



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

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Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, October 2016

This Interview with Saw B---, describes events occurring in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, in October 2016, and includes information about the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), existing army camps, a dam project, and social services such as healthcare, education, and employment.

- *Saw B--- expressed his concerns about the Burma/Myanmar government's plan to return IDPs despite the continuous army occupation in his hometown.*
 - *He also shared his opinions about what social services governments and political leaders should provide so that IDPs' needs are met.*
 - *Saw B---also stated that the dam project taking place in Nyaunglebin District is concerning to local residents. He mentioned that he was dissatisfied with the Karen National Union (KNU) about the situation because high-level leaders from the KNU already took the money from company.*
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Interview | Saw B---, (male, 42), C--- village, C--- village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District (October 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 on October 12th 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 six other interviews and 62 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Baptist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Preacher

Position: Pastor

What is your name?

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.

My name is Saw B---

How old are you?

I am 42 years old.



This is a photo of Saw B---. It was taken in Ei Tu Hta IDP camp in Hpapun District on October 11, 2016. He is a Baptist pastor in Ei Tu Hta IDP camp and he shared his concerns and perspective on the IDP resettlement and return process as well as the potential consequences for IDPs' future. [Photo: KHRG]

This photo shows Ei Tu Hta camp, which is located on the bank of the Salween river. This photo was taken on October 12, 2016. [Photo: KHRG]

What is the name of your village?

I am originally from C--- village and I am currently living in Ei Tu Hta IDP [Internally Displaced Person] camp.³

What is the name of your village tract, township and district?

C--- village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mutraw [Hpapun] District.

What is your position in the IDP camp?

I was a pastor in C--- village before I arrived in Ei Tu Hta IDP camp. Now I am still a pastor in the IDP camp.

What is your nationality?

I am Karen.

What is your religion?

I am Baptist Christian.

Are you married?

³ For other interviews with residents in Ei Tu Hta camp, see "[Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, October 2016](#)," November 2016.

Yes, I am. I have five children: three boys and two girls.

Do you have any information about IDP return?

The camp leaders informed camp residents that the food rations will stop and some IDPs will have to return to their homes or resettle to the place of return starting in August or September 2017. As for IDP return, we know that there are many different potential places planned for IDPs' return. From my understanding, we will not be returning together as a group, but that is not surprising to me. I can make my own decision about which place is best to go if I actually have to return.

What is your opinion on the return?

Since I live under the management of the KNU [Karen National Union], if it is planned by the KNU, we would be fine. I also heard that places have been prepared for IDP returnees in other districts that are controlled by the enemies [Tatmadaw]. For me, I would not accept that and I wouldn't agree to return to those kinds of places. If I have to go back, I will only return to my village and I only hope to go back to my village. I decided that if I am not sent to my village, I will not return.

What concerns do you have if you return?

There are many concerns for me. My first concern is the enemies [Tatmadaw] have been deployed and have operated in our area for about 20 years already. Another concern for us is landmines since the landmines that the enemies planted have not yet been removed. We even heard that [Senior General of Myanmar Armed Forces] Min Aung Hlaing commanded his soldiers to protect and maintain 50 yards of military land [that had already been established in the local area]. Therefore, there is no possibility the troops will withdraw. Since Tatmadaw will not withdraw their military, if we return and fighting breaks out like it did in Kachin State,⁴ we will all have to suffer again. To be honest, living in the IDP camp now, we are not very safe from [military] oppression but it is safer than not living in the IDP camp. However, if we have to go back and fighting breaks out again, I would probably not make it [back] here again.

Do you personally support this return process or what are your thoughts about the return process? Do you support the process?

To me, if I really have to go back, I will not have any positive feelings about this; only negative feelings.

What will be your basic needs if you return?

As a part of humanity, there are many needs to restart a life. One need [we have] relates to our livelihoods since the people from rural mountainous area areas work on hill farms. To be able to do that, we will need many things like machetes, mattocks, chopping hoes and buffalo. However, security protection is our main need. Right now, security is not adequate.

What is needed most for the IPDs' future?

Currently, the most important thing for IDPs is for each individual family to decide and design their own destiny for their future. Furthermore, we have to gain more specific knowledge and understanding about leadership, politics, and religions in order to protect and defend ourselves. What I want the most is for our Karen people to be united. If Karen people are not united there will be more tension among [Karen] groups. The Karen people will become divided, argue, and

⁴ Despite the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, fighting has continued sporadically in ethnic areas including Kachin State, see, "[Schools closed and civilians displaced as fighting between Burma Army and KIA intensifies.](#)" The Irrawaddy, 15th August 2016.

oppose each other. The most fundamental things to improve IDPs' and our peoples' futures are unity, creating understanding and an inclusive society.

What should the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU government do to ensure IDPs return with dignity?

