



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

February 5, 2016 / KHRG #15-113-S1

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## **Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District between June and October 2015. Topics covered include government aid, the 2015 general election, and child abuse.*

- *Karen National Union (KNU) leaders in Bu Tho Township did not accept the distribution of solar panels to villagers by the Burma/Myanmar government because they had not asked for permission from the KNU leaders before they started distributing them. The villagers in Meh Klaw village tract had to return the solar panels to the local government administrators; all the panels were then sold by the local administrators.*
  - *Many villagers' names were not on the voter list in Bu Tho Township. At the same time, names belonging to deceased people were found on the voter list. Villagers submitted a complaint letter to the Hpapun Township Election Commission but no action was taken.*
  - *Only the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Karen People's Party (KPP) were allowed to campaign in Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas; the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) were not. The Burma/Myanmar government did not allow voting to take place in KNU controlled areas.*
  - *On October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015, Saw Tha Hay Bluh, a teacher in Baw Hta Primary School, beat students who did not pass their monthly exams. The students were unable to go back to school after having been beaten by the teacher.*
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### **Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (June to October 2015)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2015. It was written by a community member in Hpapun 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>*

#### **Introduction**

[The information was documented] from June to October 2015 in Bu Tho Township about the Burma government's activities, the Tatmadaw's activities, Burma/Myanmar healthcare activities, education activities, the KNU's [Karen National Union] activities, and civilian activities.

#### **Burma/Myanmar government's activity**

In Bu Tho Township, from June to October 2015, the Burma/Myanmar government started constructing bridges and roads and they also distributed solar panels to villagers. The

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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.

Burma/Myanmar government distributed solar panels in KNU controlled areas<sup>2</sup> in Baw Hta, Plaw Day, and Day Law Poo villages, in Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township [but] they did not [give] prior notice to the KNU and [had] not asked for permission from the KNU. Thus, the KNU did not accept [the distribution of solar panels] and asked the villagers to return it [them] to the Burma/Myanmar [government] administrators, and most of the solar panels were [then] being sold by the administrators, but the Burma/Myanmar [government officials] did not know that the [local] administrators were selling the solar panels.

### **Election**

Regarding the 2015 election in Bu Tho Township, [among] the villagers who currently live near the main road between Hpapun and Ka Ma Maung [towns], some villagers' names were not on the voter lists and [the names of] some people who [had] passed away were revealed to be on the election voter lists. In this election the villages which are Baw Hta, Noh Law Hsoo, and other villages [did not have the] names [of all their residents] on the election voter lists. Thus, they submitted [a complaint] to the Hpapun Township Election Commission but [voting] permission was not given [to them]. Some villagers wanted to vote but their names were not on the voter list, thus they could not vote.

Regarding this issue we got the information from civilians. They said that the villagers that live outside [the Burma/Myanmar government controlled areas] were only allowed to conduct election campaigns for the NLD [National League for Democracy] and the KPP [Karen People's Party]. The USDP<sup>3</sup> [Union Solidarity and Development Party] said election campaigns should be allowed for all parties even if it is outside the [government] controlled [areas]. Not all parties were allowed to conduct election campaigns in the villages which are located outside the government controlled areas, therefore the Burma/Myanmar government did not permit them [the villagers outside government controlled areas] to vote. In this election the polling stations were set up in Ma Htaw, Win San, Tan Khun Taing, Me Tha Lut villages, section 1, section 2, section 3, section 4, and Naung Bet Ka in Hpapun town. They also set up polling stations for the military [Tatmadaw] in [the camps of] LIB<sup>4</sup> [Light Infantry Battalion] #434, LIB #430, LIB #341, IB [Infantry Battalion] #19, and the Strategic Operations Command [SOC]<sup>5</sup> base. Most of the people who were in charge of looking after the polling stations were Burma/Myanmar government school teachers. For the civilians they set up [polling stations] in clinics and schools.<sup>6</sup>

### **Burma/Myanmar military activity**

The Burma/Myanmar military which is the BGF<sup>7</sup> [Tatmadaw Border Guard Force Battalion] #1014<sup>8</sup> was more active [during this reporting period] in Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho

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<sup>2</sup> As per the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw are only allowed to operate and travel up to 50 yards from either side of roads that connect their army camps through KNLA territory, and only within a 150 yard radius around their own army camp.

