



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

May 5, 2016 / KHRG #15-109-S1

Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: K'Ser Doh Township, August to October 2015

This Situation Update describes events occurring in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District from August to October 2015. It includes information and updates on land confiscation, military activity, health, and education.

- *On August 7th 2015, it was reported that the Tatmadaw were planning to set up a military training camp in the Kleh Muh Htee large area on land that had been confiscated from villagers. About 500 acres of land had been confiscated and the affected villagers had not received any compensation at the time this report was written, despite having been promised 50,000 kyat (US \$42.78) per acre as compensation.*
 - *The Tatmadaw had reportedly issued explicit threats to villagers, saying that if they were to go near the military training camp once it became operational, they would be shot. The affected villagers reported feeling unsafe and afraid to return to their lands.*
 - *It was also reported that villages in the Paw Hkloh large area had been suffering from inadequate access to medical supplies, which had led to deaths among children who suffered from illnesses such as diarrhoea and dengue fever. However, following requests for more medical supplies by a township official, the situation had improved.*
 - *Furthermore, it was reported that representatives of the Burma/Myanmar government agreed to allow Karen language to be taught in the township office, albeit outside of normal school hours. This followed requests from local Karen teachers to be able to teach Karen language during school hours.*
-

Situation Update | K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (August to October 2015)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2015. It was written by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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.¹

I wrote this Situation Update between August 24th 2015 and October 7th 2015. It covers livelihoods, health, religion, and military activities, in the Paw Hkloh [large] area,² K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, during two months.

¹ 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.

² In Mergui-Tavoy District, "small areas" are equivalent to village tracts, whereas "large areas" are composed of several village tracts, yet are smaller than a township. There is no equivalent to a "large area" in the other six KNU-demarcated districts.

Livelihood situation

Civilians in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, make a living by engaging in agriculture, plantation work, hill farming, and general shop keeping. Looking at this year, the situation of agriculture is good, including crops, fruits, and other produce, and prices are really good. The people who sell things in the general village shops go to town to buy things and then they sell those things in their shops in the villages, as transportation is getting better. They earn their living like this every year and they have enough food to be able to eat well. Things have changed compared to the situation before. Previously, the situation for agriculture, crops, and other produce was not good. Insects damaged plantations and crops, and transportation was not good either. However, civilians in the Paw Hkloh [large] area, K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy district, earn a living from many kinds of trades. If the situation for one kind of job is not good, they find another kind of job and they can earn their living from that instead. We have not seen day labourers. The livelihood situation is good.

Healthcare situation

When we look at the healthcare situation in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, once every three months or once a month when the medicine arrives, health workers treat the patients and give them medicine, but there is not enough medicine. In the Paw Hkloh [large] area, some children who suffer from illnesses such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, and dengue fever die as there is not enough medicine. If we look at transportation, some places are not easy to travel to and this is another challenge. Sometimes, we send patients to 'Way Ta Eh' Hospital (free). However, at that hospital there is not enough medicine, so Hilda, the medical officer of K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, asked people at a higher level for help to get more medicine. [Following her request], help arrived and now we do not have to go all the way to town anymore; villagers can instead go to K'Ser Doh Township Hospital [which is closer to the villages in the Paw Hkloh large area] for treatment. The villagers do not have to go to town as often as before and the [K'Ser Doh Township Hospital has both] OPD/IPD [outpatient and inpatient departments]. Villagers go there for treatment and their health situation is getting a little better.

Education situation

The situation of education is as good as before. The schools in most areas in K'Ser Doh Township are up to Standard 7,³ but in the Paw Hkloh [large] area schools, the standards are up to Standard 8. The [Burma/Myanmar] government provides help by building toilets, schools, and fences, and giving out books. Even though there is a Karen text book, it is not permitted to teach the Karen subject [language during school hours] and some children cannot speak their ancestors' [Karen] language. Some Karen teachers met with Karen officials to ask for permission to teach the Karen subject, and to teach it during school hours. The Burma/Myanmar government gave its permission to teach the Karen subject, but it is only allowed outside of school hours. Using any opportunity that they get, the teachers try to teach the students the Karen subject and Karen children can write a bit in their language. Because of the [efforts of the] Karen teachers, students get the opportunity to study Karen language in the township office. The education is getting better and the situation has improved compared to before.

Religion

In K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, the majority of people are Christian. And even though there are some Buddhists, there is no discrimination. People live in harmony. When Christians celebrate Christmas, people of other religions also come to help. People can practice their religions freely. We do not see any other religions. They work together in good unity. In

³ A standard refers to a school year in the education system of Burma/Myanmar. The basic education system has a 5-4-2 structure. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 5, lower secondary school is Standards 6-9, and upper secondary school is Standards 10-11.

terms of other religions, there is the Roman Catholic Church. But they work together in good unity.

Myanmar government military activity

On August 7th 2015, the leaders of K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, and I travelled to the Kleh Muh Htee [large] area. We were told that the Myanmar government had confiscated 500 acres of villagers' land, and that they had said that they would give each villager 50,000 kyat (US \$42.78)⁴ as compensation. However, they had not given out any compensation [at the time of our trip there]. Furthermore, the villagers had had to move from their lands. Because of this, the villagers might face difficulties. The army [Tatmadaw] were planning to set up a military training camp on the land that they had confiscated. When they start training their soldiers, none of the villagers will be allowed to go to the area. If they see any villagers there, they will shoot. They threatened the villagers like this, and the villagers dared not go back to their lands. The villagers had also seen that the government army were transporting food and bullets for their training. The Tatmadaw soldiers had stolen villagers' properties such as chickens and edible fruits when the villagers were not aware. The soldiers had been patrolling in the area as usual. Regarding the situation there, a villager named A--- who lives in A--- village, Kleh Muh Htee [large] area, said that there had been no cases of forced labour or arbitrary demands but there had been cases of explicit threats.

There will always be human rights violations. There is always another violation if one violation does not exist, and the violations cannot disappear. We can say this as there are still land confiscation and forced labour in our country, and in my mind, I think that human rights violations will never disappear.

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

- *The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar*, (February 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: K'Ser Doh Township, January to March 2015," (February 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Doh Soh Township, January to June 2015," (January 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Short Update: Ler Muh Lah Township, 1998 to 2013," (November 2015)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, January to May 2015," (November 2015)

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the April 25th 2016 official market rate of 1,169 kyat to the US \$1.

