

Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2015

Killing, violent abuse, landmine incident, military activity, forced labour, displacement, and poor health and education make villagers feel insecure.



December 19, 2016 / KHRG #16-4-F1

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This Field Report includes information submitted by KHRG community members describing events occurring in Hpapun District between January and December 2015. The report describes human rights violations, including theft, looting, killing, violent abuses, a landmine incident, forced labour, land confiscation, forced relocation, explicit threats and forced recruitment. The report also documents issues important to the local communities, such as access to education and healthcare.

Killing

In 2015, KHRG received several reports of killing incidents that were perpetrated by the Tatmadaw soldiers, Border Guard Force (BGF) soldiers and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Lu Thaw and Bu Tho townships, Hpapun District.

On February 27th 2015, at 10:15 am a group of home guard¹ which contained six members encountered and were shot at by Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)² #584 of Military Operation Command (MOC)³ #20, when en-route to check on Tatmadaw vehicles that were transporting rations through a KNU-controlled area to Tatmadaw frontline camps. They were shot at on Kee Kaw Loo hill in Hkay Poo village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. A home guard named Saw K---, who was 25 years old and lived in H--- village, Hkay Poo village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District was killed in the attack. His wife, Naw P---, is now a widow with four children. Another home guard Saw D---, who is 24 years old and lives in E--- village, Hkay Poo village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, who was involved in the attack, was injured by a bullet in his chest and left arm during the shooting.

According to a KHRG researcher, the home guards did not think that they would be attacked by the Tatmadaw soldiers because the convoy was passing through the KNU-controlled area. It is well known that, according to representatives from the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), both have agreed that the Tatmadaw are not allowed to go more than 50 yards from the vehicle road.⁴ In exchange, the KNLA's soldiers would allow them to travel through this area without any harassment. However, the place where the home guards were attacked was 200 yards from the vehicle road.⁵

On March 15th 2015, a villager name Saw A--- from R--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, was shot and killed by a private named Saw Kyaw Ka who

¹ 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen State to address Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that *gher der* were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable. For more on the *gher der* see: "[Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#)," KHRG, August 2010.

² Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties.

³ Military Operations Command. Comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁴As 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 See, "[Home guards attacked by Tatmadaw in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, February 2015](#)," April 2015, KHRG.

is under the control of company second-in-command Hpah Yuh Khay of Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013,⁶ while he was travelling to catch fish for his family at night time. The BGF officer told the local villagers that the BGF shot Saw A--- by accident because it was night time and they thought that he was a KNLA soldier. According to Saw A---'s wife, when Saw A--- was shot with the first shot by the BGF soldier at his chest, he fell on the ground and told the BGF soldier that he was a villager so asked the BGF soldier why he shot him. The BGF soldier looked at him and shot him again, twice. A bullet hit his left shoulder and his shoulder was broken and one of his fingers was also shot off. Saw A--- was sent to Hpa-an General Hospital in Hpa-an Town, but he died on March 16th at around seven or eight o'clock in the morning because of his injuries.



The photos above were taken on April 6th 2015 in R--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The first photo shows Saw A---'s wife, Naw E---. She reported that her husband was shot on March 15th 2015 around 7 pm. The incident occurred in F--- place. On the same night, the villagers and village head gathered together and sent the victim to the Hpa-an Hospital. Saw A--- passed away on March 17th 2015. After he passed away, the doctor performed an autopsy on his body and discovered that his internal organs had been torn by the bullets. He was buried in the Hkaw Taw Town graveyard. The second photo is of a video that was taken by his wife. It shows that his body was disfigured as a result of being hit by several bullets and the subsequent medical treatment and autopsy. [Photos: KHRG]

The battalion commander of BGF #1013 is named Maung Hla Kyaing and their army base is located in Noh Hpaw Htee village, Noh Hpaw Htee village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

Related to this killing incident, there was a controversial argument between the BGF soldiers and the villagers; while BGF officers claimed that they made the order that villagers are not allowed to go out of the village before 6 am and after 6 pm, villagers reported to the KHRG community member that they had not heard or been told by the BGF soldiers about this curfew prior to the incident. After the incident, Saw A---'s wife later met the BGF Battalion #1013's commander in order to compensate her for the death of her husband and help her with the basic needs of her household. She demanded that commander compensate her with a one month salary of all the soldiers from BGF Battalion #1013 and the commander agreed with her request but the commander has not given her anything yet. Saw A--- had six children and most of his children are old enough to go to school, but one or two children are younger than school age.

⁶ KHRG continues to receive reports discussing abuses involving BGF Battalion #1013 and #1014, including: "[BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015](#)," KHRG, December 2015; "[Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2015; "[Human rights violations by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1014 in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, May 2012 to March 2014](#)," KHRG, July 2015; "[BGF Battalion #1014 forced labour and forced recruitment, April to May 2012](#)," KHRG, June 2013. Further reports detailing abuses involving these battalions are also available on the KHRG website.

