



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

February 3, 2017 / KHRG # 16-63-S1

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## **Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, April 2016 to July 2016**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District during the period between April and July 2016, including education, healthcare, the situation for civilians, Burma/Myanmar government military (Tatmadaw) activity, Border Guard Force (BGF), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), Karen Peace Council (KPC) and Karen National Union (KNU) activities.*

- *In Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District, there were a number of problems affecting civilians, including low incomes for rubber plantation workers, forced labour, taxation and land destruction.*
  - *Some of the local students in Kyonedoe Township had to stop studying after they finished primary school in their villages, because their parents could not support them if they went to study at the Burma/Myanmar government's middle school.*
  - *The Burma/Myanmar government has opened a clinic for the villagers but it lacks supplies and local villagers continue to use traditional medicine.*
  - *Tatmadaw activity has decreased in Kyonedoe Township. The BGF, DKBA and KPC are all still active in the Township, while the KNU is working to make villagers aware of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and drug policies.*
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### **Situation Update | Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District (April to July 2016)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 2016. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya 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>*

During the period of April 2016 to July 2016, I [KHRG researcher] went to collect the information from some villages in Kyonedoe Township, Dooplaya District. It includes [updates on] the situation for the civilians, [Burma/Myanmar] government, BGF [Border Guard Force]<sup>2</sup>, DKBA

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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 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.

[Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]<sup>3</sup>, KPC [Karen Peace Council]<sup>4</sup> and KNU [Karen National Union], as mentioned below.

### **Civilian Situation (Livelihood)**

The majority of civilians earn their living from gardens, farms and agriculture. Mostly, they grow different kinds of paddy rice in their area.

In 2015<sup>5</sup> the price of rubber decreased; one pound of rubber was priced at only 400 kyats [US \$0.30]<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the rubber plantation owners and rubber tappers became unwilling to continue in the rubber business because they were not satisfied with their income [which also decreased when the price of rubber decreased]. Besides, some of the rubber plantations were destroyed by fire.

In that year, some of the durian plantations and betel nut<sup>7</sup> plantations died because of hot weather; some of them [durian and betel nut] were not able to grow properly.

Forced labour, portering and *Loh ah pay*<sup>8</sup> have reduced since the NCA<sup>9</sup> was signed in 2015. However, the villagers had to pay farming tax to the DKBA and the KNU, and also other taxes.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 March 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011 and then signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15<sup>th</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Kaw Koh, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC government in 2007. The KNU/KNLA-PC subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform into a Tatmadaw Border Guard Force in 2010. The KNU/KNLA-PC signed a preliminary ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2012, and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Whilst the title of the Situation Update received states that the information is from April to July 2016, the researcher has included information from before this reporting period which may remain unresolved and therefore still be affecting civilians during the reporting period.

<sup>6</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2017 official market rate of 1342 kyat to US \$1

<sup>7</sup> In Burmese, ‘betel nut’ and ‘betel leaf’ are referred to as *konywet* and *konthih*, respectively, as if they are from the same plant. The Burmese names are also commonly used by Karen language speakers. Betel nut is the seed from an areca palm tree, *Areca catechu*; “betel leaf” is the leaf of the piper betel vine, belonging to the *Piperaceae* family.

<sup>8</sup> *Loh ah pay* is a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

<sup>9</sup> On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see “[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#),” Reuters, October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see “[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes ‘milestone’ signing of ceasefire agreement](#),” *UN News Centre*, October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe’s decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see “[Without Real](#)

(According to the local KNU authorities they [KNU] have to collect taxes from the people because they do not get any salary).

This year [2016] many organisations arrived in the local area and they tried to help the local villagers to reduce the problems affecting their livelihoods, such as access to electricity, water, education, agriculture and livestock.

2016 - Organisations who have come to the villages:

- (1) Community Development Group, activities:
  - (a) Dig a deep well and build a water pipe
  - (b) Rebuild a broken school
  - (c) Rebuild a small bridge in a village
- (2) Mya Sein Yaung Project, activity:<sup>10</sup>
  - (a) Implement agriculture and livestock projects

It was reported that the Asian Highway road<sup>11</sup> would be constructed in 2015.

