



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

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Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw L---, November 2015

This Interview with Naw L---describes the confiscation of Christian missionary land by the Tatmadaw in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District during 2012 and 2013. She describes the history attached to the church land and how the Tatmadaw confiscated the land. Naw L--- tried to get back the missionary land in various ways, including submitting a complaint letter to relevant authorities such as the land management Department, but it was not successful. In 2015, Naw L--- started over again to reclaim the land because the missionary land is almost all confiscated.

Interview | Naw L---, (Female, 53), B--- village, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District (November 2015)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Nyaunglebin District on November 11th 2015 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 Nyaunglebin District, including four other interviews, five complaint letters, one photo note, one situation update, 39 photographs and 2 other documents.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Church group member

Position: Church group member

Please firstly tell me what is your name?

My name is Naw³ L---

How old are you?

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern 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 southeastern 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.

³ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

53 years old

Where do you live?

I was born here in Ler Doh [Kyaukkyi Township], B--- village.

What is your job? What do you do for a living?

I just support the church as a church group member. In the church I play piano for the children. And children who are interested in it, they come and join. We also act for the Karen young generation to let them know about the story of the Karen.

What is your responsibility?

I do not have a specific duty and now I do everything, whatever I find that needs to be done. I was requested to do many things but I did not accept any of them. Karen Women's Organisation from Myanmar also called me to join them but I cannot help them effectively because since my father passed away I have to take over his jobs. My father was the director of H--- Baptist Christian Association. My father passed away four years ago and no one replaced him so I have to take over his jobs.

I have found some people reported about the confiscation of Hsaw Htee [Shwegyin Township] land through the media. So what do you know about that? Please explain me about it a little bit?

I was born later but I have lived with my father all of his lifetime and I knew about the story. In the past Hsaw Htee [Township] was called Shwegyin, and Karen mission high school is located in Shwegyin. Since the revolution began people fled and my father came back to Ler Doh after the Insein Bible School closed as he attended that school. He was leading and organising the villagers but at that time most of the villagers had already fled to other places. After my father collected the villagers [together], we resettled in Ler Doh and we named the place where we resettled, B--- village. We resettled in that place in 1960. My father started to organise the villagers who fled to the jungle and established the mission high school in 1960, but in 1964 it became the government high school in Kyaukkyi Town. Because all schools became government schools, our mission high school also became a Kyaukkyi government high school.

In what year was that?

In 1960 and we fled for 10 years.

In which year did your father set up the school?

In 1960, not only the school but also the village as well.

Where did they [your father and villagers] live before?

Before, as soon as the revolution began, we fled into the jungle. In 1950 we fled into the jungle and in 1951 we formed the first Kaw Thoo Lei government High School in K---village. At that time he [father] was only 28 years old, and when he attended Bible school he was 27 years old. When he found out the situation was getting stable in part of Per Htee Village, we came back. Before we came back to Ler Doh we went back to M--- village. At that time, in 1956, he [father] formed one middle school over there [in M--- village] as well. The Myanmar government told us that living in M--- village is not good as it is close to the outsider people [Karen National Union (KNU)], so [they told us to] come back and stay under [their] control in Ler Doh. So at the end of 1959 - 1960 we started to establish the school and village in Ler Doh.

So the K---School was started in 1951 right?

Yes.

So in which year did they [your father and villagers] move back [to M---]?

It was in 1956.

Then in what year did they [father and villagers] move to Ler Doh?

It was in 1960.

Did people live in that place at the time?

No one lived in it and it was completely forest, full of evil spirits and fighting happening in the surrounding [area]. And when we were cleaning the place dogs sometimes brought a human hand or leg. At that time Karen [KNU] were killing Burmese [Tatmadaw] and Burmese [Tatmadaw] were killing Karen [KNU]. That was happening very often and people wanted to flee from that place but my father said that we should not flee all the time and let's just stay, united. Then we just kept living in it [M---] and finally it became a village. There were no machines when [we were] cleaning the place so we were just cutting down the trees and bushes by hands and we had to dig out the root of the trees hard [it was difficult].

