



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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**Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw and Dwe Lo Township,
May to July 2016**

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Lu Thaw Township and Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District during the period between May and July 2016, including unresolved killing cases, rape and discrimination against Muslims.

- *Three Muslims in the same family were killed in A--- area, Meh Wine village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. KNU authorities arrested a worker from Shwe Kyone Gyi Company in connection to the murders but he was released after the owner of Shwe Kyone Gyi Company paid his bail. KNU local authorities investigating this case have not been able to find concrete evidence identifying the perpetrator.*
 - *On Infantry Battalion (IB) #19's old helipad in Meh Tha Lote village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, Ma F--- was raped by Maung Si Thu Naing. After the case was reported to the police by Maung H---, Maung Si Thu Naing has been kept in prison and negotiations regarding appropriate punishment are ongoing.*
 - *After U---'s goats were stolen by Saw A'Shin in Mar Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, the Meh Tha Lote village tract administrator delayed solving the case. Community members believe that the motivation for the goat theft and the delay in solving the case are due to the fact that U--- is Muslim.*
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Situation Update | Lu Thaw Township and Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (May 2016 to July 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in August 2016. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This

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.

*situation update was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including 11 interviews, four incident reports, and 54 photographs.*²

Introduction

After April 2016 the nature of social conflict [in Hpapun District] began to change. Human rights abuses by local authorities and armed groups have decreased but conflicts among local people have increased and have become more complicated.

During the period between May 8th 2016 and July 25th 2016, many different social conflicts have occurred throughout Hpapun District. To be more precise, social conflicts occurred in in Meh K'law village tract³, Bu Tho Township and A--- area and H--- village in Dwe Lo Township. Further conflicts also occurred in the villages to the west of Hpapun in K'law Ter village tract, Lu Thaw Township.

The main problems [in Hpapun District] are “killing”, “rape”, “goat stealing”, “child labour” and “serious attacks by jungle rats”. The people who cause social conflicts include people from everywhere. Some are from armed organisations but others are NLD [National League for Democracy] government staff or ordinary people [civilians]. The motivation to cause conflict is also different for each person. Some people do not get along because of religious differences and therefore want to oppress one another. Some people care less about human rights than [maintaining] their current jobs. Some people cause conflict because of their greediness for other people's properties. This KHRG community member has witnessed many different causes [of social conflict].

Conflicts between government staff members and civilians have increased and conflicts among civilians have also increased. Previously, most conflicts occurred between armed organisations [Tatmadaw/ethnic armed groups] and civilians, and local authorities [Myanmar government/Karen National Union] and civilians. In this time period the amount of conflicts between civilians and armed groups and between civilians and local authorities has decreased. Nevertheless, no matter what the social conflict is, the only people who suffer from the conflict are the civilians who lack weapons and power. The type of conflict might change and the perpetrator might change but the victims will always be ordinary people.

[In the past], local people never tried to solve conflicts that were caused by the previous Burma/Myanmar government's rule. In the past, the Burma/Myanmar government ruled the country through a dictatorship system where power was passed down generationally so the local villagers did not want any conflict [with them] and also did not dare get involved if they did not think the conflict was relevant to them. They [villagers] worried that if they tried to solve other people's conflict they would get into conflicts themselves. As they wanted to live peacefully without conflict, villagers tried to avoid getting involved in solving other people's conflicts. This is the spirit [habit] of all local villagers. If they encounter a conflict, they just try to solve it on their own by apologising or by running away in order to avoid the conflict. This is their best solution to any conflicts that arise.

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.

³ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

However, some people who were unable to solve their conflicts have died. In what follows, I will report in detail those particular social conflicts.

Killing Case in A--- [area], Dwe Lo Township

This killing case originally occurred on May 8th 2016. It took place in A--- area, Meh Wine village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. This killing case is not an ordinary killing case; it is about the murder of a family.

No one has been able to discover who the perpetrator [murderer] is. Despite many different opinions from local villagers, no one could identify the perpetrator. No one from any [political] organisation or armed group has confessed to the crime. No civilian has confessed to the crime.

There are three victims who were killed. The first victim is U⁴ Poe Pein, a 57 year-old who came to sell [things] in A---'s area; he lived in K--- Section, Shwe Kyin Town. The second victim is [U Poe Pein's daughter] Ma⁵ Har Zi Nar, a 27 year-old. The last victim is [U Poe Pein's son] Ko Thi Ha Kyaw, a 24 year-old. These three victims disappeared and were killed on the same day. Their dead bodies were discovered [buried] under the ground in A--- area. U Poe Pein, Ma Har Zi Nar and Ko Thi Ha Kyaw are Muslims.

Here are the details of the case. In the beginning of 2016, they [U Poe Pein's family] came to set up a small shop in A--- area, Shwe Kyin Town. The family consists of U Poe Pein, his daughter (Ma Har Zi Nar) and his son (Ko⁶ Thi Ha Kyaw). On May 8th 2016, U Poe Pein and his children disappeared. No one knew how the family disappeared from their shop, who took them away or where they were taken to.

After three or four days, U Poe Pein's 54 year-old brother, U B---, discovered that U Poe Pein's family has disappeared because when he (U B---) lost his chicken (which had escaped from his house) he went to search for it in U Poe Pein's house. However, he did not see anyone in U Poe Pein's house. It was at that moment that he realised that U Poe Pein's family had disappeared.