- (1) The road from Taung Kya Inn village to Aung Chang Thar village (dirt road) [approximately 12 miles]
- (2) The road from Chaung Nit Khwat village to Aung Chang Thar village (paved road) [approximately 23 miles]
- (3) The road from Ka Nyin K'Taik village to Tha Main Dut village (dirt road) [approximately ten miles]

Two of the roads have been constructed in dirt but they have not been paved yet. One road has been paved but it has not been finished yet. The local residents' lands, gardens, farms and plantations were destroyed because of the road construction. However, the local people did not get any compensation for their lost properties. In addition, they do not dare to talk about what they have suffered. Some villagers said that it is easy to transport drugs because of the better road. That is why more and more people are addicted to drugs. As a result, many people become bad people.

## Education

Every parent wants to send their children to school, in order for their children to become literate. Some parents can afford to send their children to school but some parents cannot. Children [often] attend a self-funded primary school in their village. After the students finish primary school they have to continue studying at a middle school that the Burma/Myanmar government recognises, but some parents cannot support [afford] their children if their children go to the

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[Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#)," *Karen News*, September 1<sup>st</sup> 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see "[Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#)," KHRG, May 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Mya Sein Yaung Project was initiated in 2014-2015 fiscal year, in Myanmar / in Karen State, by U Ohn Myit, just ahead of the 2015 elections. The project aims to reduce poverty in the country by 16 percent, by giving loans to the villagers and charging low interest on a yearly basis. The projects were planned to allocate 30 million kyat for each village; the amount is considered as capital for the village and the yearly interest will be added to the funds. However, according to KHRG reports received from community members in some Karen Districts, participating in the project is difficult for poor villagers who have no money. Village representatives, chosen by the project workers, prioritised their relatives when deciding to whom they would give money. Villagers there must pawn belongings in order to receive a loan. See: <http://khr.org/2014/12/14-40-s1/toungoo-situation-update-thandaunggyi-township-april-june-2014> and <http://khr.org/2014/11/14-50-s1/hpapun-situation-update-bu-tho-township-february-june-2014>. The funding for the project comes from the national budget. See "[Union Minister U Ohn Myint Needs to answer](#)", May 11th, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> To find out more about Asian Highway please see "[Beautiful Words, Ugly Actions: The Asian Highway in Karen State, Burma](#)", KHRG, August 2016.

Burma/Myanmar government's middle school. Therefore, many children in villages drop out of school. They just go back [home] and help their parents.

Because of these cases [of children not attending middle school], village authorities submit cases to the [Burma/Myanmar] government education department at the township level, in order to request post-primary school teachers in their villages. Thus, the local Burma/Myanmar government have sent some post-primary school level teachers to villages. Also, they [Burma/Myanmar government] have sent primary school teachers to the other villages. However, villagers [often] have to give support to the school teachers in the form of food and materials, such as oil and charcoal. In some villages, people cannot build a school, so they request that the local Government Education Officer builds a school in their village. Then the Burma/Myanmar government comes and helps them [villagers] to build a school. The Burma/Myanmar government contributes some school materials, such as books and pencils, to the primary schools in the villages, but there is not enough. Therefore, some villagers say that the students have to buy these school materials from outside.

### **Healthcare**

For some villages, the Burma/Myanmar government has built clinics for when the villagers are sick, but there are not enough female/male medics or sufficient medicine in the clinics. There is [often] only one clinic for villagers [that is close by]. The villagers go to the clinic when the doctor stays at the clinic. Sometimes many medical groups, such as the Mother and Childcare Association and a midwife, came to the clinics; then the villagers gather together at these clinics because they [medical groups] want to raise the health awareness of the villagers. After they [medical groups] leave the clinics are locked [closed].<sup>12</sup>

Healthcare groups from the Karen National Union [KNU] give public lectures to the villagers regarding malaria protection, when needed. They [KNU] also donate mosquito nets to the villagers for free. The common diseases in the rural areas are malaria, colic, flatulence, headache, skin disease, eczema and ring-worm. However, the villagers have to cure all of these diseases with traditional medicine.

### **Burma/Myanmar Government Military [Tatmadaw]**

We can say that the activities of the Burma/Myanmar government military have reduced in our area. If necessary, they [military troops] travel from Taung Kya Inn village to Kyainseikgyi Town. Their [army] camp, Infantry Battalion [IB]<sup>13</sup> #231, is very near to Taung Kya Inn village. Sometimes they just wear ordinary clothes [not army uniforms] and they go to buy durians from Win Ka village.

