



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

June 5, 2017 / KHRG # 15-37-A4-I1

Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, March 2015

This Interview with Saw A--- describes events occurring in Toungoo Township, Toungoo District, during the period between 2014 and 2015, including education, healthcare, gold mining, forced relocation, land confiscation and taxation.

- *Saw A--- in B--- village, Toungoo Township, Toungoo District describes how his village had been forced to relocate in 1996. He explained how the villagers came back to stay in their village, and they submitted a registration letter to Township General Administrator, so that the village would be recognised.*
 - *The Thandaung Peace Group permitted business people to conduct gold mining in Oue Sar Ta Paw Lu and Ku Thel areas, Toungoo Township, since 2010. As a result, many of the villagers' lands were destroyed and the villagers did not receive any compensation.*
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Interview | Saw A---, (male, 45), B--- village, Toungoo Township, Toungoo District (March 2015)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Toungoo District on March 8th 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 Toungoo District, including four other interviews and 14 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Kayah [Karenni]

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

Position: Villager

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.

What is your name?

My name is Saw A---

How old are you?

I am 45 years old.

What is your ethnicity?

I am Kayah (Karenni).

What is your religion?

I am a Christian.

Are you married?

Yes, I am.

How many children do you have?

I have four children.

How old is your eldest child?

15 years.

How old is your youngest child?

Only six months.

Which village do you live in?

I live in B--- village.

Which Township is B--- village located?

B--- village is located in Toungoo Township.

What is your occupation?

I am just working on the farm as a farmer.

Is there any school in your village?

On November 8th 1991 we used to have a school,³ but this school was forced to relocate on February 18th 1996 because our village had been forced to relocate in that year.

Where did your village move [relocate] to?

We moved to Taing Phay village.

How long did you stay in Taing Phay village?

Only one year; we had to move again in 1997.

Where did you move in 1997?

We moved to Pa Sin Kone village.

When you moved to Pa Sin Kone village, the school was also moved there, correct? So did the [Burma/Myanmar] government build the school or did the villagers build it by themselves?

When? In 1991?

Was the school built by the [Burma/Myanmar] government in 1991?

³ The date given by the interviewee is from a day that he remembers the school was running. It cannot be attributed to any specific event that happened at the school.

No, we built it ourselves.

What about the school after you moved to Pa Sin Kone village in 1997?

There was a company, which was called Stone Production Company, in Pa Sin Kone village. They donated the school to the village.

The Stone Production Company?

Yes.

Do you know any other name of this Stone Production Company?

No. I do not know.

So this company built this school?

Yes.

When you were forced to move in 1997, when did you move to this village?

When we had to move for the second time, it was related to 1996. We were forced to relocate for the first time in 1996. However, most of the people were peasants in the village. So they moved back to the previous village to cultivate their farms. Thus, we had to move to Pa Sin Kone village again in 1997, even though the villagers were stubborn. When we returned to our old village nothing was confirmed yet [their village was not registered]. However, we submitted a letter to the Township General Administrator in 2015. He had to interrogate it for confirmation [registration] after we submitted the letter.

Why did you submit a letter to the Township General Administrator? Is it because you returned to your old village?

Yes, some people had built their houses in the village, so we wanted the Township General Administrator to recognise it because our village had been forced to relocate in 1996. They had destroyed our village. So we reported it to the Interior Ministry to reconfirm and recognise our village. Also, we reported it to the Township General Administrator in order to recognise our village.

Now do they recognise your village?

Yes.

So you did not have any school in your village before?

As I told you before, we used to have school from 1991 to 1996. Just five years.

So there was no school after the village relocation?

Yes.⁴

What about the villagers?

Some villagers stayed in the village. They came back to work on their farm.

Did they come back to stay in the village with their whole family?

Yes.

When they came back to the village with their whole family how did they send the children to school, as there was no school in the village?

⁴ According to the interviewee there was no school in Taing Phay village between 1996 and 1997. There was a school B--- village from 1991 until 1996, when the village was forced to relocate, and then in 1997 the Stone Production Company built them another school in Pa Sin Kone village.

As I told you before, for the children who are old enough to go to school, we send these children to the schools in nearby villages such as Pya Sa Khan village, Tha Thay Kone village and Ma Sin Kone village.

What challenges do they face when they go to school in another village? Can you tell me as a parent or a student?

As a parent, we worry for our children because the school is very far from home. They [children] have to cross a stream and a ditch. Also, they have to go through bushes and vines. The road is filled with mud during the rainy season. Some people take their children to the school but I cannot take my children.