Therefore, their father's death has brought problems for them and the older children have to help their mother and their younger siblings for their livelihood and education needs.⁷

BGF Battalion #1011

On April 23rd 2015, a 37 year old an ethnic Taung Thu villager named Maung A--- who lived in C--- village, Ka Taing Ti village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, was killed by BGF soldier Saw Maung Thet from BGF Battalion #1011 who serves under the Battalion Commander Major Soe Naing.

Maung A--- worked as a chef in a medical training school dormitory which is located outside of Ka Ma Maung Town. On April 23rd he did not have work to do so he drank alcohol and got drunk, and he visited to Myaing Gyi Ngu special (under religious authority) region, Sone Nan Tha Myaing Shwe Myo Taw area, Lin Lon Myaing section which exists beyond the river of Ka Ma Maung Town. When he was in Lin Lon Myaing section, he had an argument with the car drivers at the sugar factory's bus station, so he was sent to the BGF Battalion #1011's check point which is in front of the sugar factory. There, the BGF soldiers beat him and Maung A---, aged 37 was dead because of the wounds at around 12 o'clock, midnight.

After the killing incident, on April 25th 2015, three of Maung A---'s siblings went to meet the BGF Battalion #1011's Battalion Commander So Naing and demanded 10,000,000 kyat [US \$8427.20]⁸ as compensation for the death of their brother. According to Maung A---'s siblings, the Battalion Commander agreed that they would compensate 3,000,000 kyat [US \$2528.16] but they were told by the Battalion Commander to go and get the money from second senior monk U⁹ Nya Ni Ka. When they arrived to monk U Nya Ni Ka, before they said anything, monk U Nya Ni Ka aggressively shouted *"Bring me my sword, I will hack everyone, do not you know that [at] these [special region] places [you] are not allowed to drink alcohol and [be] drunk?"*. Eventually the monk gave 500,000 kyat [US \$421.36] to Maung A---'s siblings and they took the money in fear.

According to the KHRG community member, the case was conducted without any proper investigation and action taken by the Burma/Myanmar government authority, and the BGF soldier who committed the killing was not given any punishment.¹⁰

Killing and violent abuses committed by KNLA officer Commander Hpah Mee

In April 2015, 52 year-old Meh Lah villager, Kyaw Dah Dah who was Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract leader was killed by KNLA's officer Commander Hpah Mee¹¹ in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

According to Meh Lah villagers, Kyaw Dah Dah was arrested by Commander Hpah Mee's subordinate on April 15th 2015. Villagers indicated that the problems between the two men may have initially stemmed from Commander Hpah Mee's displeasure with the village tract leader over several discrepancies. These were Kyaw Dah Dah's collection of elephant tax, his supposed lack of support in running a newly established army base in Htee Th'Daw Hta village

⁷ See "[Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2015 and "[Violent abuse and killing committed by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, March to May 2015](#)," KHRG, July 2015.

⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the August 9th 2016 official market rate of 1186 kyats to US \$1.

⁹ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

¹⁰ See "[Hpa-an Incident Report: Violent abuse and killing committed by BGF soldiers in Myaing Gyi Ngu Town, Hlaingbwe Township, April 2015](#)," KHRG, August 2015; this information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in June 2015.

¹¹ See "[The death of Saw Hpah Mee \(November 13th 2015\)](#)," KHRG, July 2016.

tract, and a dispute over the number of guns distributed to Kyaw Dah Dah by Commander Hpah Mee. KHRG received information that the individual who carried out the killing of Kyaw Dah Dah, under Commander Hpah Mee's orders, was a DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]¹² soldier serving under the command of DKBA Commander Maung Thein Win. Villagers reported that they found the dead body of Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract leader Kyaw Dah Dah floating in the Salween River nearby Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Prior to the incident, Kyaw Dah Dah was previously arrested and beaten with the barrel of an assault rifle by Commander Hpah Mee. Before he was killed, he talked to someone he knew secretly that he wanted to be replaced as the Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract leader as he was afraid of Commander Hpah Mee and felt he could not serve as a village tract leader under him anymore. He appealed to the witness not to let Commander Hpah Mee hear about the conversation between them, out of fear he would be beaten again.

Kyaw Dah Dah was married and had four children. He served as Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract leader since 2011 until he was killed in April 2015 by Commander Hpah Mee.¹³

In another incident, on October 1st 2015, a villager name Saw Bee Hka, 40 years, who lived in Mon Hsan Myaing section in Myaing Gyi Ngu Town was arrested and beaten to death by Commander Hpah Mee.

According to villagers, Commander Hpah Mee arrested Saw Bee Hka because he suspected that Saw Bee Hka had communication with BGF soldiers. When he arrested him, he beat him until his head smashed and the whole of his body was covered with wounds. According to the KHRG community member, Commander Hpah Mee gave 200,000 kyat [US \$165.07] to Saw Bee Hka for the treatment. Saw Bee Hka was hospitalised at Myaing Gyi Ngu hospital on the same day but he died. Additionally, in the same month, following the incident when Commander Hpah Mee arrested and beat Saw Bee Hka, he arrested and killed another two villagers: Saw Ka Pay and Tee Hpah Kyee Pah who were around 40 years old were accused of having contact with BGF soldiers. According to the villagers, these two victims were motorboat drivers and they earned their living by driving motorboats on the Salween River.

