



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, January to October 2016

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District during the period between January and October 2016, including development projects, military and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) movement, education, healthcare and the region's social and economic situation.

- *There were no significant military activities by either the KNLA or the Tatmadaw between January and October, and local villagers responded positively to seeing soldiers from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #351 wearing civilian clothing and sightseeing with soldiers from the KNLA. However, minor clashes in September 2016 caused some local people to worry about an increase in instability.*
 - *Although the educational situation in Dooplaya District has generally improved, villagers in deep rural areas reported receiving insufficient educational support, especially regarding the availability and quality of teachers.*
 - *The development of the International Asian Highway has caused many villagers to have their land confiscated and their homes lost. Villagers propose and request that a Community Based Organisation (CBO) helps negotiate between the Myanmar government and the KNU in order to ensure that villagers will be compensated for their losses.*
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Situation Update | Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District (January 2016 to October 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in October 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 Dooplaya District, including five interviews, one other situation update and 164 photographs.*²

Introduction

This situation update describes events occurring in Win Yin [Win Yay] Township, Dooplaya District, during the period between January 1st 2016 and October 20th 2016 and discusses development, military and KNLA movement, education, healthcare and the region's social and economic situation.

KNLA and Tatmadaw military movements

Since January 1st, 2016, there were no significant military activities by either the KNLA or the Tatmadaw, with the exception of minor movement caused by Tatmadaw troop rotations. The [frontline] military unit was rotated every six months. On April 28th 2016, the Tatmadaw army in Lay Naung military base camp was led by military camp commander Ye Win Thein. 30 fully armed Tatmadaw soldiers patrolled [around] the Met K' Wa, Kwun Thay Ta, and Kyauk Ta Dar areas. Military activities did not take place only in this township, however. Similar activities also took place in Kawkareik Township and Kyainseikgyi Township.

On July 22nd 2016, Light Infantry Battalion³ [LIB] #591, led by Major Kyaw Myo Aung and consisting of 17 fully armed soldiers, came to monitor the school and newly built low-cost houses in the old village of Met K' Tha, Kyainseikgyi Township. They then went back to Three Pagoda Pass Town after changing from military uniforms into citizen shirts. From the KNLA side, the vice officer Saw⁴ Ba Thein and his group came to greet them (LIB #591) and guided them towards the places they would like to go [for sightseeing]. The [local] villagers were very happy to see this.

However, [local] people panicked again in September 2016 after minor clashes took place in some areas that created instability. The local people became worried and wondered if the clashes would happen again. It was a situation in which armed groups were sometimes friends but also sometimes fighting each other. In addition, while the citizens were trying to let go of their fear, the Tatmadaw restarted its activity [inside the region]. Although both the KNLA and the Tatmadaw were planning to fight one another, the real victims of the conflict were the citizens. Military movements from both sides have not stopped.

Education

Compared to 2010, the education situation in Karen State within KNU controlled areas has mostly improved in 2016. Due to newly built schools and roads, the involvement of government teachers, increased support for Karen literacy classes in school, and general educational support, many children were able to attend school. However, less educational support was received [by villages] in deep rural areas [hill areas], where there are around 50-60 houses in

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 Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up to date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁴ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

one village. Some villages still have not received any [Myanmar] government recruited teachers. This issue was raised on September 10th 2016 when KHRG field researchers went to a meeting between A--- village head, a locally-recruited teacher and several [Non-Government] Organisations. These Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) agreed to support [the school]; however, since they returned, no help has been provided and no action was taken. There were in total three teachers in that primary school; one was recruited by the government and two were originally there.

Daw⁵ D--- has been serving as a teacher since 1993 and she has worked in [many] different places. She is the wife of an Immigration Authority [Officer] and has not been been transparent about contracts for teachers. The village heads disregarded her actions because they had no idea what she was doing. She hired a villager named Daw Hser Hayblu Moo and paid her 1,500 Baht [US \$44.99]⁶ per month. Though the government teachers have not disclosed this information, the government should be aware that the Karen children would not gain sufficient knowledge, or learn the Burmese language [because she is not the proper teacher and lacks Burmese language skills]. This case was reported to KNU controlled area of Dooplaya District office. This truly happened according to [position censored for security] Saw B---. Currently, the KNU and the Myanmar government are supporting primary education as much as they can. As a result, there are changes within the [local education] situation.

Healthcare

Concerning healthcare in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District, since 2010 there has been a reduction of malaria infections due to the campaigns led and medicines provided by organisations working against malaria [in rural villages]; thus, there were improvements [in healthcare].