Were you already born at that time?

I was born in 1962.

What is your father's name?

Thara⁴ Saw⁵ H-----.

Was he married at the time?

He was married since he established the Kaw Thoo Lei government high school.

How many households [were there] when people first came and lived in that place [M--- village]?

Around 14 to 15 households, but at first he [Saw H---] asked help from one villager to build a house for the teacher. The villagers organised themselves and built the house, and there is one building in Ler Doh Township and one in S--- and one in M--- for the teachers. For the students also, their parents prepared the house for them as well. So at the beginning there were around 20 to 30 households and we also built up some huts. And later on, when the situation [conflict] was getting stable the village was also improving.

To whom did he ask for help?

He asked villagers from other villages. The villagers that fled were from Mone Township and Ler Doh Township.

⁴ *Thara* (male) or *tharamu* (female) is a Karen term used for any teacher, pastor, or any person to whom one wishes to show respect.

⁵ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

What did they [Saw H--- and villagers] name the school that they established here in Ler Doh?

They named it B--- Karen Mission High School. There were some difficulties when establishing the school as they needed the school materials for building up a school, so he [Saw H---] sold his heritage field from his parents, around 5 to 6 acres. He started to establish the school like that and built up a small building and at the time we had a proper food supply [paddy] but he prioritised doing the necessary things first. At the beginning it was not easy to collect the salary for teachers but later on villagers supported that, gradually. Our betel⁶ plantation in Mone Township was gone [sacrificed] for that school.

So the teachers had to fund themselves?

Yes, just for only one to two years and the villagers also understood the difficult situation and at the time the official salary of teachers was 200 kyat to 300 kyat [US \$0.15 to US \$0.23]⁷ but villagers were only able to pay 150 kyat [US \$0.11] according to their understanding [their agreement].

Where did he [Saw H---] get the teachers?

Just from among the people who fled.

Were they Karen or Burmese?

All were Karen.

Are there any other ethnic people [who] came and attended that school?

Many Burmese came and attended that school because it was the first high school and the grade was only up to 6th standard in Ler Doh. So people who had money, they just went to Toungoo and Nyaunglebin to continue high school and for those people [who] did not have money they just quit the school after they reached 5th or 6th standard. Because of that condition my father established the high school. The vision was [that] education is the main [priority] and because we did not have education, education was [used as] the main [way to] control [people], not [through] power as [the way to] control. As a proverb said, *'wisdom is supreme: if we have knowledge and wisdom then we will have a stable life'*. We were displaced in 1959 and now [after that] we wanted to live stably so we established a high school in 1960 and in 1964 our school became a Myanmar government school. In 1970 my father formed a Bible school as there was only Insein Bible School at that time and it was difficult to go and attend that school.

Did the Myanmar government give him [Saw H---] permission to form that [Bible] school?

Yes, when we lived in M--- [village] they [Myanmar government] told us that, *"you live close to outside people [KNU] and as it is in-between the KNU and Myanmar government [controlled area] one of them will [have a] misunderstanding for sure as you live between them. So come back and live under the Myanmar government control"*. Then my father came back [to] live under the Myanmar government control.

So the Myanmar government recognises the place that you recently [now] live in?

⁶ In Burmese, 'betel nut' and 'betel leaf' are referred to as *konywet* and *konthih*, respectively, as if they are from the same plant. The Burmese names are also commonly used by Karen language speakers. Betel nut is the seed from an areca palm tree, *Areca catechu*; "betel leaf" is the leaf of the piper betel vine, belonging to the *Piperaceae* family.

⁷ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 20th October 2016 official market rate of 1,291.22 kyat to US \$1.