Violent abuses

In 2015 KHRG received information regarding violent abuses that were committed by Tatmadaw soldiers and BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

¹² The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA Benevolent) was formed in 2010 as a breakaway group following the transformation of the majority of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (1994 – 2010) into Border Guard Forces (BGF). This group was originally called the Democratic Karen *Buddhist* Army until it changed its name to the Democratic Karen *Benevolent* Army in April 2012 in order to reflect its secularity. This group is comprised of different divisions, including Klo Htoo Baw Battalion and DKBA-5, and was led for many years by General Saw Lah Pwe aka Na Khan Mway who died in Mrch 2016 and was replaced by General Saw Mo Shay in April 2016. The DKBA (Benevolent) signed a preliminary ceasefire with the Burma/Myanmar Government on November 3rd 2011 and then signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15th 2015. The group is based in Son Si Myaing area, Myawaddy/Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, southern Kayin State. This DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) should not be confused with, either the original DKBA (Buddhist) (1994-2010) which was transformed into the BGF in 2010, or with the DKBA (Buddhist) (2016 – present) which was formed in 2016 as a splinter group of the DKBA (Benevolent). Importantly, the DKBA (Benevolent) has signed both the preliminary and nationwide ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government, whereas the DKBA (Buddhist) has not signed either agreement.

¹³ See "[Commander Pah Mee implicated in violent abuse, disappearance, and killing of village tract leader in Hpapun District, July 2015](#)," KHRG, March 2016.

On April 26th 2015, a villager named Maung D---, 42 years old, who lives in G--- village, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, was arrested and violently abused by Officer Hpah Tha Beh,¹⁴ whose rank is 2nd Lieutenant from BGF Battalion #1014. According to a KHRG researcher, between April 23rd and 24th there was small-scale fighting between BGF Battalion #1014 2nd Lieutenant Hpah Tha Beh's soldiers and the local KNLA's soldiers. After the fighting, 2nd Lieutenant Hpah Tha Beh arrested Maung D--- and accused him of having contact with, and being supportive of, KNLA soldiers. He then hit him with the butt of a gun, beat and kicked him and shot a gun to scare him. As a result, Maung D--- went unconscious.¹⁵

In another incident of violent abuse, on September 30th 2015, a 62-year-old H--- male villager U B--- was arrested and violently abused by the Tatmadaw soldiers whilst they accused him of not informing them of the KNLA soldiers' whereabouts after they were shot at by the KNLA soldiers.

Prior to the incident, around 40 Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Division (LID)¹⁶ #22 were seen patrolling in KNLA-controlled H--- village. KNLA soldiers who were also patrolling there fired two or three warning shots in their direction. Following the shots by KNLA soldiers, the Tatmadaw soldiers arrested U B--- while he was grazing his cows beside a paddy farm. They accused him of not informing them of the whereabouts of the KNLA soldiers, and two Tatmadaw officers hit him in the chest and on his ear two or three times each with their gun muzzles.¹⁷ They ordered him to accompany them on their way back to their base and released him.



This photo was taken by a KHRG community member on October 15th 2015, in H--- village, Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photo shows U B----- who was hit with by Tatmadaw soldiers from LID #22 with their gun muzzles on September 30th 2015, after the KNLA soldiers opened fire at them. [Photo: KHRG]

¹⁴ Saw Tha Beh is a Second Lieutenant in Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District. KHRG has received multiple reports of Saw Tha Beh committing human rights abuses in Hpapun District, including forced labour, arbitrary taxation and violent abuse. For more information see: "[Hpapun Incident Report: Violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, April 2014](#)," KHRG, November 2014; "[Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 – January 2014](#)," KHRG, September 2014; "[Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014; and "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

¹⁵ See "[Violent abuse and killing committed by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, March to May 2015](#)," KHRG, July 2015.

¹⁶ Light Infantry Division (Tatmadaw); commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

¹⁷ See "[Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015](#)," KHRG, October 2015.

In June 2015, violent abuse also occurred in Meh Pree village tract and Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township. Saw T---, who is the L--- village head from Meh Pree village tract told a KHRG community member that he was violently abused by Mo Hein and Hpah Waw Say from the BGF. They hit, shouted, grabbed his bag and pulled him forcefully.

Explicit threats

In 2015, KHRG received two separate cases of explicit threats committed by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

On June 17th 2015, Second Lieutenant Tha Beh, a BGF platoon commander from BGF Battalion #1014,¹⁸ went to A--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, and threatened to kill some villagers. His reason for the threat was the alleged exclusive support of the village for Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers and lack of support for BGF soldiers by some of the villagers. As a result, the villagers feel afraid of him. Second Lieutenant Tha Beh is notorious in the area, as he has previously violently abused villagers¹⁹ and ordered villagers to do forced labour.²⁰

In another incident, on October 27th 2015, a group of BGF soldiers who are based in Htee Hta Baw camp led by officer Mo Hein, under Battalion #1014 went to Bb--- village and they shouted at the villagers in the village and shot down villagers' coconuts from the tree. Villagers were scared of this activity and they reported the incident to the BGF Battalion #1014's commanders but no action was being taken towards the soldiers at the time of reporting.²¹

Military activities

In 2015 KHRG received several reports about the Tatmadaw, BGF and KNLA's military activities that have created concerns for villagers' security. In some cases, it led to the displacement of villagers.