However, there were not enough nurses, doctors or medicines in the government-provided clinics in rural villages; this has caused local people to encounter healthcare difficulties. In response, several young people who attended the training regarding healthcare [basic skills] opened by KNU have volunteered or taken on informal medical jobs to provide healthcare services [to the village]. Moreover, an organisation against malaria assigned one staff member to each village and tested the blood of all villagers who have suffered from fever.

Social

According to what has been documented between January 1st 2016 and Oct 20th 2016, in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District, there have been major changes between 2010 and 2016 regarding the social situation. These changes are due to increased practices of religious literacy training, village safety, and more voluntary work in villages. Youth have been prioritised and there are more opportunities for them to take on leadership roles than before. Disciplinary action has also been taken which has stopped authorised personnel and the KNLA from using drugs with impunity. However, women are not currently being selected to village leadership positions because of the stereotype that they are unqualified. Meanwhile, the KWO [Karen Women Organisation] and KYO [Karen Youth Organisation] are raising the awareness of the people; the social situation seems to have improved due to their inspirational campaign calling for the prioritisation of education in the Karen community.

Economic

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

⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the October 4, 2017 official market rate of 33.35 baht to US \$1.

There are significant changes and improvements to the economic situation in Dooplaya District, Win Yay Township, between January 1st 2016 and October 20th 2016 because increased freedom of movement has opened up more opportunities to trade domestic livestock. Many people have rehabilitated their houses between 2015 and 2016. However, there are still some homeless people due to the confiscation of lands caused by the development of the International Asian Highway⁷ [AH1]. This [AH1] has only benefitted companies, armed groups, and investors. [Local] people are too honest, naïve, or unwilling to speak up, which has made it difficult to fight back against the AH1. NGOs have come to collect money [from the villagers], saying that they would help them but since they went back to town, they have not returned. The names of the NGOs are unknown and they frequently enter and exit [the villages]. Furthermore, fighting also broke out, causing people to worry. Meanwhile, some wealthy individuals from the big cities have seized opportunities by cooperating with KNU authorities and ignoring the local people. Instead of raising their voices, the villagers did what they were asked to do: if they were asked to go, they went; if they were asked to pay, they paid; if they were asked to answer, they answered. They continued this until the companies/wealthy individuals and armed groups were satisfied.

A cement company came and tested the stone twice. When they first came, they said that the villagers didn't accept them so they went back. When they returned, they had received permission from Dooplaya's District governor [Pa doh⁸] Shwe Maung to conduct assessments of the stone for fifteen days so the villagers had no idea who to report [their complaints] to. Although the villagers have protected the township and village's natural beauty, [they feel that] wealthy individuals who are rich and powerful have used many different tactics to seize what they want. As a result, only wealthy individuals and armed groups have profited whereas local people have been left behind, their lands and gardens lost, and their lives full of intimidation.

Regarding local people's business, they just sell the fruits that are annually produced from their domestic garden in order to support their livelihood. One local villager said, *"We don't face difficulties like before; we can purchase and consume meat such as fish, pork, and chicken easily. We don't have big businesses."*

Local residents in Dooplaya District, Win Yay Township, mainly make their living by working on rubber plantations, betel plantations and by farming. [Local] people have questioned, *"Why has our mother organisation, the KNU, ignored us on the issue of the International Asian Highway construction? If our own government cannot help us, how can the Burma/Myanmar government help us? After all, the Burma/Myanmar government is not made up of Karen people!"* The International Asian Highway is believed to be connected with the KNU but it is unclear how they are connected. Villagers have also reported, *"We propose that [a CBO] helps negotiate between the Myanmar government and the KNU. So far, only affected government buildings or lands*

⁷ The Asian Highway Network is a United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific-supported project that aims to link 32 countries in Asia across 141,000 kilometres of roadway. In Burma/Myanmar the project has involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see ["Beautiful Words, Ugly Actions: The Asian Highway in Karen State, Burma"](#), KHRG, August 2016; ["The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik Town road construction threatens villagers' livelihoods"](#), KHRG, March 2015; ["With only our voices, what can we do?: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar."](#) KHRG, June 2015; ["Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway."](#) KHRG, October 2009; and ["Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State."](#) KHRG, April 2007. In addition, fighting continues erupting between the Tatmadaw and the DKBA along the highway, with the latest clash erupting in early July 2015, resulting in the highway between Myawaddy and Kawkareik shutting down for several days, ["DKBA, Tatmadaw fight over illegal highway tolls," Myanmar Times, July 3rd 2015.](#)

⁸ *Pa Doh* is a title meaning 'governor' or 'minister' within the government or military.

were compensated, but no other information or compensation has been given by stakeholders, organisations and armed groups since 2013. Moreover, if they [authorities] want to meet amongst themselves, they call on us [villagers] to support them.” Thus, business in the local regions can be considered to have improved only slightly. The local villages have not benefited; all the improvements have gone towards the companies and KNU members’ relatives who have taken advantage of local people in Win Yay Township. Thus, there has not been any ‘real’ change in the economic situation; change will only be ‘real’ when it is easier for local people to earn their livelihoods [than before].

