



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Situation Update**

April 6, 2017 / KHRG #16-104-D1

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## **Hpa-an Short Update: Hlaingbwe Township, March to October 2016**

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*This Short Update describes events occurring in Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District between March and October 2016, including forced relocation, a demonstration held by villagers and the problem of landmines.*

- *Villagers in Kloo Htaw village tract and Meh P'Roh village tract were forced to relocate by the Border Guard Force (BGF).*
  - *The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was blocked from accessing food by the BGF. This resulted in villagers also being blocked from accessing food. Therefore, A--- villagers held a demonstration to protest the BGF's food blockade on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2016.*
  - *Villagers' livestock stepped on landmines planted by DKBA in Hlaingbwe Township and the villagers had to resell the injured livestock for very low prices.*
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### **Short Update | Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District (March to October 2016)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2016. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an 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>*

This Situation Update [was documented] from March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in Lu Pleh [Hlaingbwe] Township, Hpa-an District.

The armed groups in Lu Pleh Township, Hpa-an District are the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], the BGF [Border Guard Force]<sup>2</sup>, government military [Tatmadaw] and

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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.

<sup>2</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 are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion

Battalion Kloh Htoo Lah of the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army]<sup>3</sup> which is also known as Bo Bi's<sup>4</sup> troops. The conflict occurred between Bo Bi's troops and the BGF in Kloo Htaw village tract and Meh P'Roh village tract. The BGF blocked the DKBA [from accessing] food which also blocked villagers from accessing and transporting it. In response, A--- villagers held a demonstration on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2016.

According to information gathered in the area, the BGF and the Tatmadaw were planning to attack the DKBA on September 4<sup>th</sup> 2016 to remove them from Kloo Htaw and Meh P'Roh village tracts. They [the BGF and the Tatmadaw] want to have them [the DKBA] removed from the village tracts within a month. All villagers who lived in Kloo Htaw and Meh P'Roh village tracts were forced to relocate by the BGF and to resettle in Kaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu] Town.

In the same month, fighting broke out on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2016. [Before the fighting] the DKBA had built [their army camps] in Kloo Htaw and Meh P'Roh village tracts. Wa Kluh Loo, Htee Yer Kloh, Kloo Htaw, Htee Wa Hkaw Hta, Htee K'Neh Hta army camps were situated in Kloo Htaw village tract. Htee Kloh Thaw Hta, Guh Thaw Poo, Ler Klah, and Yeik Ka Ko army camps were situated in Meh P'Roh village tract. Paw Hta, also known as K'Law Kwee, was the place where the DKBA's leaders had lived. The DKBA had built their army camps and had taken control of ten places and had planted landmines close to their army camps. Before this, the DKBA had only been active in two village tracts: Kloo Htaw and Meh P'Roh village tracts.

There are 15 villages situated in Meh P'Roh village tract, consisting of [censored for security] households, and 11 villages situated in Kloo Htaw village tract, containing [censored for security] households. Some villagers, who live in Kloo Htaw village tract, did not relocate to Kaw Taw Town, but the villagers near the DKBA's army camps had to relocate. The villagers who lived close to the DKBA army camps faced difficulties because the DKBA planted landmines [near their army camps]. Livestock such as cows, buffalo, goats, and pigs stepped on landmines, which resulted in villagers having to sell their livestock for very cheap prices.

In September 2016, the villagers who lived in Meh P'Roh village tract and Kloo Htaw village tract left their plantations [due to the fighting]. Some of their plantations and schools were damaged from the fighting that occurred between the DKBA, BGF and the government military.

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

- "Hpa-an Interview: Saw A--- and Saw B---, October 2016," (February 2017)
- "Recent fighting between newly-reformed DKBA and joint forces of BGF and Tatmadaw soldiers led more than six thousand Karen villagers to flee in Hpa-an District, September 2016," (December 2016)
- "Hpa-an Interview: Saw A---, August 2015," (October 2016)

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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>3</sup> *Kloh Htoo Lah* is under the command of Bo (Officer) Bee and is one of the three current DKBA Battalions, the others being *Kloh Htoo Wah* and *Kloh Htoo Baw*, that were formed in September 2011 and refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions. *Kloh Htoo Baw* (Golden Drum) referred to the DKBA before 2011, but was then reconfigured to have the two additional battalions as well. DKBA forces in Hpa-an and Dooplaya districts that refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions began fighting Tatmadaw forces in November 2010 and have been variously referred to as DKBA #907, *Kloh Htoo Baw*, Golden Drum, and Brigade #5.

<sup>4</sup> Chief of Staff and General Saw Taing Shwe aka Bo Bi

- “Hpa-an Field Report: Continued difficulties under ceasefire, January to December 2015,” (September 2016)
- “Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar” (August 2016)

# Hpa-an District



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