Yes, they [Myanmar government] asked my father to come and have a look at the place and my father chose the place by himself. There was no Myanmar military [Tatmadaw] department office or other building at that time. Just after we resettled over there they [Myanmar military] requested to come and live in it. And my father considered that he just has to have [a good] relationship with them so he allowed the Myanmar military to come and live on [the land].

How many acres of land was he [Saw H---] allowed by the Myanmar military to live in?

At that time he was allowed to live on the whole military place and what I heard is that it was around 20 acres. The total extent of the military land is 46 acres and my father was allowed to live on 20 acres, [which] was half of the land that my father was able to use. But they [Myanmar military] also came and lived on it and my father told them, *'Please stay a little bit far from us,'* and they replied that they just want to live close to us. But then our missionary land was left as only 8 acres since they [Myanmar military] put in their buildings, but the buildings were damaged [so] then they planned to move to Battalion #60.

Have people from the land management ministry come and measured your [missionary school] land?

Just once at the beginning and when the issue [increased] then they measured again and the extent of our land was left as very little. They just kept the measurement result at their office, they did not show us. They just told us when we went to their office that our land was not 40 acres anymore and what was left was very small.

What is the size they said when they measured the land for the first time?

It was 46.20 acres. The top leaders from Bago and Yangon Divisions came and they asked the land management department to measure the land.

Do you know their names?

Commander Khin Ohne and Commander Sein Win who is the first Senior General of Myanmar.

In what year was the land confirmed [as missionary school land]?

In 1964 and they gave us the map of the land but our land remained as application land [land pending a land title]. Then my father asked [the land department's] responsible people about the land and they replied that, *"It is fine if you have the map of this land because you are the first who entered onto this land and you already have evidence so people cannot make trouble [by taking your land]"*. And we made sure and asked the land management [department] and they said that it is correct. At that time no one who was dealing [with] land issues [had problems] like that.

Did you get a land grant at that time?

No one in Shwegyin and Ler Doh [Townships] has [a] land grant because it was [during] the conflict time. Even now there are many people who do not have a land grant. But those who have a close relationship with the leaders [Tatmadaw], they do have land grants, and those who do not have a close relationship do not.

In what year did they [Myanmar military] take back the land?

As I have mentioned, since [the time that] we entered and resettled onto that land they also came and lived on it.

How did they put their base camp on it?

They just came and repaired the place for their soldiers somewhere [on the land]. At the time there was only military and later on they were asked to move back to Than Bo, then they reduced their soldiers and when they reduced their soldiers on that land they built up their township office again. At that time we did not have a chance to report or submit the complaint letter about [it], so our land was not left [with] much [acreage].

Did they repair [improve] their buildings after 1960?

They did not improve the buildings after 1960 and [when] their buildings were damaged they then came and lived in our church buildings, which are Bible student buildings and Bible teachers' buildings and [the] township office. The township office was totally damaged and my father repaired the other two damaged buildings. Because we lived in the border area for 17 years my father lost the connection with the relevant leaders, but in the past if something happened they came and informed my father. Because my father lost connection with them while living on the border area my father was not able to repair our church buildings and they were damaged. We came back [from the border] in 1997 and my father checked those buildings and repaired some of the damaged buildings. And when he repaired the buildings he faced some difficulties and he said to the Myanmar military that, *"You guys came and lived in our buildings and now you do not allow me to repair the buildings"*.

Who did not allow him?

Tactical Commander U⁸ Thet Oo. U Thet Oo got promoted to the position very quickly because he was taking too much [a lot of] power when he was in Mone Township, and when he came here my father faced [spoke] with him directly and then he disappeared. He was just abusing his power that like and when [he] came back again to Ler Doh, after he disappeared for a while, he detained two of my father's subordinates who my father had asked to take down the buildings. He [U Thet Oo] charged my father 4000 kyat [US \$3.09] for each of his subordinates to take them back [release them] from his detention.

What does the current situation look like now?