After U Poe Pein's family had disappeared for one week, workers from the [nearby] gold mining operation area came to dig for gold and extracted the earth from the ground with a machine. They found the dead bodies of U Poe Pein's family. The local villagers talked about this case and expressed their own opinions on what happened but no one was able to find any concrete evidence that would reveal who the perpetrator was. This case occurred in a KNU [Karen National Union] controlled area so the KNU local authorities are still investigating the case. It is very difficult to find out [information about] this case because most people do not [take it upon themselves to] take responsibility [in pushing for justice] for what has taken place. The local villagers are just staying in their own places and pretending that they don't know anything. This KHRG community member hopes that everyone will try to resolve their conflicts so that a killing case like this does not happen again.

When the workers in the gold mining operation area from Shwe Kyone Gyi Company came to [A--- area] to continue their gold mining they found three dead bodies on the ground that were cut into pieces. After the dead bodies were discovered, people accused Ko Zay Yar Tun, a 31 year-old man who lived in Shwe Kyin Town, of being the perpetrator. Local KNU authorities then

⁴ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

⁵ Ma is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

⁶ Ko is a Burmese title meaning older brother. It can be used for relative as well as non-relative.

went to Shwe Kyin Town to arrest him. Ko Zay Yar Tun was arrested by KNU on June 2nd, 2016. He was then sent to KNU headquarters in Brigade 3 where he was held for eight days. While he (the perpetrator) was kept in KNU headquarters in Brigade 3, his boss, Shwe Kyone Gyi Company's owner, U Kyaw Min Naing, came to pay bail. Ko Zay Yar Tun was therefore released [from jail] on June 10th 2016. He now lives peacefully in Shwe Kyin Town without any worries. I would also like to report that U C---, 56 years and U B--- (the relatives of the victims) are currently hoping that the KNU in Brigades 3 [Nyaunglebin District] and 5 [Hpapun District] will be able to arrest the real perpetrator as soon as possible.

Rape

A rape case occurred on June 1st 2016. It took place on [Tatmadaw] Infantry Battalion [IB] #19's old helipad, which is near D--- Section, E--- village, Meh Tha Lote village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

The [accused] perpetrator [of the rape] is Maung⁷ Si Thu Naing, a 24 year-old Shan man who lives in A'nout Pat Ken village, K'law Hta village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. The victim who suffered from rape is Ma F---, a 16 year-old who lives in G--- village, K'law Hta village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District.

Regarding this case, [witness] Maung H---, who is 41 years, told me, *"The event took place very close to me and I alone witnessed this event in detail."* According to Maung H---, Maung Si Thu Naing drove his motorbike with Ma F--- between 3:30 and 4:00 in the afternoon on June 1st 2016. He drove it [his motorbike] to IB #19's old helipad. He then stopped driving his motorbike and immediately tried to rape Ma F---. Ma F--- is just a young girl and she could not fight back so she was forced to accept the sexual demands of Maung Si Thu Naing without her consent.

Maung H---, who witnessed this rape, informed the police at the police station in Hpapun Township. Maung Si Thu Naing is currently being kept in the jail at the police station in Hpapun Township. We have not yet heard anything about how he will be punished. Their [perpetrator and victim's] parents are still negotiating with each other in order to solve the case. We do not know how they [parents] will agree to solve this case. Ma F--- is currently studying in school whereas Maung Si Thu Naing is being kept in the jail at the police station.

Goat Thefts

The case that I am now going to write about is one of the social conflicts [in Hpapun District]. This case occurred on June 1st 2016 in G--- or [also known as] H--- village, Mar Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. The perpetrator is Saw⁸ A'shin, a 25 year-old who lives in Whay Mon village, Meh K'law village tract, Bu Tho Township. The victim is U I---, a 52 year-old Muslim who lives in J--- village, Meh K'law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. One perspective is that the perpetrator stole goats from U I--- because he wanted to bully Muslims.

U I--- lives in J--- village but he did not keep his goats in that village. He kept his goats in the land which is covered with full of grass [pasture] to the west of H--- village near the Yune Slin stream. Saw A'shin usually travels to H--- village so it was easy for him to steal the goats. Saw A'shin's uncles and aunties also do not get along with Muslims and it is also for this reason that community members believe that Saw A'Shin stole the Muslim's goats.

⁷ Maung is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁸ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

In addition, although Saw A'Shin was arrested, U Sai Myint Kyaing, the Meh Tha Lote village tract administrator, delayed solving this case. One community member concluded that he delayed his decision because U I--- is Muslim. This is an inappropriate [way to act] in a democracy. Although Muslims are born in Myanmar not all of them have Myanmar citizenship ID cards or are able to exercise their right to religious freedom.

In this case, U I--- suffered alone [lost his goats] but does not want to talk about it anymore. He relied on the village tract administrator to provide justice but the village tract administrator did not care about [his case]. Because of this, the Muslim people in the local area are unhappy. The other local villagers [non-Muslim villagers] are just staying in their own place and ignoring the problems that arise.

Conclusion

It is the opinion of this KHRG community member that even if we inform villagers about all the social problems in the area, they will ignore them. This is their [the villagers] habit: to avoid problems and not attempt to solve them. As long as this is the case it will be impossible to reduce these social conflicts. Although it may be impossible to eliminate social conflicts entirely, it is still necessary for villagers to attempt to resolve the conflicts that emerge.

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

- "Hpapun Interview: U Fm---, 2016" (December 2017)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, July 2015," (April 2017)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, October 2016," (March 2017)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, March 2016," (January 2017)
- "Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2015," (December 2016)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District