In this area, what situation makes you worry about your children?

It is not like that. We worry if our children cross the car road because the children in rural areas are not aware of the cars on the road, as you know. How can I say? They do not have much knowledge about how to cross the road. So we worry that they will be hit by a motorbike or a car. However, it is fine when they walk in the street in the village with their friends.

From your village to Pya Sa Khan's school do the children have to go back and forth within one day?

Yes.

How far is it from your village and the school that the children attend?

Two miles. If they go back and forth it takes four miles.

As it is far, it will be difficult for children to travel. What will happen if they wake up late?

They will be late for the class.

Do parents rent a house for their children to study there?

For students who study at high school, we have to build a house for them there because they have to attend the tuition. For students who study at primary school, we could not build a house to stay in another village.

Do the students have to pay school fees?

In the 2014 academic year students did not have to pay school fees until eighth standard.

What about in the past?

In the past, I think they had to pay school fees.

Is there any organisation that donates school materials to the students, such as pens, pencils and books?

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supports the local school.

What about the Burma/Myanmar government?

I think UNICEF and the Burma/Myanmar government cooperate together.

How many students are there in your village?

There are 15 students who study at primary school, six students in middle school and three students in high school. Only three students are studying at university.

How many children [who are not able to go to school] are there in the village?

The children are getting older year by year. So everyone goes to school when they are old enough.

How many houses are there in your village?

There are [censored] houses and [censored] households in the village.

How many children are there in the village in total?

We do not separate the number of people like that. So I do not know how many children are in the village.

Do you have a clinic in your village? Do you also have a midwife and a nurse?

No, we do not have them.

How do you take care of sick people, as you do not have clinic in your village?

If people get sick we carry them and put them in a car on the nearby road. Then, we send them to the hospital.

Does anyone, or any organisation, come to the village and give medical treatment to the villagers if they are sick?

I heard that the KBC [Karen Baptist Convention] medical team called the people to attend a medical workshop, and they also donated medicine. We can take the medicine freely, but it is only to protect against malaria. They do not have medicine for other diseases because they [KBC] just came to give a workshop for a few days.

What does KBC stand for?

KBC stands for the Karen Baptist Convention.

How long did they [KBC medical team] stay and help the villagers in the village?

They went back after they finished their project. Then, we stayed in the village like this.

So you just had medical treatment when they [KBC] stayed in the village?

Yes. They left the village after they finished the project. I think they do not have any permission to come and stay in the village. I am not sure.

How much did they help the villagers when they stayed in the village?

We do not know about that because we did not record or check that kind of thing.

Was it [the medical workshop and medical treatment that KBC gave] effective?

I think it was effective. In the long run they have to run it [medical workshop] systematically.

Does the Burma/Myanmar government support the villagers' healthcare in your village?

The Burma/Myanmar government? [Laughing] No, they do not support [us].

Does anyone [who is employed by the Burma/Myanmar government] come and give vaccinations to the villagers?

There is no one who comes to give medical treatment in the houses, but the Burma/Myanmar government said that they will send a nurse to the village to give vaccinations to the children who are under five.

How do you cure people who have serious diseases?

For people who have serious diseases, we just send them to the hospital in Set Thone Maing village.

When you go to the hospital in Set Thone Maing village, do you get medical treatment for free?

No, we do not. We have to pay.

Do you have people who could not afford the medical fee and then could not go to hospital, although they had to visit the doctor because they had a serious health condition?

Regarding health, no one wants to die. So they have to solve their problems in their own ways.

I mean, for example, some people died, even though they did not want to die, because they could not pay money to the doctor?

We do not have those kinds of people or situations in our village, but I do not know the situation in other villages.

What do most people do for their livelihood?

Most of the people earn their living from farming.

So can they support their livelihood by working on the farm?

They are just getting by. They can earn their living for one year [by working on the farm]. After one year, they have to work on the farm again. They could not make a lot of money, like a big business.

Can you tell me about your yearly income from working on the farm?

I do not know about it in detail because I did not make a list for that.

For example, how much do you sell one basket of rice for in this season?

We sell one basket⁵ of rice for 3,500 or 4,000 kyat [US \$2.56 or \$2.93].⁶

How much does one viss of pork cost?

We have to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.66] for one viss⁷ of pork.

What about chicken meat?

It is also 5,000 kyat [US \$3.66] for one viss of chicken meat.