In 2012 when we were cleaning the compound [church land] another tactical commander came and told us that he does not know all of the story regarding this church land and he said that [we should] just leave a plot of land for him and clean the rest of the land. And then the officers from the township level asked us to stop cleaning the land as the peace [military situation] is not guaranteed as stable. We have stopped since then, and now we started over again because our land was almost confiscated and now the opportunity has opened up [to reclaim it]. Like before, some students have to go and attend the school at the refugee camp and they have difficulties and now the situation is getting better and people would like to come back inside of the country. [They would like to] attend either the Bible school or the government school here in Ler Doh; that is why we need more place [land] for the learning centre. Now we need the place for the students and for the dining place and agriculture place and we have to put up those buildings. And on [the] other hand, our land was confiscated by people [Myanmar government] and we have to try to get back the rest of our remaining land. Actually we just want to stay on our land peacefully but they do not care about that.

What did they tell you?

According to our previous meeting with township officers – not the top one [highest-ranking officer] just the lower two officers - they said that they do not know about this land [confiscation]

⁸ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

issue and they just got the order from Nay Pyi Taw⁹ [headquarters] to inquire and report about it and they did it. But, 7 to 8 months after that report about our investigation [about the land confiscation issue] we did not get any response from them. They also told me that they do not know about the building [on the confiscated land] as well, so we have to ask the general administration officer about it, but at lunch time we could not find the general administration officer and we do not know where he is. So we do not know what their tricky action [plan] to [do to] us is.

Have they built up the buildings a lot? What have they built up?

There are three types of buildings that they plan to build up, which are: the cooperative office, the commission office, and the community development office. The first building that they started to build up was being built only for two or three weeks. The construction workers are saying that they [are] just doing this because of the order [they received] and if they got an order to stop constructing the building then they could stop.

Are they building up any other buildings on the land?

I heard that the municipality is the contractor for the building which is [being] constructed on our church land. So we just let it continue and we don't want the thing to get messed up [cause trouble] and we just want to get the rest of our remaining land. I don't know how much of our remaining land is left and I think it would be only around 4 to 5 acres. I have no idea how to tell them to stop building on our church land or [if we should] let them just finish the first building that they have already constructed and not continue the other two buildings because even one building takes a up a large space. We do not know what to do about this and if we just let them carry on then our land will be gone [lost].

Have you ever tried to take any action based on what they are doing?

We tried to submit the complaint letter once or twice, but they did not send our complaint letter to above [relevant department that deals with land issues]. They just said that it is not easy to deal with this, as your land has no [land] grant and you don't have enough evidence [that you own it]. But the third time, our complaint letter arrived to the superiors, and they ordered [their staff to] investigate this land issue, but I don't think this guy [their assistant leader] will help us with the land issue. They just know that our Karen people are easy going, so they do not take us seriously and just treat us this way.

How many buildings have they already built?

They have started to build up the first building by now.

I mean since the past and until now.

In the past when my father came back [to Ler Doh] they built up the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party]¹⁰ office and the exchange office. I heard that they also repaired the information office but the situation was getting worse so they stopped, however I heard that they rebuilt it in another place. For us, we are just waiting for the order from the leaders in Nay Pyi

⁹ *Naypyidaw* (also spelled *Nay Pyi Taw*) is the capital city of Burma/Myanmar. In 2005 the military regime moved the capital from Rangoon 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.

¹⁰ 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 2nd 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.

Taw [to tell us] about how they will handle this for us but we have not heard anything and now they [Myanmar military] have started putting the buildings up.

So how do you feel when you get no response for the actions you have taken?

