



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

April 19, 2016 / KHRG #15-101-S1

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## **Thaton Situation Update: Thaton Township, July to October 2015**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thaton Township, Thaton District between July and October 2015. It also includes updates on land confiscation, education, healthcare, military activities, and development projects.*

- *On November 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, a Thaw Maw villager in Noh Ta Hsguh village tract reported that Tyre Factory #2 had confiscated 250 acres of land, belonging to Thaw Maw villagers. They had also planted rubber trees on the confiscated land. Due to decreasing rubber prices, the factory owners are now selling the land back to the villagers, at a price of 60,000 kyat (US \$46.20) per acre.*
  - *Following the signing of the 2012 preliminary ceasefire, the Burma/Myanmar government, the Karen National Union (KNU), and other organisations have increased their education activities and support in Thaton Township. However, despite a growing number of schools and more external support, some parents are still facing financial difficulties sending their children to school.*
  - *The Burma/Myanmar government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have built new clinics in Thaton Township. Nonetheless, villagers are still facing difficulties accessing healthcare and adequate medicine. As healthcare in the towns continues to be an option mainly for the more affluent, some villagers continue to seek treatment in their villages or in KNU-controlled areas.*
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### **Situation Update | Thaton Township, Thaton District (July to October 2015)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2015. It was written by a community member in Thaton District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Thaton District, including 48 photographs and one video clip.<sup>2</sup>*

Thaton Township is situated in between [near] Bilin Township, Kyaikto Township and Hpa-an Township. According to the KNU's [Karen National Union] land demarcation, it is in a KNU-

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in southeast 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.

<sup>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast 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.

controlled area. However, I know that some government-controlled areas are [also recognised by the KNU as] KNU-controlled areas.

In terms of the villagers' livelihoods, I see that the villagers are working with plain farming, hill farming, flood plain farming, cutting and selling trees and bamboo, and working as day labourers. In terms of the healthcare sector, if the villagers are ill, those who live near towns go to town for treatment. Those who have insufficient money for treatment, they find their own ways of treating their illnesses. In KNU side [KNU-controlled areas], Back Pack<sup>3</sup> has set up clinics in every area. Therefore, those who cannot afford to go to town [for treatment] try to go to the KNU side [clinics], where they also receive enough medicine.

In terms of the education sector, some villagers are educated, some are fairly educated, and some are not educated. However, since the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire,<sup>4</sup> the Burma/Myanmar government has been trying to arrange [improve] education policies and open ways to education for civilians. In KNU-KED [Karen Education Department<sup>5</sup>] side [KNU-controlled areas], following the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire, they [KED staff] have been entering into each township and giving out school materials and some stipends to teachers.

In terms of the economy, I see that companies have come into the area and are building roads and other things since the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire.

### **The situation of education**

In terms of education in Thaton Township, there are three types of schools: Burma/Myanmar government schools, civilian schools [self-reliant schools built by civilians] which are connected to the [Burma/Myanmar] government schools, and religious schools. Currently, we can say that the education sector has become stronger [than before]. KNU-KED supports schools with sufficient materials and they give out stipends of 7,000 baht (US \$195.20)<sup>6</sup> or 230,000 kyat (US \$178)<sup>7</sup> to each teacher to last for one year. The Burma/Myanmar government pays salaries to teachers [in government schools] once a month.

After the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire, I see that some organisations work together with the Burma/Myanmar government to build schools in almost every village. Nevertheless, [the schools] do not receive any support [in terms of financing and teaching materials]. In some areas, I see that some students have to buy books. In contrast [to the Burma/Myanmar government], KNU-KED tries to be active in every [KNU-controlled] area. The villages [schools]

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<sup>3</sup> Back Pack refers to the Back Pack Health Workers' Team (BPHWT), an organisation that provides medical treatment for villagers in remote areas.

<sup>4</sup> The KHRG community member is referring to the preliminary ceasefire agreement that was signed on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see "[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#)," Reuters, October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015.

<sup>5</sup> The Karen National Union's Education Department. The main goals of the KED are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture. During the civil war in Burma/Myanmar the KED became the main organisation providing educational services in the KNU controlled areas in southeast Burma/Myanmar. The KED also previously oversaw the educational system in the seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, however in 2009 these activities were restructured under the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE). See "[Conflict Erupts over Govt teachers deployed to KNU areas](#)," Karen News, August 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 and the KRCEE website: "[About](#)," accessed July 21<sup>st</sup> 2015.

