



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

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Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, March 2016

This Interview with Saw A--- describes a landmine explosion occurring in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, in 2016. He describes how the landmine explosion happened and where the incident took place on March 16th, 2016. As a village head, he also helped the landmine victim who is one of his villagers not only by taking the victim to hospital for medical treatment but also by providing financial support for his treatment.

Interview | Saw A---, (male, 54), B--- village, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (March 2016)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Hpapun District in 2016 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 Hpapun District, including 9 other interviews.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Village Head

Position: Village Head

Please tell me what is your name?

My name is Saw A---.

How old are you?

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

I am 54 years old.

Which ethnicity do you belong to?

I am Karen.

What religion do you believe in?

I believe in Buddhism.

What do you do for your livelihood?

I have been serving as a village head for 24 years already.

Oh, you are a village head in this village?

Yes, I am. Before the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army]³ was formed [1994], I resigned from village head work for one year and entered into the KNU [Karen National Union] and after the DKBA was formed I was asked [by the people] to serve as a village head, so I have served as a village head till nowadays. I actually retired from village head work but people [villagers] did not let me retire and they bought a motorcycle for me and requested me to work [again] as a village head.

Do you have a family?

Yes, here I have my youngest daughter but [she has] no mother.

Oh, so your wife was gone [passed away]?

Yes, four years ago.

How many children do you have?

I have seven children.

How old is the oldest one?

The oldest one might be over 30.

How about the youngest one?

13 years old.

Which village do you live in?

³ The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was originally formed in 1994 as a breakaway group from the KNLA. Since its separation from the KNLA in 1994, it was known to frequently cooperate with and support the Tatmadaw in its conflict with the KNLA. The original group underwent major change in 2010 as the majority of the original DKBA was transformed into the Border Guard Force (BGF), which is under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government. The remainder of the original DKBA formed a smaller splinter group in 2010 and then changed its name in 2012 from the Democratic Karen *Buddhist* Army to the Democratic Karen *Benevolent* Army. Following this major change in 2010, the original DKBA is considered to no longer exist as a distinct entity as it has now been submerged within the BGF. This original DKBA (Buddhist) (1994 – 2010) should not be confused with either the DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) which was formed as a breakaway group from the original DKBA, or with the DKBA (Buddhist) (2016 – present) which was formed as a splinter group from the DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) in 2016. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see “[Inside the DKBA](#),” KHRG, 1996.

I live in B--- Village.

Which village tract does B--- village belong to if we define the location under the KNU boundaries?

It belongs to two village tracts which are Ka Ter Tee village tract and Lay Poe Hta village tract.

Is it under which township?

It is under Dwe Lo Township.

How about district? Do you know under which district it is located?

I do not know which district.

Alright it is fine.

Oh, it is Mu T'Raw [Hpapun] District.

[Saw A--- changes the topic] He was clearing the hill farm at the lower part and he stepped on the landmine. And he called his friend when he fell down after he stepped on the landmine and then his friend came to him.

How many of them went to the hill farm?

Three people went to the hill farm.

So three people went to the hill farm and one was hit by landmine?

Yes.

Do you remember the incident date? Which day did they go to the hill farm?

Yes I remember [the date].

Was it a long time ago?

It was on March 16th, 2016.

Was it in the morning or evening?

It was in the morning at 9 o'clock.

Oh, it happened so early?

Yes. Here, after people finish breakfast they go to work on the hill farms. The place where he was hit by the landmine is at the foot of the hill.

You said he was hit by the landmine on March 16th 2016 in the morning at 9 o'clock?

Yes, that is right.

How about the place? Where did you say it took place?

The place where he was hit by the landmine is at Mount Law Ka Tay between B--- village and C--- village.

Between which villages?

The incident took place between B--- village and C--- village.

So if we mention the specific location where the incident took place, which part of B--- Village was it? Did it take place at the eastern part of B--- village or the western part of B-- - village?

It was took place at the river mouth, the western part of B---.

How many miles would it be in distance from the village [B---]?

I estimate that it would not be far, about a mile from the village.

Who stepped on the landmine?

He just went to work on the hill farm and stepped on the landmine but two of his friends were not hit.

What is the name of the person who stepped on the landmine?

[Man 2] His name is Hpah⁴ Kheh. People called him Hpah Aww Bar [when he had been a monk].

So Hpah Kheh and Hpah Aww Bar are the same person?

Yes, the same person.

How old is he?

[Man 2] He would be over 30; maybe 40 years old.

He is 38 years old.

He is 38 year old?

Yes

Is he Karen or Shan?

He is Karen.

What religion does he believe in?

He is Buddhist. Hpah Kheh also used to be a monk and when he was a monk his monk name was U⁵ [Hpah] Aww Bar.

So his real name is Hpah Kheh and his monk name is [U/Hpah] Aww Bar. Is that correct?

Yes, it is correct.

So which village does Hpah Kheh live in?

⁴ *Hpah* is an informal S'gaw Karen title used for men, which appears before the person's name.

⁵ *U* is a Burmese title for a respected elder male.

He just lives in B--- village.

Is there anywhere else he used to live?

No, in the past he was a monk and after he quit from monkhood he returned to ordinary villager life and worked on the hill farm for his livelihood. And when he worked on the hill farm he stepped on a landmine.

Oh, so was he injured while working on the hill farm?

Yes

So what is the situation for his family [wife and children] after his injury from the landmine?

His family [wife and children] are in a condition of hardship. He has five children. I help him with financial support for 300,000 [US \$222.03].⁶

Oh, you already helped him through financial support for 300,000 [US \$222.03]?

