, February 2015; and "[Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#)," KHRG, May 2014.

²⁸ The interviewee is stating his opinion that all Burmese are the same, that they will not change.

I forgot to tell you that we were disturbed at the [Tatmadaw] Aw Bo Deh check point once when we sent one serious patient [in their car], who was suffered from throat cancer to the hospital. One of the women had to argue a lot and then they let us go.

When did it happen?

[It happened] in June 2014, but the patient died later.

Who stopped you?

The Tatmadaw.

Do you know their battalion number?

I do not know.

Do you still have anything else to say?

No.

Thank you very much.

Yes, thank you.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpa-an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- Hpa-an Interview: U A---, November 2014,” (May 2015)
- “The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik towj road construction threatens villagers’ livelihoods,” (March 2015)
- “Hpa-an Field Report: January to December 2015,” (January 2015)
- “Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe, Nabu, Paingkyon and Hti Lon townships, May to July 2014,” (November 2014)
- “Hpa-an Incident Report: Land confiscation in Paingkyon township, February 2013,” (November 2014)

Hpa-an District



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