<sup>6</sup> All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 official market rate of 35.86 baht to the US \$1.

<sup>7</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 official market rate of 1,292.47 kyat to the US \$1.

that are in KNU-controlled areas receive KNU-KED support, such as books, pens and pencils and different kinds of sport materials year by year until now [each year].

Students do not have problems with travelling like [they did] before to go to school. In the past, students had to go to school in other villages [than their own] and they had to face floods [in the rainy season]. Now, the ARC (American Refugee Committee) is entering the area and is building schools for children as well as [re]constructing roads that have been destroyed.

In Thaton Township, the KNU-KED is planning to build a Karen Kaw Thoo Lei<sup>8</sup> middle school.

### **The situation of healthcare**

In terms of the healthcare sector in Thaton Township, I see that some organisations are entering into the area and opening [setting up] clinics and it has benefitted the villagers after the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire. In 2014, UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] entered the lower part of Naw Ka Toh village, Ta Rweh Hkee village tract, Thaton Township and built a clinic. Yet, the villagers said that they had not received any medicine since they set up the clinic.

The Burma/Myanmar government entered into the area and built one clinic in Pa Nweh Klah village, Pa Nweh Klah village tract, one clinic in Ta Maw Daw village, Ta Maw Daw village tract, one clinic in Wee Raw village, Wee Raw village tract, and one clinic in Wa Puh village, Kaw Ler village tract. They said that they built the clinics for free but they never had adequate medicine for the villagers to go and get, not even now.

Regarding illnesses, I mostly see headache, body ache, diarrhoea, stomachache and other illnesses. In Thaton Township, those who go to the hospital in town when they are sick are fairly rich people. Those who cannot afford to go to the hospital in town try to go to KNU[-controlled] areas [to places] such as the [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)] battalion clinic departments, and township-[level KNU-]supported healthcare in KNU[-controlled] areas.

### **The situation of [the Burma/Myanmar] government economy**

In Thaton Township, the government economy [government-owned businesses] are [involved in] rubber plantations, cashew plantations, a rubber factory, Bilin's sugar factory, and a distillery. On November 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, a Thaw Maw villager in Noh Ta Hsguh village tract reported that in the past, Tyre Factory #2 had confiscated 250 acres of Thaw Maw villagers' land and planted rubber trees. They now sell the land back to the villagers for 60,000 kyat (US \$46.20)<sup>9</sup> per acre as the price of rubber has decreased. They ask the villagers to plant rubber trees and produce a 30 year agreement grant [contract for the villagers]. If they [the villagers] get ten pieces of rubber after they have tapped [the trees], three [of those] pieces of rubber are to be paid to them [Tyre Factory #2]. Only 15 villagers can afford to buy the land that is sold back by the [tyre] factory; most of the land is bought by rich people. In between Noh Ta Hsguh village and Noh Hpah Htaw village, Noh Ta Hsguh village tract [the Burma/Myanmar] government built a caustic soda factory [which covers an area of] 407.30 acres.<sup>10</sup> They have now constructed a road and they have also built warehouses to keep their materials in.

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<sup>8</sup> The term *Kaw Thoo Lei* refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU), but the exact meaning and etymology is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. *True Love and Bartholomew: Rebels on the Burmese Border*, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

<sup>9</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 official market rate of 1,292.47 kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>10</sup> Further information and photographs can be found in "[Thaton Photo Set: Land Confiscation in Thaton Township, January – October 2015](#)," KHRG, February 2016; and "[Thaton Situation Update: Thaton Township, January to February 2015](#)," KHRG, October 2015.

### **The situation of the Tatmadaw**

The Tatmadaw battalions located in Thaton Township are Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>11</sup> #1 [situated] in Nya Ta Weh [village], LIB #118 in Thaton Myo Thit [Town], LIB #9 in Win Pa [village], LIB #3 in Tan Ta Kha Kyo [village] , Infantry Battalion<sup>12</sup> #8 in Section #8 in Bilin [Town], LIB #24 in Doo Yin Hseik [village], [military] training #9 in A Lan Ta Ya [village], Artillery #314 in Zi Won Nauk Ka Zaing [village], Artillery #402 in Noh Hpa Htaung [village], Artillery #202 in Thaton Myo Thit [Town], LIB #206 which is under Light Infantry Division (LID)<sup>13</sup> #22, in Kya Pan [village], Pa Nweh Klah army camp and Wee Raw army camp.