His family cannot survive if you don't help as his children are very small [young]. So as a village head I have to take care of the village. According to our ancestors, "*if we have unity we will achieve victory*," that is why I have to look after my villagers and if I do not then no one will look after [them] for us.

For that 300,000 [US \$222.03] of financial support was it Thai Baht or Myanmar Kyat?

It was Myanmar Kyat. I just requested one thousand kyat [US \$0.74] from each villager.

So you collected the money from villagers and when it reached 300,000 kyat then you gave it to him?

I have not collected it [money] yet so I just gave it from my own money. [I donated] due to the difficult situation as his children are so young and his living condition is also very bad; I understand the situation of my villager. Without other villagers help I could not help him alone, by myself. So if we have unity in the whole village we can solve this problem by cooperating to help each other.

After he stepped on the landmine, which part of his body was injured by the landmine explosion?

It hit his leg.

Which of his legs, left or right?

I have not asked about that but it seems like it hit both legs.

So which leg got the most injured?

I didn't ask about that; his leg was amputated yesterday.

Where is he now?

⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 9th December 2016 official market rate of 1351 kyat to US \$1.

He is at Taung Kalay Hospital.

Oh, he arrived at Taung Kalay Hospital?

Yes. It seemed like the main doctor was not at the hospital when he arrived at Taung Kalay Hospital so he was referred to Hpa-an Hospital and maybe [then] the main doctor came to the hospital. His leg was amputated by a small amputation machine. I heard that he needs money so I sent the money to him.

Do the police of Ka Ter Tee live close to the landmine incident?

Yes they do.

What did they say about that?

I did not hear anything from them.

How about people from KNU [Karen National Union]? Did they come and say anything related to that [landmine explosion]?

I did not even hear them summon us [to question us about the landmine explosion].

What about BGF [Border Guard Force]? Did they come and say anything about that?

No, they have said nothing. They just told me to submit the case to the *Kaw Thoo Lei* [KNU] maybe they [KNU] might do something about it.

They told you like that?

Yes, but I replied to them that I do not dare to do that as I worry people might think that I am therefore affiliated with an armed group. One day a group of people from Ka Ter Tee [village tract] came to the area where the incident took place and they checked the place where the landmine had been. They said that the landmine belonged to the *Kaw Thoo Lei* [KNU/Karen National Liberation Army KNLA] but they don't know when the landmine was planted.

When you mentioned the group of people from Ka Ter Tee [who investigated the case], did you mean the responsible leaders from Ka Ter Tee village tract?

Yes, the village tract leader.

What is the name of the village tract leader?

People call him B---.

What did B--- tell you?

He said that it was a *Kaw Thoo Lei* [KNU/KNLA] landmine; maybe it was the landmine that was planted in the past and had remained buried.

Is this what the Ka Ter Tee village tract leader Hpah B--- said?

Yes, for us we don't know whether it was a *Kaw Thoo Lei* [KNU/KNLA] landmine or a BGF landmine or a Tatmadaw landmine. When we checked the landmine place we were sure that it was an old landmine that had been planted in the past.

So when he [Hpah Kheh] was sent to Taung Kalay [hospital] who went with him?

Just his sibling followed him.

How about his wife and children? None of them went with him?

His wife stayed behind as his five children are very small.

How about their living condition right now? How do they get food to eat?

Their living condition is very serious that is why we have to look after them to support them for the food because they are working hand-to-mouth and their situation is precarious. They just do daily labour work and work on the farm but that does not provide them with enough food to eat.

So, regarding the case of the villager who stepped on the landmine and the landmine exploded, how would you like to summarise that?

I would say that if people can help them we want them to help the victims' family. If you go to their house you may see that their house is very bad and they just work on the hill farm; in the summer period they work for daily wages and when the rainy season comes they get back to work on the hill farm. There is only one way we expected to get help: from [a community-based] organisation because he [Hpah Khet] has to survive [and provide] for his family. That is why I initially have provided him with support from my own money for 300,000 [US \$222.03] kyat because when he went to the hospital he didn't take any money. [He is poor] as he is a daily worker and hill farmer, and when you look at their rice pot you see that they have very few portions of rice. When he has recovered well, he can pay back to us what we paid for him during his medical treatment. But at the present moment, both of his hands are also injured and his leg has been amputated; I couldn't see his injuries very well, I just saw that he was bleeding a lot.

Oh, that was so serious. So was his chest also injured as well?

Yes, his chest, face and chin were also injured because he was clearing the grass on the hill farm [when he stepped on the landmine].

So did he step on the landmine or did he cut [clear the area] around the landmine?

He stepped on the landmine because he cleared [cut] the grass [around the landmine].

You said that he is now at Taung Kalay Hospital, right? Do you mean Taung Kalay Hospital which is the International Red Cross hospital?

I don't know about that because I have just come back home after I sent him to Taung Kalay Hospital.

You have answered what I have questioned you so I thank you very much for that. I have recorded your conversation. And now I know your name and the place where you live. So finally, when I write up the report I will include the information that you have mentioned. I just want to ask permission from you that will you allow me to include your information when I write up report. So if I write up a report and include your information as a main topic will you agree with that or not?

Of course I do. I would be happy if there is any benefit for my villagers by including my information in your report. Now as a village head, one of my villagers got injured and I am not able to support my villager only by myself so if there is any help from other [people] [that can be provided] that would be great. If other [people] cannot help us then what can we do? We will be very happy if people can take care of us.

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

- “Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2015,” (December 2016)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to August 2016,” (November 2016)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2016,” (September 2016)
- “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)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)