In the village, there is one village head and one clerk, who are appointed [chosen] by the Burma/Myanmar government. They regularly go to the Township administration office, once a month [to report on the village situation]. If something needs to be done with management in the village the Township administrator gets the village head to manage it.

### **Border Guard Force [BGF]**

Battalion Commander, Saw Pa Lu [from the BGF Battalion #1021], is based at the BGF headquarters in Noh Loe village. Company Commander, Bo Kyaw Aye [from Company #1], is

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<sup>12</sup> The problems of newly built B/M government clinics with limited medics, limited medicine and locked doors have been reported several times to KHRG across Dooplaya District. See, "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, June 2015 to August 2016](#)," KHRG, December 2016, and, "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships, July to November 2014](#)," KHRG, January 2016.

<sup>13</sup> An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises of 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.

active in Htee Hu Thi village. However, I did not see that they [BGF] have done anything beneficial for the civilians.

### **Democratic Karen Benevolent Army [DKBA]**

Battalion Commander, Bo Aung Yin [from the DKBA Battalion #901], is active in Kyonedoe Township, but they do not have their army camp based there. They just stay at their [own] houses. Some responsible villagers said that some soldiers [under the DKBA battalion #901] asked for taxes from the people. The villagers had to pay 1,000 kyats [US \$0.74] for one acre of rubber plantation. DKBA soldiers also demanded one big tin of rice<sup>14</sup> from each house in the village as an annual ration, but some villagers could only give them four bowls of rice. They [DKBA] do not benefit [help] the villagers.

### **Karen Peace Council [KPC]**

Battalion Commander, Mein Khin Lin [KPC battalion #776], is active in Kyonedoe Township, but they do not have a permanent office. When necessary, they just go to KPC headquarters in Tokawko village, Kawkareik Township. They do not have any activity regarding militarisation. They just do their work at home. They also do not demand taxes from any person.

### **Karen National Union [KNU]**

In order to understand the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement [NCA] completely, KNU authorities and Karen National Defence Organisation [KNDO]<sup>15</sup> Battalion #6 worked together and held a public meeting in Kyonedoe Township. Regarding drugs, more and more people are addicted to them.<sup>16</sup> They [KNU] try to take action to tackle drugs issues. They also raise awareness of drugs amongst the people. They carry out the law<sup>17</sup> as it was made by the District leaders.

### **Conclusion**

I [KHRG researcher] went to different villages in Kyonedoe Township and saw many problems and issues regarding livelihood, education, healthcare, armed groups, road construction, destroyed lands and plantations, and drug users and drug dealers. Therefore, I [KHRG researcher] would like to conclude in the Situation Update that it is difficult for local authorities to solve all of these problems because there are many ethnic armed groups in the area.

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

- “Dooplaya Incident Report: Rape and Killing of a teenage girl in Kawkareik Township, August 23rd 2016” (January 2017)

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<sup>14</sup> A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg or 23.04 lb of paddy, and 16 kg or 35.2 lb of milled rice.

<sup>15</sup> The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

<sup>16</sup> To find more information about the drugs issue in Dooplaya District, please refer to “[Growing drug use and its consequences in Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts, between February and December 2015](#),” KHRG, May 2016.

<sup>17</sup> The KNU Drug Prevention Special Act (1/2014) was enacted in 2014. Articles 2 to 8 give a prison sentence of between 6 months and 10 years for the use and sale of yaba, depending on the quantity of drug being used and sold. Article 9 includes a prison sentence of between 1 year and 7 years for the possession of drug (yaba) making equipment or raw materials for producing yaba, and up to 15 years in prison for using a yaba manufacturing machine. Article 11 states a prison sentence of 3 years for transporting yaba, even if the person caught does not know what they were transporting. Article 22 states that if murder occurs whilst using drugs, the perpetrator can be punished according to Kaw Thoo Lei Criminal law or National Criminal Law.

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yin Township, January 2016 to March 2016” (December 2016)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, June 2015 to August 2016” (December 2016)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw B---, March 2015,” (November 2016)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, February 2016” (November 2016)