In one incident, on June 15th 2015, many KNLA soldiers were seen coming into G--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, and the villagers were frightened because they worried that fighting would happen between the KNLA and the BGF. Therefore, they ran into their bomb shelter. Then later that day, the BGF came into the village and pointed at the villagers with guns and asked why they ran to hide in the bomb shelter and told them to come out. The BGF soldiers were led by Officer Plah Thoo, under Battalion #1014.²²

In another case of military activity, on June 14th 2015, the Tatmadaw soldiers from LID #22 came into D--- village, Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. There were 35 Tatmadaw soldiers and two BGF soldiers, 37 soldiers altogether, and they also brought heavy weapons with them. They also crossed into the KNLA delimited area.²³ They did it

¹⁸ KHRG has received numerous reports of human rights violations committed by soldiers from Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014, including killing, torture, violent abuse, explicit threats, arbitrary taxation and demands and land confiscation. For more information see, "[Human rights violations by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1014 in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, May 2012 to March 2014](#)," KHRG, July 2015.

¹⁹ See "[Violent abuse and killing committed by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, March to May 2015](#)," KHRG, July 2015.

²⁰ See "[Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

²¹ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2016.

²² See "[Hpapun Short Update: Bu Tho Township, May and June 2015](#)," KHRG, January 2016.

²³ 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.

because they heard that the Karen armed groups were holding a meeting in E--- village and they wanted to demonstrate their presence.²⁴

Tensions between KNLA and BGF

Starting from March 10th 2015, BGFs in Htee Th'Daw Hta and Meh Pree village tracts have been very active in the region. Due to this increased activity, from April 22nd to the 26th there were skirmishes occurring in both village tracts between BGF soldiers and the KNLA in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. Since the skirmishes, BGF Battalion #1014's soldiers ordered the villagers from both village tracts not to go out after 6:00 pm or before 6:00 am. This has caused difficulties for the villagers' livelihoods, for example it has made it difficult to take care of their buffaloes and go to work on their paddy fields. The situation is tense in the region.²⁵

On May 11th 2015, BGF Battalion #1013 held a meeting with the village heads from S---, H---, M--- and N--- villages in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. In the meeting they told the village heads that they would conduct a military operation in these four villages. The BGF stated that they do not intend to attack the KNLA and they do not want any interruptions, for example threats or attacks from the KNLA. If the BGF privates and officers threaten, bully or rob the villagers, the villagers can report it to the relevant BGF commanders. The BGF also warned the village heads that during the military operations, the village heads must inform them if they see the KNLA patrolling. They did not inform the village heads about the date, their battalions, companies or how many soldiers they will use during the operation.

In the meeting, Battalion Commander Maung Chit stated, *"Since we transformed from the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army]²⁶ into the BGF, we have not travelled anywhere or carried out any duties. So, to make our leader satisfied, we will carry out the military operation on both sides of the road from Hpapun to Ka Ma Maung road."* He added that, *"When we come on foot, we want to return on foot."* By this he meant he does not want any fighting to happen resulting in having to carry the injured back following the end of the operation.

Following the meeting, on May 12th 2015, the KNLA called a meeting with the village heads from the Ka Taing Ti village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District and warned villagers that:

- 1) When the BGF carry out military operations in any village area, villagers must not let the BGF stay in their houses.
- 2) Villagers must walk only on the road/path when they go to their farms and work places.²⁷
- 3) Villagers must not go to the hills, valley or areas where there is water.²⁸

²⁴ See. ["BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015,"](#) KHRG, December 2015.

²⁵ See ["Violent abuse and killing committed by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, March to May 2015,"](#) KHRG, July 2015.

²⁶ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see ["Inside the DKBA,"](#) KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

²⁷ The villagers were asked to do this because the KNU/KNLA will then know that those people who abandon the path are not villagers and are members of a BGF.

²⁸ Similarly to the previous footnote, the villagers were asked to do this so the KNLA could ambush the BGF if they see them straying from the path as the villagers have been ordered not to leave the path. The KNLA will shoot anyone who is in the forbidden areas. There are also landmines prevalent in the area.

According to the villagers, the areas where the KNLA forbade the villagers from going to is only two furlongs (0.4 km. or 0.250 miles)²⁹ away from the back end of the village. Therefore, villagers in the area of Htee Th'Daw Hta and Meh Pree village tracts, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District could not travel from one village to another village freely like before this tension between the KNLA and BGF between March and May 2015 and if they do travel, they do so in fear.