Do people in the village buy rice to eat?

It costs 15,000 or 16,000 kyat [US \$10.98 or \$11.71] for one sack⁸ of rice.

Have you faced any challenges or problems as a farmer?

Regarding the land, we did not have any argument but it is not clear. I mean we do not understand it clearly.

How is it not clear?

In 1997 *Nyein Chan Yay* [Thandaung Peace Group]⁹ asked the villagers to pay a yearly tax.

⁵ A basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg or 46.08 lb of paddy, and 32 kg or 70.4 lb of milled rice. A basket is twice the volume of a big tin.

⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 30th May 2017 official market rate of 1366 kyat to US \$1.

⁷ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg or 3.52 lb.

⁸ A sack is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One sack is equivalent to 31.35 kg or 69.12 lb of paddy, and 48 kg or 105.6 lb of milled rice. A sack is also equivalent to three big tins.

⁹ Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh, or 'Thandaung Peace Group', is a local militia located in Toungoo District. The group split from the Karen National Union in 1997 and was initially led by Khe R'Mun. Reports from the field claim that they are currently led by General Bo Than Myin, have around 300 troops stationed at Leik Tho Base (Battalion Commander Bo Kyaw Win), in Leik Tho Township, and an additional 40 soldiers at Pya Sa Khan Base (Battalion Commander Khin Maung Lwin), near Thandaung town. It has been reported that they control a number of different illicit operations, including gambling and black market car licencing. They are also allegedly employed as security personnel by local companies and wealthy individuals involved in logging and mineral resource extraction, in addition to having direct involvement in the lumber and mineral business. Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh should not be confused with Nyein Chan Yay A'pweh, which is occasionally translated as Peace Group but refers to the Karen Peace Army (KPA), aka the Karen Peace Force (KPF). Nor should it be conflated with Aye Chan Yay, another small militia group also operating in Toungoo District that the Thandaung Peace Group has come into

What do you mean by yearly tax? What kind of tax did they ask?

They gave [the land] a title like "Army Group's Territory". Then they demanded tax from the people.

What do you mean by Army Group's Territory? Who gave them [Thandaung Peace Group] these lands or territory?

In November 1997 they [Thandaung Peace Group] entered the village. The Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant General Tin Oo, gave them 1,350 acres of land, in order to earn their living. It also included these lands and other lands in another village.

Did it also include B--- village?

Yes.

When they took 1,350 acres of land, did it all belong to the villagers?

Oh yes. All of those lands belonged to the local villagers who lived in Taing Phay village, Lel Tan village and Pya Sa Khan village. So they confiscated those lands from three villages.

When the Thandaung Peace Group confiscated the 1,350 acres of land from the villagers, what did the villagers grow on those lands?

The villagers grew long term plantation on some land and garden [vegetables] on some land.

Did they give the villagers compensation?

No, they did not.

Did they inform you that they were going to confiscate the lands at that time?

At that time we were moved from place to place, in 1996 and 1997, so we did not know anything about land confiscation.

After they confiscated the lands, can the villagers cut the trees and bamboo on those lands?

Yes, they can, but they [Thandaung Peace Group] will arrest them if they see the people cutting the trees.

So they [Thandaung Peace Group] were not only given the land?

Yes, they took the lands and also said all of the resources on those confiscated lands belonged to them, including the trees and the water.

Are these the only problems you have regarding the land issue? What other problems do you have?

Some farmers became jobless. After their lands were confiscated they felt like they had lost their lives.

As you told me before, did they only collect tax on the farms? What about the tax on the other kinds of land?

They also collected tax on the farm and the betel nut plantation. If the villagers could produce 10 viss of betel nut, they had to give one viss of betel nut to Thandaung Peace Group.

Do you know who is in charge of the Thandaung Peace Group?

In 1997, an explosion maker [saboteur] from Battalion #4 and Kwe Mu from Battalion #3 led the Thandaung Peace Group at that time. However, they changed their leadership management [leaders] in 2015.

conflict with. It is also distinct from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council, which is also sometimes translated as 'Peace Group'.

Have they been collecting taxes from the people up until now?

Yes.

Do you know the current leader of the Peace Group?

People say that now the leader is Bo Than Myint.

What is the position of Bo Than Myint?

I do not know.

Is he the chairperson?

People said that he is the chairperson.

What about vice chairperson?

The vice chairperson is Bo Kyaw Win.

Do they separate their army camps in different places? And who is in charge of your area [village]?