Our Karen people are the people who want to live life peacefully. Then I tried to organise up [the community] but our villagers and religious leaders have different opinions and just because [of this] they [Myanmar military] take the opportunity [to take the land]. Since the B--- village was formed I organised villagers [young people] and village leaders and church leaders and we acted in our own sectors and cleaned up the land. Now I find the way and we should not give up easily like before when people threatened us and we were afraid of the challenges. Our forefathers committed [by] themselves to establish villages for a long time and now those people [military] do not need to commit to anything [to establish a new village] and they can make up this [claim] for the land to become their property. Now we feel that it is not appropriate to lose our heritage land from our forefathers so easily, therefore we need to stand up and work together and now I think the opportunity is open up for us [to act]. However they [Myanmar military] have no idea why we try to take back the remaining land and what are we going to do on it. So I plan to clean the land just to put the playground for the children, such as a cane ball ground and a badminton playground, and agricultural land. I would be grateful if the villagers help us in cleaning the land.

How much of your land do you think has gone for the buildings that they [Myanmar military] have already built on your land?

When my father was alive we already gave them [military] one football ground and the land for the high school and the land for the electric office and the construction site also [so it] would be around 10 acres. And now they again are putting the buildings, such as the USDP office and the exchange office, and it would take around 5 acres [extra]. So the land already gone is around 15 acres and we do not want to make any problem for these 15 acres of lost land. The remaining land left is only around 5 to 6 acres.

Do they still plan to keep confiscating the land or [will they] stop confiscating it?

I met with the tactical commander for the issue of this land and he said that this land was first requested by the military and he did know what the above order is, so he cannot handle it at the moment. The township [responsible people] do not let us to meet with them [Tatmadaw], who confiscated the land, so maybe they are just abusing the military power in some way by thinking that we do not dare to complain to them [about] the way that [the] military is living on our land. If they give us a chance to meet with them then we can discuss about the land. Now they play a tricky game [with] us, whether it is military or government [who we should talk to].

Does the military still live on this land?

There are only three soldiers guarding the land and they are just drinking alcohol and if people pass over [by the land] they ask [the villagers] to buy the beer for them. They told us that, *"If you are gaining [taking] this land please let us [go] back because here we have nothing to do [guarding the land]"*. And another thing is I think maybe they want the plants that are existing such as ironwood, teak and gum trees on the land because those plants are really expensive. They have already cut down those trees a lot and when they cut down the trees we told them that they belong to our church land and now there are not many plants left.

So when they came and cut down the trees and when you told them like that, how do they respond to you?

We did not complain at first, we just started complaining to them when we started cleaning the land around two or three weeks ago, but in the past they did whatever they wanted. At that time even if you complained it wasn't effective at all.

Now when you are complaining to them how do they respond to you?

The people who came and cut the trees said that they already took the permission from the tactical commander and that they thought that the land belonged to the tactical commander. Then they apologised to us because they said that they did not know it belonged to the church but in the past they just cut the trees with the permission of the tactical commander.

The people who cut the trees are soldiers or villagers?

They are just the villagers who cut the trees for others and they got the profit for it.

I want to ask another thing. Do you have any plan to clean up the land and/or repair the building?

The problem right now is that we have a crowded space for the dormitory students but we were not able to build more buildings, however, if the military gives us their old buildings we could repair them [we will have more space]. Actually they should give us [the buildings] because they are already damaged, three of our buildings and the buildings that they store the paddy in are totally damaged. At the time when my father was alive, he repaired it and it cost 1,300,000 kyat [US \$1010.63]. So I just want them [military] to help us as much as they can and then we will try for the rest [of the cost of repairs] by ourselves. We have to try a lot and other buildings also have to be repaired and we will do it gradually.

How many ways have you tried to get back this place [church land]?

At first I started trying to get the land back alone and no one gave me suggestions for it. And my father also used to tell me before he died; he said that when other ethnic [groups] come and stay with you then you may not be able to live peacefully. Since then I tried to submit the complaint letter two to three times and I did not have success. Finally my complaint letter arrived to Nay Pyi Taw and later on I submitted the complaint letter to the KNU [Karen National Union], KPP [Karen People's Party]¹¹ and NLD [National League Democracy] and to all people who I think are powerful. So now I am starting over again together with villagers and we just only need unity as we do not have unity. But the thing is we are easily scared and if people are more serious [strict] against us then we just want to give up as we do not want to face complicated things [trouble].