According to an interview with W--- village tract administrator U B--- on May 17th 2015, he said, *"We are worried with the situation now. People who are impacted are villagers. A few days ago, the KNU called a meeting with village heads from S---, H---, M--- and N--- villages and informed the villagers not to go in the old areas especially on hills, valleys or areas where there is water. If villagers are going to their work places, they can use the usual path but do not go on the hill or valleys - the old areas where they used to plant the landmines. They [KNLA] informed the villagers [that] if the BGF carry out activities they [KNLA] have not planted landmines yet. But they will definitely plant landmines if the BGF start [to] carry out an operation and BGF battalions are on patrol."*

Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers

On September 30th 2015, three skirmishes occurred between KNLA soldiers from Company #4 and Tatmadaw soldiers from LID #22 in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

The first skirmish took place at Kwee Neh village, Day Wah village tract between a group of KNLA soldiers from Company #4 and Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #205, who were being led by Deputy Commander Kyaw Thu from Light Infantry Division (LID) 22.

The second skirmish occurred at Meh K'Naw Th'Waw Hpya section, in H--- village, Kyaw Pah village tract, between a different group from KNLA Company #4 and an unknown Tatmadaw battalion.

Based on the account of the KNLA Company #4 deputy commander, these skirmishes occurred because the Tatmadaw soldiers went over the delimited area without contacting the local KNLA soldiers to inform them of their patrol route. As per the preliminary ceasefire agreement, the Tatmadaw are only allowed to operate and travel up to 50 yards from either side of the road that connects their army camps through KNLA territory, and only within a 150 yard radius around their army camp.

Because of these skirmishes, more than ten households from H--- village fled to the area surrounding Myaing Gyi Ngu Town, Hpa-an District.

In addition, on October 3rd 2015, local villagers reported to KHRG that the Tatmadaw and BGF began actively operating a checkpoint on the road between Hpapun and Ka Ma Maung towns at Oh Taung village, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. Although the checkpoint was in place prior to the recent skirmishes, the soldiers manning it had not been stopping passing vehicles in a systematic way until recently. The Tatmadaw and BGF soldiers searched passing cars and questioned passengers, asking whether there were any Karen National Union (KNU) members in the cars.³⁰

²⁹ A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.2 of a km. or 0.125 of a mile.

³⁰ See ["Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015,"](#) KHRG, October 2015.

KNLA forced recruitment

Starting in August 2015, villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District heard a rumour of the KNLA forced recruitment in the area so many of them fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town to evade the KNLA recruitment.

Between September 27th and 28th 2015, KNLA soldiers from Company #4 detained a total of 14 people from A--- and B--- villages, Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, including both village heads and ordinary villagers, after the villagers failed to arrange ten adult males to join the KNLA. This detainment led to widespread fear among villagers and resulted in many villagers fleeing to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town to evade the KNLA arbitrary detainment.³¹

According to A--- villager Saw C---, villagers fled because of three reasons. Firstly, they saw that when a person who has been called to serve for the KNLA was not in the village, the KNLA soldiers detained one of their family members, so many villagers ran to evade a potential detainment. Other villagers were worried that the Tatmadaw and the BGF might decide to take advantage of the instability created by the KNLA recruitment and conflict with the villagers, and enter into the village to engage in fighting with the KNLA, which would cause villagers to flee with their children with no preparation. Because of this concern, many villagers decided to preemptively send their children to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town and follow them there. Finally, some of the villagers fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town because they saw other villagers escape and they did not dare to stay behind in the village. They left all their houses, livestock, farms, hill farms and properties. Saw C--- also noted the KNLA did not detain the 14 villagers to have them serve as soldiers.



³¹ See [“Villagers displaced following rumours of KNLA forced recruitment, more flee following a clash with Tatmadaw in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, September to October 2015,”](#) KHRG, June 2016.

The photos above were taken by a KHRG community member on October 12th 2015 at B--- village's boat's port in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show how B--- villagers went to the Yuzalin River bank carrying their luggage and children while they were going to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town by motorboat to evade the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]'s recruitment. On October 10th 2015, the KNLA's Company #4 Company Commander Hsa Yoo went to the village and held a meeting with villagers regarding the recruitment. In the meeting he explained to villagers about the detailed information and the purpose of the KNLA recruitment. Then, he told villagers who remained in the village not to go to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town anymore and also to inform others who had fled to return. He told villagers, "*We [KNLA] are not recruiting soldiers anymore. So, do not flee like this anymore. Live as you did before. Ask and inform villagers who already fled to return and we will not do anything to them. They can live as they did before.*" Even though Commander Hsa Yoo told villagers like this it seems that villagers did not inform other villagers or ask others to return to their homes. Moreover, more villagers were still fleeing: these photos were taken two days later after Commander Hsa Yoo held a meeting with villagers. The photos depict villagers continuing to resettle to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Some of them, even though they have small children, were also fleeing. According to the KHRG community member, there might also have been some rumours from other groups that persuaded or scared the villagers in some way to flee, causing this ongoing problem. [Photos: KHRG]

Eventually, on October 10th 2015, the KNLA's Company #4 Company Commander Hsa Yoo held a meeting with villagers from H---, D--- and E--- villages in C---'s school in C--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. In the meeting, he told villagers who remained in the village not to go to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town anymore and to inform other villagers who already fled to return and live as they used to live in the past. He also informed villagers that he won't forcefully recruit soldiers anymore and he won't do any harm to villagers who had already fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. However, many villagers still chose to resettle to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town.³²

Landmine

In 2015 KHRG received a report of one landmine incident which occurred in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District which led to injury of a civilian.