The people said that the person who is responsible for the army camp is Khin Maung Lwin. The person who is in charge of the area is Maw Ket.

What did Khin Maung Lwin do in the past? Who was he?

We do not know.

How much tax do you have to pay on the farmland?

We just have to give one rice sack for one acre of farmland.

If the villagers could not give anything, due to many problems, what will they [Thandaung Peace Group] do? Do they sue the villagers?

They do not sue the villagers for that, but they try to get the tax from the villagers until they get it.

So they ask for the tax until they get it?

Yes, but some people do not give anything. They are told not to give anything at the present time.

What about in the past? Did you have to pay?

In the past we had to pay, but when the new government came out people became aware of the different kinds of taxes that they should pay.

So for how long did you not pay taxes?

Only in 2015 we did not pay taxes.

You do not have to pay or you have not paid yet?

They [Thandaung Peace Group] just keep asking for the tax, but some villagers [peasants] do not pay.

Oh it means you have to pay but you just have not paid yet. Right?

Yes.

Did they send an order letter to the villagers, in order to pay tax?

I heard they asked a village administrator to send a letter to the villagers [to make them] pay tax.

Did they go to the villagers' houses to ask for the tax, or did the villagers have to go to their place [camp] to pay the tax?

We had to go to their office and pay the tax.

In 2015, did they send a letter to the villagers in order to [make them] pay tax?

They did, but the villagers have not paid yet.

Do they sue the villagers who do not pay the tax?

They do not sue the villagers.

Do they send a summons letter to call the villagers?

Yes. They did.

Why do they send a summons letter? Just to meet them?

They want to talk about land issues such as the land arrangement, so they sent a letter.

Regarding the land, do the villagers have any conflict with the Thandaung Peace Group?

How can I say? They just call themselves the Thandaung Peace Group, but they do not have a symbol showing that they are for peace. If I say clearly, everything they have done has been destruction. They dig gold in Oue Sar Ta Paw Lu and Ku Thel areas, and they also dig gold along Thin Nyin Chaung [stream]. Due to the gold mining, many areas of land have been destroyed.

Oh they just dig the gold in the farms?

Yes.

I mean Oue Sar Ta Paw Lu and Ku Thel lands?

Yes.

Did they give compensation for the land destruction?

No. They did not give [any compensation].

Could the people still work on the farm?

No. They could not work on the farm anymore. They lost their farm because their lands were confiscated.

Did the Thandaung Peace Group confiscate their lands?

Yes.

Did they [Thandaung Peace Group] arrange the digging of the gold on their farm?

Yes.

How long have they dug the gold?

They started to dig the gold in 2010. It has been five years.

Are they still digging the gold?

Yes.

Because of the digging of the gold, it impacted the environment and the villagers. So what did they do for the villagers?

They did nothing for the villagers.

Who came to dig the gold? Where do they come from?

The people who dug the gold came from the border. They are from Ban Maw. They are business people.

Did you report it to the local authority, regarding the land destruction because of the gold production?

How can I say? We do not report it because there are many relevant leaders who govern the country. They know what is happening on the ground. I think it is not good to report it because it is their business. If they think it [gold digging] is not good then they will ban it. That is all.

As this area is controlled by the Thandaung Peace Group, do the soldiers come often to this village?

They come to the village once a year.

What about in 2015?

They came then too.

As I asked you before, do the people's militia¹⁰ and the Burma/Myanmar government military [Tatmadaw] cooperate? Are they both related?

The people's militia is one of the Burma/Myanmar government's organisations. I think.

Did [Tatmadaw] soldiers come to the village?

In 2015 they arrived in the village.

Which month?

March 16th 2015

Which battalion?

Infantry Battalion¹¹ #439.

Who is in charge of IB #439?

I do not know.

How many soldiers came to the village?

More than 30 soldiers

What did they do in the village?

I think they came to the village because of the gold case.

Did they meet you?

Yes.

What did they talk to you about, regarding the gold case?

Before March 16th, the people's militia entered into the KNU area on March 13th 2015. They came to arrest people who dug the gold, because the government had already sent an order letter not to dig the gold. After that, IB #439 came to the village.

When did IB #439 come to the village?

March 16th 2015

What did they talk to you about?

¹⁰ *Pyithu sit* translates to 'people's militia,' which is a militia structure into which local civilians are conscripted to serve in village or town militia groups. For further reading on the *pyithu sit*, see "[Enduring Hunger and Repression: Food Scarcity, Internal Displacement, and the Continued Use of Forced Labor in Toungoo District](#)," KHRG, September 2004.