Are there any other activities that you do?

There is nothing special right now and I can [will] build a proper relationship with the people from the land registration department except the top one as that one [person] does not know me yet.

So there is nothing special that you do [to get the land back]?

Yes, before we get this land we start cleaning the land but the problem is that there is a trench used for communication and we have to [work] hard to clean it. But there is one thing that we

¹¹ The Karen (or Kayin) People's Party is one of four ethnic Karen political parties represented in the Burmese government, currently holding a single legislative seat. Traditionally the KPP represents those Karen communities living outside of Karen State: Rangoon, Irrawaddy, and Bago regions, as well as Mon State where there is a Karen population. Saw Htun Aung Myint, the party's chairman, once served as a colonel in the Burmese Navy.

have no idea on where to ask for help because, as it is a former place of military, there will be military equipment remaining such as bombs and ordnance so please keep in mind for us [how] to get help for that. The trench is very wide and it was along all the land.

How many acres would it [the trench] be?

The trench was dug surrounding the 46 acres of land and sometimes the fighting happened with outside people [KNU]. That is why they [Myanmar military] dug the trench along the land.

What is the extent [size] of the trench?

From the eastern part it would be about a mile long. So that would be great if people could clear up the remaining bombs and ordnance as those are the risky things. Now the young villagers are cleaning the land without considering that risk because in the past when we cleaned the land we used to find bombs and we had no idea whether they could explode or not.

Did people who clean the land find anything special such as ordnance?

We were not aware of that because we did not get into the trench and we were just cleaning the surrounding [land]. The trench is so deep and only if you light it with torch light can [you] see in it. I just worry for my young villagers who clean the land because they are working carelessly and [if] they got into the trench they probably would be in danger.

How long have you been cleaning the land?

Just only for three days; it was on Saturday, Monday and Tuesday.

Do they see you guys when you guys are cleaning the land?

They just looked at us like that [watched us].

Did they say something to you?

No.

Did you also go and meet with them?

Yes, we met two and three people [controlled by] the tactical commander.

What did they say to you guys when you met with them?

They just told us that if you can negotiate this land [issue] successfully then we will go back to our place [military base] because we are getting bored living here without anything to do. My personal opinion is maybe the township responsible leaders want these plants [trees] on the land, so they ask the soldiers to come and stay on it [church land].

How many of their [Myanmar military] buildings remain [on the church land]?

Only one building is left and it is almost ruined.

How many soldiers live in it?

Just three soldiers and if three of them go back then another three soldiers come back again.

Where are they from?

They are from Than Bo [Town].

You said that they always stay there [church land]?

That is right and they are always drunk.

What is your future plan?

We just have to wait and see the situation. However, I have distributed the complaint letters to many groups [relevant organisations] but I did not hear anything back from any of them. So we just pray to God and by the grace of God the opportunity will open up for us. Now there is one opportunity from you [KHRG researcher] if your organisation [can] help me in one way. We just want to live peacefully because we have been suffering from this for around 50 to 60 years. We do not want to be against [fight] and we just want to deal [with] it peacefully. We have heard that after the land confiscation the compensation follows so we do not want those complicated things. We just want back the remaining land and we want them to give it us back in a peaceful way so that we can work on it freely.

How many acres of land were remaining?

I think that it would remain only around 5 to 6 acres. The land would remain more if they do not put the buildings in it and if their soldiers get off the land and there will be one more acre of land left.

Do you have any special plan to let the soldiers get off the land?

They [soldiers that come and stay in the land] just asked us to try to solve the land problem and if it is done then they can go back to their own place because perhaps they do not like living on the land as they feel like a ghost is haunting [the land].