On May 16th 2015, a 40-year-old villager name Saw Y---³³, who lives in B--- village, Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township, stepped on a landmine reportedly planted by the KNLA between Y--- forest and Z--- forest while he was hunting.

According to the community member, on May 16th around 4pm, Saw Y--- went hunting to a forest which is 150 yards away from his farm and he stepped on the landmine. But villagers dared not immediately get him when he stepped on the landmine; later at around 6 pm, around 20 villagers went to get him and brought him to Hpapun Ka Tin Ta Ya Hospital in Hpapun Town. They arrived at the hospital at around 11pm and his left leg was amputated at 1am. According to Saw Y---'s wife on May 17th evening, the Tatmadaw soldiers went to visit them at the hospital and brought some juice and snacks in a hand basket. They claimed that the landmine was not theirs and if the landmine was theirs, Saw Y--- would be dead already.

When a KHRG community member asked Saw Y---'s wife about whose landmine her husband stepped on, she suspected that the landmine was planted by the KNLA because there is a road that the Tatmadaw soldiers use for transportation of rations to their army camps in the area. She also said that after her husband stepped on the landmine, she heard that two other landmines had exploded near to the area where her husband stepped on the landmine. Saw Y-

³² See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2016.

³³ In the published report, Saw Y--- was censored as Saw A---.



The above photo was taken on June 6th 2015 at 5:26 pm in Hpapun Ka Tin Ta Ya Hospital, Hpapun Town, in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The picture shows Saw Y---, 40 years old, who lives in X--- village, Hkaw Poo village tract, Hpapun District. He was hospitalised after stepping on a landmine while out hunting between Y--- forest and Z--- forest. [Photo: KHRG]

-- told the KHRG community member that he would not go to the area if he knew there are landmines planted. Saw Y--- is married and has five children.³⁴

Forced Labour

In 2015, villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District reported to KHRG that forced labour ordered by the BGF is unavoidable since the BGF's soldiers go and base themselves in the local area.

In early 2015, BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014 set up a new army camp in Meh Pree and Htee Baw Kaw village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, and they operate in the area. Villagers reported to KHRG that the BGF soldiers ordered villagers from Bb---, Gg---, Hh--- and li--- villages to do labour for them such as: cooking, finding vegetables in the jungle, carrying water and portering guns and pots. They only order male villagers to work for them and warn them to comply with the orders without being absent. One villager has to work for three days and if they do not work they have to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$4.22) to the BGF per day for their replacement. During harvest season, villagers tried to avoid the BGF orders and told the BGF officers that they had to harvest and process their paddy so they were absent but BGF ignored their request. KNLA officers and soldiers who operate in the area suggested villagers do not comply the BGF's order but since villagers are afraid of the BGF soldiers, they have to work for them. Villagers reported to a KHRG community member that there was a news agency that came to the villages in Meh Pree village tract and asked villagers about the forced labour case in the area so villagers reported about the BGF Battalion #1014 ordering forced labour. According to the villagers, that news agency published the article in the newspaper about the BGF Battalion #1014 ordering forced labour. Subsequently, one of the higher rank Tatmadaw Officers who is based in Hpapun Tatmadaw army base read that article and he summoned BGF Battalion #1014 Battalion Commander Maung Chit and asked him if his soldiers really forced villagers to work for them. Consequently, Commander Maung Chit summoned four Jj--- villagers and questioned them if they reported the forced labour case and his name to any news agency. Because of this, villagers are afraid of the BGF soldiers and they dare not report about the forced labour case.³⁵

On June 12th 2015, five C--- villagers had to do labour in the army camp for the BGF Battalion #1014, led by Plah Thoo aka Company Second-in-command Moe Hein and Plah Yuh Say,³⁶ which is based in C--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. According to the villagers, they had to help BGF soldiers with general camp support such as

³⁴ See "[Hpapun Short Update: Bu Tho Township, May and June 2015](#)," KHRG, January 2016.

³⁵ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2016.

³⁶ Plah Yuh Say is also a radio (walkie-talkie) code name, however KHRG was unable to determine the real identity of this particular soldier, who is serving under Company Second-in-command Moe Hein.

carrying water and collecting vegetables and firewood. Villagers reported that five villagers had to go and work in the camp for three days and then another five villagers had to replace them after three days without pay. Some villagers had to hire people to go and work in their place if they were not able to go, and they paid 5,000 kyat (US \$4.28) per day if they were absent.³⁷

In another incident of forced labour, on October 9th 2015, villagers from Li--- and Hh--- villages were ordered by BGF soldiers from Battalion #1014, which is based in the area, to stay in the army camp. They cooked and carried water and waited for the military luggage that needed to be transported to other places. Villagers raised their concerns that it was harvesting season and they had to harvest and process the paddy but BGF's soldiers did not allow them to go to their hill farms. Villagers were worried about their hill farm but on the other hand they felt afraid of the BGF soldiers. According to the villagers, if they do not cook and carry water for the BGF's soldiers, the BGF soldiers go to their village then threaten, shout and fire the warning shot in the village.³⁸