¹¹ An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

They just came to meet the business people who dug the gold. The authorities who allowed them to dig the gold have to take responsibility. It depended on the authorities who allowed the business people to dig the gold.

Who came to close the gold project? Was it the KNU?

The KNU just sent out a letter not to do the gold project. It was like a prohibition letter.

What about the Burma/Myanmar government? Did they allow the business people to do the gold project?

No, the Burma/Myanmar government also did not allow [the gold project].

So who allowed the business people to dig the gold?

The Thandaung Peace Group.

Where did the Thandaung Peace Group allow the business people to dig the gold?

In the 1,350 acres of their [Thandaung Peace Group] lands

So how did the Burma/Myanmar government respond?

The Thandaung Peace Group is split from the KNU. If they do something they have to let each other know what they are going to do. As I told you, it is fine if they get along with each other, but if they do not get along it will become a problem. If the problem between the armed groups becomes bigger it will only affect the villagers.

They [Thandaung Peace Group and KNU] do not get along right now?

I could not say exactly yet, because this project has been banned by a decision from the KNU District committee. For example, people have to follow the law that they [armed groups] set up. An organisation [armed group] has to submit a requested letter [an apology] to the leader [for what they have done]. It should not be like the villagers have to request it [apology letter].

Now the KNU submits a requested letter? What happens?

I just have talked about an example. The Thandaung Peace Group is split from the KNU, so they must communicate with each other by any method. It is fine if they get along with each other, but if they do not get along it will become a problem. If the problem between armed groups becomes bigger it will only affect the villagers.

Who permitted the business people to dig the gold?

The Thandaung Peace Group. The Thandaung Peace Group is a people's militia, which split from the KNU based in the Thandaung Special Zone.

Did the KNU know that the Thandaung Peace Group permitted business people to dig the gold?

The KNU knew already. That is why they came to the village.

So the KNU did not know because the Thandaung Peace Group did not inform the KNU about it, but when the KNU knew they came to close gold project. Is it like that?

Yes, we can say it is like that.

How did the Tatmadaw come to the village?

I do not know exactly why the Tatmadaw came to the village. They came to stop the project because the Thandaung Peace Group did not follow the rule or order. For example, the Tatmadaw inquired about things, such as how many business people they [Thandaung Peace Group] had called [to do the mining] and how many workers were employed on the gold project.

Did they [Tatmadaw] call the business people at that time?

No.

How did the Burma/Myanmar government handle the case, when the Thandaung Peace Group permitted the business people to dig the gold?

The 1,350 acres of the Thandaung Peace Group's land is nothing to compare to the whole of Burma/Myanmar. Look at the people who govern the whole country. Who are they? *"It should be only the Burma/Myanmar government. It is not appropriate that they [Thandaung Peace Group] can do illegal business because they think they have power".*

Who said those words?

Commander of IB #439.

What did he say exactly?

How can I say? It is like they should not permit business people to dig the gold in the 1,350 acres of their lands.

So he means that his leadership in the Tatmadaw army is superior?

It is not like that. The civilian government does not act like them. Why did they give permission for a gold project? He just said that they [Thandaung Peace Group] should not do things like that again.

What happened after they [Tatmadaw] called to meet the Thandaung Peace Group, regarding the gold project? Did they have any conflict?

They did not have any big conflict, they just discussed the gold project and they negotiated with each other.

The gold project affected the villagers a lot. So they [Thandaung Peace Group] called to meet the business people. Did they also call the villagers?

No.

The Thandaung Peace Group confiscated the land in the past. Do they still have the confiscated land and use those lands for the gold project in 2014 and 2015? I heard about it at the current time. I mean what has happened that was so special in 2014 and 2015?

In 1997 they started to arrive at the village. In 1999 they started to sell their lands. Then they demanded the tax from the people. When the gold project emerged, they gave the permission to the business people to dig the gold. As a result, it affected the villagers a lot. Finally, only the villagers have suffered from land confiscation, land destruction, taxation and social problems. The local villagers could not avoid those sorts of things because they are local residents here.

When they confiscated the land in the past, they just confiscated it verbally. What about now? Do they build a fence on the confiscated lands? Do they dig the ground with a bulldozer?

I have not seen them dig the land with a bulldozer, but they set up a post to build a fence.

When did they set up the post to build a fence?

Last year. In 2014

Who set up the post? The Burma/Myanmar Government?