Do they help people that go around in front of them?

No.

Do they question people at all?

No, they are just satisfied when villagers bring a can of beer for them.

But if villagers do not bring them a beer what then?

Because they are used to getting the beer from villagers, if they see the villagers then they ask for the beer.

What is your opinion based on my interview with you?

This is a kind of opportunity. We have never seen any reporters within 50 years because our land was recognised as a black area so we could not do anything. NGOs, media, reporters and photographers, none of them can come to our area. However, now I have a chance to speak with you and I share the information with you [KHRG researcher] because I believe that it will be beneficial for something. I understand that we should stand and work together in our own sector in order to achieve the prosperity for our people. I also believe that there might be a positive outcome for the thing [reporting] that you have done with me. In the past we just thought that we are going to give up easily because many people have been scared in their life. But now the opportunity is opening up and we should stand up and move forward as much as possible in

order to be able to live peacefully in our region and the region should become the light area [legal area] as it was recognised as a black area.

Is there anything else that you would like to add if I have not asked you?

We should give a commitment when we try to get something. When I processed the complaint letter also I tried to lead for making [writing] up the complaint letter. I have to pay for the expense. So we should not doubt that will there be meaning for the things that we are doing because we are just doing them for our people. We lost our house, our properties while living [over] 50 to 60 years. In the past we lived [were stuck] between the powerful people; like if we gave one cow to the Myanmar government we also had to give one hen to the outside people [KNU]. And sometimes they blamed us, such as complaining that we gave the other group [Myanmar government] more and just gave them [KNU] less and it is not fair. So we had to face armed conflict between these two groups and we lost our home and lands. However, although we have suffered this much we are still able to survive just because we have the firm [strong] spirit. We have the spirit that can face the challenges and we do not have the attitude against those who oppress us. Moreover, we have the attitude to forgive others. Just the only thing we do not have is intelligent [understanding about] how to move forward. You [KHRG researcher] also inform your leaders to come and have a look of our place. When my father was alive he always travelled. So after my father passed away we should go around and encourage each other. Now I do not travel like my father but I wrote the letters and distributed them to the villagers and told them to be united and encourage them to move forward as we have been struggling for more than 50 years. You also have conducted the interview with me so please report it [to the headquarters].

What would you like to suggest our KHRG organisation to improve in the future? What do you see as our weak point or [what is] needed?

We just heard about this organisation but we have never seen it. Because the situation is getting better I have met with you [KHRG member] now and if possible in the future I would like to provide one office [site for] your organisation to [have] contact with your team if any kind of human rights problem happens. We just have to consider our situation if our condition is good I would like to offer an office [site] for your organisation. The situation right now is [that] educated people are gone and poor people continue to face hardship. I think it is better that we die because some people underestimate themselves and some are over-arrogant. So we just need to correct our attitude and cooperate to be united and as the saying [goes], "*give yourself, know yourself and be yourself,*" we have to be like that.

Anything else you would like to say?

I have to do [the same work] like my father as he used to visit Bible teachers, township leaders and make up [organise] the fellowship, so I have to go around and meet with relevant leaders, villagers and young people in order to build up the understanding [cooperation]. The important thing is we should be able to have a good relationship and cooperate together. Thank you so much for the interview.

Thank you so much for your time.