Currently, if the [IDP] community from the KNU controlled area went back now, there would not be any benefits for the KNU and their return would only profit the [Burma/Myanmar] government military. In the future in order to maintain peace, both the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government should try their best to obtain peace like they have done in the past. Since the leaders have more authority, their vision will have more power than the civilians' [vision]. My understanding is that while they are organising and arranging the return process, they are hoping to build peace within the country, bring unity, and stop the civil war. If they are truly trying to better the situation, they need to prioritise those issues. Otherwise, there will be no benefits and it will not be fruitful for any groups.

What kind of support will you need from the Burma/Myanmar government?

For me if I go back, there will be a lot of things that I might need. The [Burma/Myanmar] government will need to provide services such as farming, healthcare, education and religious work for us. I do not want support from the government. I only want support from the KNU government since I have lived under the KNU's administration since I was born.

What is your feeling about the return plan?

Like I said before about sending back [IDP] returnees, I am not satisfied because I do not know if the return is planned by the KNU or the Burma/Myanmar government. What I want is for the [Burma/Myanmar] military camps inside [Karen State] to withdraw and move away from where civilians live. If there are no military [groups] present, IDPs will return themselves voluntarily. We do not even need them to plan the process. We want to go back to our own place and our own village. We do not want to live in the IDP camp forever, because the IDP camp is not our village.

How did you receive information about IDPs' return?

I just heard rumours from the camp community and from the camp committees about the return. We heard from the news that the return process is not planned by the KNU leaders, and is planned by Burma/Myanmar [government]. They want to take advantage [of planning the relocation] for themselves, who knows? I do not see how the return benefits the KNU. It only benefits the Burma/Myanmar government.

How do you feel about leaving the IDP camp?

Currently, where we are living is not our birth place and it is not our village. Therefore, it is not surprising if we have to leave. We would not have any issue leaving this place. I am only concerned if the fighting and conflict breaks out again like it has in the past. We do not want to face it [possible fighting] and do not want to dream about it happening again. Leaving the IDP camp is not a problem, but sustainable peace is the most important thing.

How long have you been living in Ei Tu Hta IDP camp?

I have been in this IDP camp for about seven years already

Do you have any information on the return site? Where and when will you return?

I do not know exactly about this information. As I live in Brigade 5 [Hpapun District], I previously heard that there are up to three or four places [for return] and about ten or twenty household will have to relocate to these unknown relocation places. I have visited those places, but I wouldn't dream of living there. Since we fled [from place to place] we had already been living in

places with similar [living conditions]. Therefore if we have to go back, our situation will be the same as IDPs. Furthermore, if we go back we are just creating more problems for the local people, who are settled there and have already cut trees and cleared the land for hill farming.

Do you own any land where you will return to?

I have a small plot of land that was passed down by my ancestors. Even if we only have a small plot of land in the area where we grew up, anything we do or want to do [on the land] is our right. We have more opportunities on our ancestors' land, rather than on land in other places.

Do you have any information about healthcare, education, access to land and employment in the area where you will return?

There will not be any opportunities for us to earn money by working for [the Burma/Myanmar]government departments. Our only possibility for work is doing the same work our ancestors did for work before. The only things that I can do are give advice and educational support for the children and do religious work since I am a pastor.

Are there any discussions happening within the IDP camp about the return process before it is implemented?

I do not know of any discussions or meetings held. I have heard very little information from the camp committee. Whether we will return and be provided with support or go back by our own arrangement, I do not exactly know about the process either.

Is there anything that you want to talk about that I failed to mention?

There are many things that I want to mention. Now I am a civilian living in KNU controlled area and our KNU has great leaders at their headquarters and in every single district. In each district, the situation now looks like a proverb said by elders: "*one bush one rabbit*" [meaning you are weaker when you are alone]. It seem like they do not cooperate together anymore. If District Three [Nyaunglebin District] does something, the others, like District Five [Hpapun District] and District Two [Toungoo District], do it differently.

I travelled [through the districts]. I am not satisfied with what I saw because when I went recently to Brigade Three [Nyaunglebin District], I heard there will be dam construction on Thay Loh river. Some civilians will lose their land and their village will be destroyed if the dam is constructed. Therefore, they do not want the dam construction project to happen. But if we look at the leaders [local authority] they have already taken the company's money [therefore the project will go ahead]. I thought both the leaders from the KNU and the KNU's civilians would stand together [to protect their land and environment]. However, civilians have to stand alone on their own feet [without support from KNU leaders] to protect against the dam construction and the KNU leaders have already taken the company's money. Civilians and the KNU are not on the same page. For this reason, we are losing trust and unity among us. I personally think the relocation will have more opportunities and benefits for the Burma/Myanmar government than for the KNU and Karen civilians. For the leaders, whoever will rule the country and lead the people, now it is an important time for them to act and make sure everything goes according to their plans [to make the situation better].

Thank you, Thara!⁵ Would you allow us to publish the information if we want to use the information you shared with me?

⁵ *Thara* (male) or *tharamu* (female) is a Karen term used for any teacher, pastor, or any person to whom one wishes to show respect.

You can use my information, and if [any other] problems arise we will still keep reporting the information truthfully [to anyone who collects the information], based on what we know and see and what we have been through.

Thank you very much, Thara.

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)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, March 2016,” (January 2017)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)