<sup>3</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010 and is headed by Burmese President Thein Sein. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) ousted the USDP in a landslide election, winning a majority of seats in parliament.

<sup>4</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.

<sup>5</sup> Strategic Operations Command; under regional command, three to four battalions and a headquarters, covers an area mostly for defence.

<sup>6</sup> KHRG is in the process of following up this information to determine more specifically which villages the researcher is referring to. It is not clear whether or not all villages located outside of government controlled areas in Bu Tho Township were unable to vote in the 2015 election.

<sup>7</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 Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions

Township. Even though the leaders [had] signed the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire they were still active and asked villagers to porter and work for them. They also did not respect the KNU [boundaries] because they always passed over KNU delimited territory and it caused clashes between the KNU [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)] and BGF Battalion #1014.

### **The KNU's activity**

In Bu Tho Township the KNU [KNLA] follow their leaders' orders [not to cross over delimited territory]. After the leaders signed the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire<sup>9</sup> they ordered them to [only] be active in [the KNU controlled] territory and listen to each other [the Tatmadaw and the KNLA] thus, they were active as per the orders from their leaders. They were active in their own territory and took responsibility for providing security for the villagers in the area.

### **Civilians' situation**

In Bu Tho Township the civilians are very glad after hearing that the [KNU] leaders signed the ceasefire<sup>10</sup>. But, the civilians said that they did not know what was going to happen after signing the ceasefire, therefore they could not entirely build trust [in the peace process].

### **Education**

In Bu Tho Township the [students who study] one to four Standards<sup>11</sup> in government schools do not have to pay anything [to the schools]. One school uniform was also provided to each student. On October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015, Hpapun High School Education Administrator U Pa Thaw Khel's son Saw Tha Hay Bluh, who is teaching in Baw Hta Primary School, beat the students who did not pass their monthly exams. He beat them on their heads, thighs and calves. We saw that the calves and thighs of the students were bruised and some students were not able to go to school [after having been beaten by the teacher].

### **Healthcare situation**

In Bu Tho Township if we look at healthcare, the people who go to [get] treatment in government hospitals have to pay less for medicine. The number of health workers is increasing

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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>8</sup> KHRG has received numerous reports of human rights violations committed by soldiers from Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014, including killing, torture, violent abuse, explicit threats, arbitrary taxation and demands and land confiscation. For more information, see "[Human rights violations by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1014 in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, May 2012 to March 2014](#)," KHRG, July 2015.

<sup>9</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 the 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.

<sup>10</sup> The KHRG community member is most likely referring to the most recent ceasefire agreement between the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU. 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. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see "[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement](#)," *UN News Centre*, October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe's decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see "[Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#)," *Karen News*, September 1<sup>st</sup> 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement 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.

<sup>11</sup> A Standard refers to a grade in the Burmese education system. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 4, middle school is Standards 5-8 and high school is Standards 9-10.

and [the treatments available are] improving a bit. They [Burma/Myanmar government health workers] provided immunisations to the children on time. The Golden Plain Project started in 2014 [and runs] to 2016. The non-governmental organization HelpAge International provided support to Baw Hta village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township. They provided corn, pesticides for paddies, and backpack insecticide sprayers. For the villagers who are very poor they even provided pigs and goats to raise. They also provided materials for the school, toilets, and tools for fixing pipes.

### **Livelihood situation**

The villagers who live in Bu Tho Township area are working in cultivation farming. After they planted the paddy seeds, rats removed and ate them. Thus, some paddy seeds did not turn into plants. Some paddy plants were attacked by rats after they had grown. Some villagers were unable to [continue] working on their cultivation [because the seeds did not turn into plants] and some of them [had to] work as day labourers. Some villagers said that after the leaders signed the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire they can travel freely to buy rice and carry food, therefore they are very happy. Some villagers said that before the leaders signed the ceasefire if they went to buy rice and fish paste they had to travel secretly and hide the food. If the Tatmadaw caught them they misunderstood them [and thought] that they carried it for the KNU. Some villagers do not get enough food [from their cultivations] so they have to buy food and carry the food.

### **Conclusion**

The activities in Bu Tho Township that started from June to October are revealed in the text above.

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, June to September 2014,” (January 2016)
- “Hpapun Short Update: Bu Tho Township, May and June 2015,” (January 2016)
- “BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015,” (December 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2014 to January 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015,” (October 2015)

# Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)