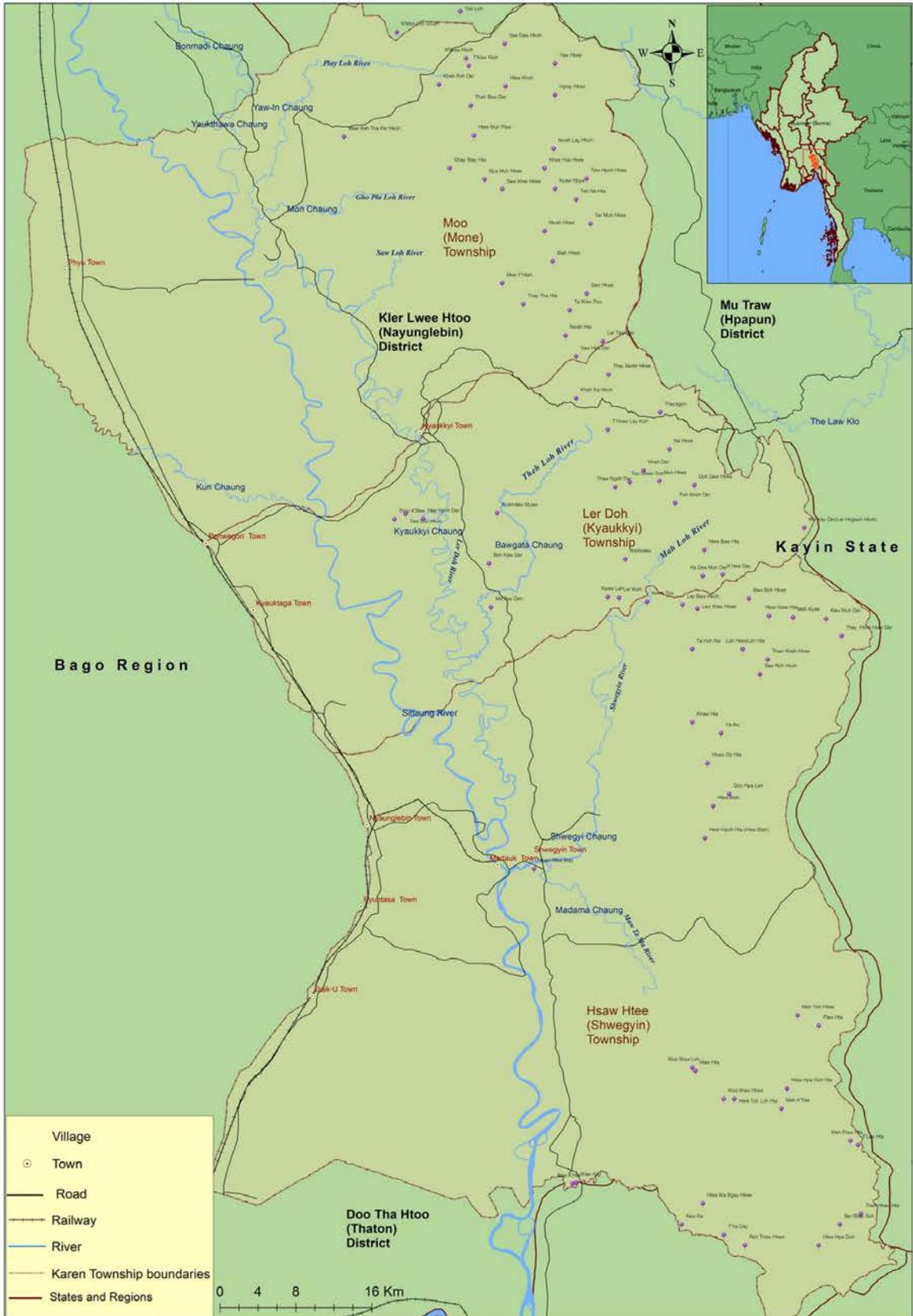


These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on November 11th and November 12th 2015, in B--- village, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. The photo on the left is of Naw L---, who is trying to reclaim missionary land that has been almost completely confiscated by the Tatmadaw. The photo on the right shows a football field built by the Tatmadaw on confiscated missionary land. *[Photos: KHRG]*

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

- “Nyaunglebin Interview: U A---, January 2016,” (September 2016)
- Two separate landmine incidents happened in Hpapun and Nyaunglebin districts, March and April 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, April to May 2016,” (August 2016)
- Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar, (August 2016)
- “The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar,” (February 2016)

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)