Theft and looting

In 2015, KHRG received two separate incidents that the BGF's soldiers from BGF Battalion #1014 stole villagers' livestock and confiscated villagers' properties in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

On July 17th 2015, Officer Mo Hein from BGF battalion #1014 and his soldiers patrolled in Meh Pree Hkee village and they stole two chickens at the villagers' farm huts that belong to Meh Pree Hkee villagers. In the same month, a BGF Battalion #1014's Second Company Commander Tin Win Hlaing and his soldiers patrolled in Meh Pree Hkee village at Htee Baw Kaw place. During their patrol, he ordered the villagers who he had already ordered to be porters from the camp, to steal Htee Baw Kaw villagers' firewood, pots and plates at villagers' farm huts from 12 different villagers. According to a KHRG community member, villagers whose livestock and properties were stolen dare not speak up and report to the BGF's Battalion #1014 commanders about these incidents.³⁹

Forced relocation

In 2015, KHRG received several reports about land confiscation for a road construction and village development activities by Burma/Myanmar authority in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District which led to the displacement of villagers.

According to two received reports, on July 11th 2015, Hpapun District administrator U Aung Hsan Oo, construction leader Kyaw Hsan, and some police from Burma/Myanmar government went to meet with Whay Mon village head and villagers in Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township. They said that they would expand the road in Whay Mon village area about 75 yards from each side of the vehicle road so they ordered villagers who live beside the vehicle road to move their houses and relocate within 40 days. On July 12th 2015, Hpapun District administrator asked the Department of Agriculture to measure the land beside the road in between Whay Mon and Whay Hsan village.⁴⁰

³⁷ See "[Hpapun Short Update: Bu Tho Township, May and June 2015](#)," KHRG, January 2016.

³⁸ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2016.

³⁹ This information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in August 2015.

⁴⁰ This information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in October 2015.



The first photo was taken by a KHRG community member on July 12th 2015 at Whay Mon village, in Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show the road that Hpapun District administrator U Aung Hsan Oo and Township administrator U Aung Than Zaw are repairing in between Whay Mon and Whay Hsan village for the purpose of making Whay Mon village as the role-model village in the area. According to the Whay Mon villagers, some villagers' lands were confiscated and some houses had to relocate. [Photos: KHRG]

When villagers asked them about how they would give compensation, they responded that they could not provide compensation. Villagers raised their concerns that this action caused problems for the Way Mon villagers because it was in the rainy season that they were forced to relocate so they faced difficulties. Even some of them did not know where else to live and had no other land to build a house on. Some of them had built permanent houses and some had repaired their houses beside the vehicle road already. Reportedly, around 3 million kyat (US \$2532.47) from central Burma/Myanmar government for relocation costs had already reached U Aung Hsan Oo's hand but he could not do anything apart from carry out the villagers' relocation. The villagers do not want to relocate and they said they do not need compensation; instead they need their lands, houses and working places.

Some villagers said that U Aung Hsan Oo is a Hpapun District administrator and he wants to get a good name so he agreed to implement this project. Villagers also said that administrator U Aung Hsan Oo has never held a consultation with villagers before doing something since he has been receiving salary from the Burma/Myanmar government in the role of administrator.

According to the villagers, many villagers' yard fences and farms will be impacted and around 90 houses of the villagers will be impacted because of the road expanding. There were already five villagers' houses that already had to move from vehicle road: U Nyunt Sein, U Lwin Zaw Oo, U Tin Tun, U Kaw Say and U Thint San.

KNU conducted land surveys and registration in Bu Tho Township

On March 6th 2015, Thara Tee Hkuh from KNU's headquarter office of land survey and registration under Karen Agriculture Department (KAD), and Pa Doh Saw Thaw Thee and his team from Mutraw District land survey and registration department cooperated together to survey lands. They surveyed lands and farms from Nga Ein Su (Na Ku Nah) village, Whay San village, Whay Mon village, Ta Kon Taing village, Whay Naung village, Ka La Kon village, Me Tha Lwut Out Kai village and Me Tha Lwut village, and gave land grants to the land owners.⁴¹

According to a KHRG community member, when KNU conducted the land surveys, villagers had to pay 2,000 kyat (US \$1.69) for each acre of land and 5,000 kyat (US \$4.22) for one land

⁴¹ This information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in June 2015.

grant document. Also, villagers had to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$4.22) for the contract document that they will need for buying, selling, and mortgaging the lands. The KNU's land survey team conducted land surveys until May 18th 2015. When KNU surveyed the local people's lands, although they wanted to survey the villagers' lands that have been confiscated by the Tatmadaw in Hpapun Town area, the Hpapun Tatmadaw Operation Commander did not allow them.

Education

There are two education systems that operate in Hpapun District areas; one is from Burma/Myanmar government and the other is from the KNU.