No, it was the private business people.

Who permitted those private business people to set up the post?

They [business people] bought the lands from the Thandaung Peace Group. Then they set up the post to make a fence, in order to stop the villagers who try and get their lands back.

When they [business people] cut or cleaned the trees and bushes, to build a fence, did they have a problem with the villagers?

They just came and built a fence. They did not do anything special. The villagers also did not do anything and they [villagers] just watched. If they [business people] did something wrong, the villagers would do what they should do [against the business people].

Have you ever tried to report to an organisation or leader, personally or collectively, in order to get back the lands or to receive compensation, based on the lands that were confiscated by the Thandaung Peace Group?

Some villagers have tried to report it to an organisation, but I am just now drawing a plan to report it.

How have some villagers tried to report to an organisation, in order to get back their lands or compensation?

As my sister talked about it before, they have also reported it but I am trying to plan to report it at the current time.

When the villagers tried to get back their lands, did some people [villagers] reject it?

We can reject it if they [government] create a Land Form #7 certificate,¹² because we have the rights to reject it. To reject or not, it depends on what kind of land form they create.

People can reject it if Land Form #7 fails. It means they already created Land Form #1?

They [government] have not created Land Form #1 yet, we just prepare to reject it if they create it.

When Thandaung Peace Group confiscated the land, they did not have Land Form #7. Right?

Yes. They have not got Land Form #7 yet.

What about your side? Did you already have Land Form #1 and Land Form #7?

In Ka Mout Chan, outside the area of the lands that were confiscated, the villagers already applied to the government for Land Form #7.

When they applied for Land Form #7, did they have to pay money?

No, they did not have to pay.

What about if they apply for Land Form #1?

No, no need to pay.

During the period between 2012 and 2015, after the [2012] preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed by the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government, what did you think of the KNU? What is your opinion?

If we look at the past, the KNU is an organisation which stands for Karen people. As it is an organisation for Karen people, they [KNU] must have responsibilities and duties. As for me, I did not work for the KNU so I do not know about the KNU in detail.

I mean what do you want to suggest to the KNU, as they serve the people? What do they need to do after the [2012] preliminary ceasefire? What is your opinion?

As the KNU is an [administering] organisation, their leaders set the rules or the laws for the people. The KNU members follow the law as the leaders set it. Regarding the ceasefire process, they pay attention to the people. They said they will make peace for the people. This plan is good, I think.

¹² Land Form #7 is the land grant required to work on a particular area of land. In Burma/Myanmar, all land is ultimately owned by the government.

What about the Burma/Myanmar government? It has already been two or three years since the [2012] ceasefire agreement was signed.¹³ What do you think of it? What is your opinion?

The government has changed. They just changed their rules or strategies, but they did not change their people [the Burma/Myanmar government staff]. So I think it does not matter. It will be same because they just changed the rules. They did not change their people.

What do you mean “it will be same”?

I mean, it is like the soldier just changes his uniform to civilian clothes but he does not change.

You mean the order is the order. Just like the previous Burma/Myanmar government?

They have just slightly reduced some of the difficult situations. They changed their clothes and they wear civilian clothes, so they show the civilians that they are also civilians. As I told you before, if they wear their uniform how can they gain trust from the people?

You mean the people do not trust them completely right now?

The people have already suffered from what they did to the people in the past. The people have had the experience. So the people already know what they are going to do. The people can guess what their attitude looks like.

What do you want to say for the last thing?

I do not have anything more to say.

I mean what is your view? What do you feel? You can talk to me.

What I want to say is, we do not get any support or help until now, since we were forced to relocate in 1996. The only support we got was from religious groups. It is just a little, but it is not that I want to have support. I mean, it was very hard or difficult to support our livelihood when we were forced to relocate. Also, our lands were confiscated. That is enough I think.

Do you want to say more?

No. I do not have anything more to say.

If so, thank you for sharing. Do you want me to use this information or interview for KHRG? Do you allow that?

Yes

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

- "Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, June to August 2016," (March 2017)
- "Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, January 2016," (February 2017)
- "Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, November 2015," (February 2017)

¹³ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage](#) on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors began in Yangon, see [“Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations,” Karen National Union Headquarters](#), March 18th 2015. Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see [“KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders’ Summit,” Karen News](#), April 22nd 2015.

- “Toungoo Field Report, January 2015 to December 2015: Slow transitions towards real change,” (January 2017)
- “Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, December 2015,” (November 2016)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)