



Situation Update

March 9, 2016 / KHRG #15-114-S1

Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2015

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District between August and October 2015, including forced labour, land confiscation, and livelihood issues.

- *Soldiers from Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #96 in Dwe Lo Township, forced villagers in A--- valley to transport their supplies and the only compensation the villagers were given was petrol.*
 - *The Karen National Union (KNU) organised for land confiscation victims in Meh Thoo and Meh Way village tracts to receive two million kyat (US \$1,547.80) per acre as compensation.*
 - *Since the signing of the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement, displaced persons in Dwe Lo Township have been able to return to their old villages.*
-

Situation Update | Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (August 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.¹

Introduction

The information in this Situation Update was documented from August 1st 2015 to October 25th 2015, in Dwe Lo Township. It includes updates on Tatmadaw activities, forced labour, arbitrary demands, land confiscation, the situation for civilians, civilians' livelihoods, healthcare, and education. This information was collected by me, a KHRG community member. I report it as I collected it, shown in the text below.

Since [the signing of] the [preliminary] ceasefire in 2012,² the civilians who live in Dwe Lo Township have suffered less from forced labour, extortion, and killings. Such abuses, committed

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 The KHRG community member is referring to the preliminary ceasefire agreement that was signed on January 12th 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. On October 15th 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 15th 2015.

by the Tatmadaw, have decreased by 80%.³ Regarding land confiscation of plantations belonging to villagers, the Karen [Karen National Union (KNU)] leaders arranged for them to get compensation.

The Tatmadaw situation

In Dwe Lo Township, the number of Tatmadaw army camps is still the same as I have previously reported. They did not reduce or decrease the number of army camps and they still exist as before. They rotate their military [units on a] quarterly [basis]. When they rotated their military [units], they sometimes did not follow the rule not to cross over delimited territory and travel only in their own territory.⁴ They did not strictly follow it. If they saw villagers travelling on the same road as them they did not disturb and question them like they used to. During 2015, some Tatmadaw army camps were being repaired

Tatmadaw activity

In terms of Tatmadaw activities, sometimes their small columns patrolled and asked villagers to porter for them and forced them to do other things.

Forced labour

The Tatmadaw IB [Infantry Battalion]⁵ #96, which is based in Waw Muh army camp, forced motorboat owners to carry food and luggage for them and gave only petrol as compensation, not money. They mostly asked B--- villagers. The Tatmadaw [soldiers] in Dwe Lo Township annually force villagers in A--- valley to carry rations, enough to last for one year, to their army camp. They forced villagers who own motorboats to transport their rations. In order for them [the Tatmadaw] to be able to transport their rations themselves, they asked for permission from the Karen [KNU] leaders, who gave them permission, and they could then transport their rations freely.

Arbitrary Demands

The Tatmadaw [soldiers] who are stationed in Dwe Lo Township made fewer arbitrary demands concerning [obtaining] thatch shingles and bamboo from villagers. If they needed bamboo and thatch shingles, they sometimes asked the village heads, and the village heads in turn asked villagers to produce it for them, and [the Tatmadaw] paid [the villagers] the price that the village heads had decided.

Civilians' situation

Since the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire was signed, the villagers who live in Dwe Lo Township have been able to stay in their villages. In the past, they fled into the jungle as displaced persons, but at present they are able to return to their own villages and live peacefully. They have better chances to work and travel now.

Civilians' livelihoods

The villagers in Dwe Lo Township mostly earn their living from cultivation, farming, sesame plantations, and bean plantations. Some civilians are involved in trade and earn a profit from selling goods. This is how the villagers earn their living. In 2015, some paddies were destroyed by floods and unfavourable weather after they had been planted, especially in the plain farms. Furthermore, at the period of rice seed production, the paddies were attacked by insects. They have no insecticides to kill the insects and therefore many paddies were damaged. Some people [whose crops had been destroyed] had to work as day labourers in the hill farms and

³ These figures should be seen as estimates by the community member, not as figures based on statistical analysis.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for garrison duty but sometimes used in offensive operations.

plain farms in order to get rice from other villagers, whose paddies were growing well and had not been damaged by floods and insects.

Land confiscation

From the first to the fifth month of 2015 the villagers who live in Meh Way village tract and Meh Thoo village tract faced gold mining and land confiscation [problems]. Many plantations of villagers that are located near where the gold mining is taking place were damaged. The Karen [KNU] leaders organised [for land confiscation victims] to get 2 million kyat (US \$1,547.80)⁶ per acre of [confiscated] land as compensation for those whose land plantations had been confiscated, and they [the confiscators] gave it [the compensation] to the villagers. The civilians whose plantations were damaged [by the gold mining] cannot plant crops on their lands anymore. In order for them to be able to grow their crops they have to find new places in other areas to continue farming.

Healthcare

The illnesses that the civilians who live in Dwe Lo Township mostly face are flu, malaria, fever, and joint pain in legs and arms. In terms of treatment for villagers, neither Tatmadaw [Burma/Myanmar government] nor Karen [KNU] healthcare departments are good enough to treat them. The civilians who face the illnesses [listed above] treat themselves in the villages, and if they do not feel better they go to the hospitals in the towns. It costs a lot of money when they go for treatment in the towns. Some civilians do not have money; therefore, they find a way to go to the old people and get some knowledge from them, and they then treat themselves with herbal medicine and get better.

Education

The civilians who live in our area, especially the children who are old enough to study, have good opportunities to study, but in our area there are not yet schools in all of the villages. If the children pass seven and eight standards⁷ they go on to finish their studies in the towns, camps, and other places where high schools are located. This is how the children try to finish [high] school.

Conclusion

I collected all the information in this report myself and I saw it with my own eyes. The information is true, therefore I reported it.

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

- “The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar,” (February 2016)
- “Hpapun Interview: Naw A---, April 2015,” (February 2016)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015,” (February 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)

⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 3rd of February 2016 official market rate of 1,292.12 kyat to the US \$1.

⁷ 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.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)