In Bu Tho Township, there are 11 village tracts and in 2015, schools are now built almost in each village; only a few villages do not have school. There is also a college and high school situated in Pa Heh village tract controlled by the KNU. The Burma/Myanmar government also built primary schools and high schools in some village tracts in Bu Tho Township.⁴²

In 2015, at some schools in Burma/Myanmar government controlled areas, students from first standard⁴³ to fourth standard are accessing free education without any payment to the school. These students are also provided with one school uniform each.⁴⁴

In 2015, there was also incidents of schools which closed in KNU controlled areas. Schools were closed in Kyaw Pah and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts, Bu Tho Township. There were two different reasons. One reason was many villagers in Kyaw Pah village tract fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town after a rumour of the KNLA's forced recruitment in the area. Another reason was many villagers in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract also fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town due to the fear of the KNLA's former commander Hpah Mee who was known for violent abuse and killing in the area.⁴⁵



The first photo was taken by a KHRG community member on October 11th 2015 at G--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. It is the photo of students who were studying at the primary school in G--- village. There were two female schoolteachers and 36 students in the 2015 academic year. When villagers fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town they were bringing their children with them. Therefore, nine students followed their parents to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. The second photo was taken on October 12th 2015 at A--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. It is a photo of the primary school in A-- village. Starting in August 2015, because villagers heard a rumour that KNLA would come and recruit soldiers in the village, villagers were scared and they fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town; the female schoolteachers were also

⁴² See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2016.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, February 2016.

⁴⁵ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2016.

afraid and they fled there too. There were six teachers: four female teachers from the Burma/Myanmar government and two teachers who were hired locally. This school has not re-opened yet [at the time of receiving this report] and there were fewer students remaining in the village as of October 2015, so they could not study and go to school. [Photos: KHRG]

In Dwe Lo Township, children had some good opportunities to study, however there were not schools in all of the villages. When children finished seven and eight standard they went on to finish their studies in the towns, refugee camps, and other places where high schools are located. This is how children try to finish high school.⁴⁶

Healthcare

There are also two healthcare systems that were operating in Hpapun District; one is healthcare provided by Burma/Myanmar government and the other is healthcare provided by Thai-Burma border Karen health groups.

In 2015, regarding healthcare in Bu Tho Township, villagers in Burma/Myanmar government controlled areas could access better healthcare. The numbers of government's health workers were increasing and villagers had to pay less for the medicines and treatment cost. The government health workers also provided immunisations to children regularly. The Thai-Burma border Karen health groups health workers also provided medicines, treatments and immunisations in Bu Tho Township. These groups also provide healthcare to the other townships in Hpapun District where they can access.⁴⁷

The common sicknesses faced by the villagers in Bu Tho Township area are: malaria, diarrhoea, red eyes [conjunctivitis], measles, mumps and other common sicknesses. According to the research by health groups in Bu Tho Township, elephantiasis, cancer, swelling and measles were also infecting villagers in the communities.

On the other hand, in Lu Thaw Township where most Karen IDP (Internally Displaced Person/People) populated, the common illness that villagers in faced are malaria, spleen disease, cough, prolonged lung infections or coughing, cholera, and dysentery. Arthritis as well as illnesses that negatively impacted women were also increasing. There were some dispensaries in some areas but they did not have sufficient medicines. Some village tracts do not have any dispensary. Therefore, villagers' health conditions were worse and it impacted their livelihoods such as working and traveling. To treat the illness, in some villages, people who have money bought medicine and injected themselves according to their own knowledge. Some villagers have knowledge of herbal medicines so they heal themselves with their own ability.⁴⁸

The illnesses that the civilians in Dwe Lo Township mostly faced were flu, malaria, fever, and joint pain in their legs and arms. In terms of treatment for villagers, both Burma/Myanmar government and KNU's healthcare departments provided medicine and treatment to civilians, however the services was not enough to treat everyone. The civilians who faced the illnesses listed above treated themselves in the villages, and when they did not feel better, they went to the hospitals in the towns. It cost them a lot of money when they went for treatment in the towns. Some civilians do not have money therefore, they then treated their illness with herbal medicine and they somehow got better.⁴⁹

Conclusion

⁴⁶ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2015](#)," KHRG, March 2016.

⁴⁷ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015](#)," KHRG, February 2016.

⁴⁸ This information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in September 2015.

⁴⁹ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2015](#)," KHRG, March 2016.

In 2015, villagers in Hpapun District faced violations that were committed by armed groups, especially Tatmadaw, BGF and KNLA's soldiers who operate in the townships of Hpapun District. Villagers faced abuses such as theft, looting, land confiscation, displacement, landmine, explicit threats, violent abuse, forced recruitment, killing and forced labour. Villagers also worried about their security due to the impact of conflict between armed groups. Some villagers continued to face challenges to access to health and education.

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

- "Two separate landmine incidents happened in Hpapun and Nyaunglebin districts, March and April 2016," (August 2016)
- "Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women's testimonies from southeast Myanmar," (August 2016)
- "The death of Saw Hpah Mee, November 13th 2015," (July 2016)
- "Villagers displaced following rumours of KNLA forced recruitment, more flee following a clash with Tatmadaw in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, September to October 2015," (June 2016)
- Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2015

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)