### **Tatmadaw activity**

Regarding the Tatmadaw's activities, they were still active following the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire. [Soldiers from] LID #22 and LIB #202 came to patrol in T'Maw Daw village, continued to Plaw Hpoh village and then went back to K'Dee Poo area [village] on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015.

On May 7<sup>th</sup> 2015, LIB #3 came to patrol in K'Dee Poo area [village]. The commanders of LIB [#3] are Captain Ye Min Thein and Captain U Thet Naung. On May 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, IB #8 came to patrol in Kyeh Htoo Koh [village] with 20 soldiers.

On February 13<sup>th</sup> 2015, LID #22 and LIB #202 came to rotate with LID #44 and LIB #3 in Pa Nweh Klah army camp, Thaton Township. Column #1 patrolled from P'Nweh Klah village, [through] Ta La Aw Hpoh Klah village, T'Maw Daw village, Naw Ka Toh village, and Ta Rweh Hkee [village], to Plaw Hpoh village. The leader of column #1 is Battalion Commander Min Thu Shwe. Column #2 patrolled in the Lah Khoh area, [through] Htee Maw Hkloh village and Taw Thu Klah village to P'Nweh Klah village. Currently, I do not see that they patrol like [they did] before. There are no special activities [carried out] by them.

### **The organisations that operate [in the township]**

The organisations that operate in the area [township] are World Concern and UNDP [United Nations Development Program]. They provide support to build schools, toilets, and wells. UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] also supports schools with materials such as bags, books, pens and pencils. The ARC (American Refugee Committee) provides support for constructing bridges on the river between the villages in order for students to be able to go to school. They also help [the villagers] with raising animals and with agriculture. MRCS<sup>14</sup> and UNHCR entered into the area and conducted life skills awareness trainings in some areas. The [Burma/Myanmar] government entered into our area and introduced the [so-called] *Mya Sein Yaung*<sup>15</sup> [loan] initiative.

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<sup>11</sup> Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 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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<sup>13</sup> Light Infantry Division (Tatmadaw); commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

<sup>14</sup> It is not entirely clear what organisation the community member is referring to here; KHRG received the report with only the acronym written down. MRCS might refer to the Myanmar Red Cross Society.

<sup>15</sup> Mya Sein Yaung is a loan initiative established by the Burma/Myanmar government to provide poorer communities access to capital. Further information on the Mya Sein Yaung project and villagers' reactions in Hpapun District can be found in the KHRG report: "[Hpapun situation update: Bu Tho Township, February to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

### **The situation of villagers**

In Thaton Township, villagers are working in plain farming and hill farming. Currently, since the soil [in the farms] is not good [for farming, after having been farmed for many years], there are fewer villagers working in farming than before. Some paddy fields are uncultivated. They [the villagers] clear their uncultivated lands and plant rubber trees. Regarding the hill farms, since villagers do not work on the hill farms like they used to, trees and bamboos are growing [there].

There are still problems in many ways regarding the weather.<sup>16</sup> In terms of education, I see that parents are facing [financial] difficulties sending their children to school. We can see that the students who finish [primary] school in the village do not have enough money to continue their schooling. However, they are very enthusiastic about studying.

In terms of healthcare, the regular illnesses occurring in the area [Thaton Township] are malaria, headache, diarrhoea, stomachache, menstrual disorders, arthritis, itching skin, coughing, and malnutrition. Regarding medical treatment, the [Burma/Myanmar] government set up clinics in some villages but they could not provide all the [necessary] supplies.

Regarding [animal] husbandry, the villagers raise cows and buffalos for working [in the farms]. They also keep goats, pigs, and chickens at home for [their] livelihood as [is their] tradition.

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

- “Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, October 2015,” (February 2016)
- *The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar*, (February 2016)
- “Thaton Photo Set: Land Confiscation in Thaton Township, January – October 2015,” (February 2016)
- “Thaton Short Update: Hpa-an Township, October 2014,” (February 2016)
- “Thaton Situation Update: Thaton Township, January to June 2015,” (January 2016)

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<sup>16</sup> Since 2010, KHRG has received an increasing number of reports referencing unstable or inconsistent weather conditions, and the resulting impact on agriculture in rural areas of Karen State. For more information, see: [“Nyaunglebin Interview: Daw U---, December 2012,”](#) KHRG, July 2014; [“Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, January to June 2014,”](#) KHRG, September 2014; [Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013,”](#) KHRG, August 2014

# Doo Tha Htoo ( Karen )



**KHRG** Karen Human Rights Group  
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