Development

The economic situation regarding development has improved in Win Yin [Win Yay] Township, Dooplaya District, between January 1st 2016 and Oct 20th 2016. After the NCA⁹ (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement) was signed [on October 2015], there has been development of education, social, economic, healthcare, transportation and communication. However, there are also significant negative consequences to development. For example, there was a fraud in which villagers were asked to submit 500 kyat [US \$0.35]¹⁰ per household in order to help them gain access in solar energy. However, after there was a signed agreement to build [solar panels], the fraudsters disappeared and were never heard from again. The affected village is C-- and this fraud took place on March 2016; however, we don’t know whether this also affected other villages because we [KHRG field researchers] didn’t contact them.

There are also improvements in education. Despite increasing [financial] support for schools and higher enrolment rates in every village, challenges still remain due to the shortage of teachers as well as other needs. There are still some villages that do not teach Karen language during school hours. Some schools still exist which are able to stand on their own feet [without outside support] such as Buddhist schools and Burma/Myanmar government schools in some villages. Moreover, greater access to libraries is needed. Regarding transportation, the International Asian Highway is beneficial for the public as well as for organisations and local citizens. However, it has hugely impacted [local people who live along or near the road construction]. The road is crossing through local people’s lands/gardens and farmlands; but, the road has not met the [qualified] standard until now. The actors didn’t care about providing any compensation for the damage they inflicted upon gardens and farmlands. Those who had lots of land could endure [this damage], but some people lost everything they had and no one was able to care for them. Some villagers said that they requested compensation in order to fund village development: *“They have not even paid for 60 feet of lands but they say that they have already*

⁹ On October 15th 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 15th 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 15th 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 Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...,”](#) *Karen News*, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 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.

¹⁰ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the October 4th 2017 official market rate of 1363 kyat to US \$1.

paid for 230 feet of lands, so we should just watch and keep quiet. *Thay Min Ta Man Lan* [literally 'Asian Death Railway', the nickname given for IAH] is even scarier than the Death Railway [that existed many years ago]." As it ruined farmlands and long term plantations many people suffered. Moreover, another concern is the cement factory, which has already assessed the rock on the mountain [in order to produce cement]: "Our homes have been built along the road, beside [or near] the mountain where road construction operated. If the mountain is able to successfully produce cement according to their assessments, we would like to ask our mother organisation KNU where we should run to?"¹¹ The villagers are really concerned about how the KNU will protect the villagers from the negative consequences of development. As a proverb said, "When tree-stumps are composting, Karen people are fleeing" [when there are no trees or fertile lands, the Karen people have to displace to other places]. In conclusion, the International Asian Highway has disappointed villagers and if cement production is successful, it would have huge effects and destroy the long term plantations, houses, and farmland of villagers. [This issue] was disclosed to KHRG by village chairpersons and villagers. Regarding this concern, the villagers want KNU leaders, if possible, to consider the long-term needs of villagers.

Conclusion

The main incident in Win Yin Township, Dooplaya District, during this period is the International Asian Highway. We [villagers] don't know whether the highway is completely constructed or not but they are still asking for taxes to be paid. We feel like no one cares about local citizens' plantations/garden and farmlands, especially the International Asian Highway construction special unit (22) U San Lon [led group]. [Therefore,] the local citizens encounter many difficulties. U¹² E--- from F--- [village], who has seven children, has nothing left though even though he previously owned [land] before. He is over 60 years old, is a widower, and earns money by working daily irregular work. He is tightly managing his family's health, education, and livelihood. Although others are facing [difficulties] like him, he is one of the worst victims that this KHRG community member has witnessed. According to Sayama¹³ Naw¹⁴ G---, this [highway construction] is connected with central KNU.

Another issue which appeared in this period was cement production. This reflects the country's desire to develop, which has created stress and caused some citizens to feel intimidated. In addition, around six dams are also believed to be in operation in other areas in Dooplaya District. Local people are unsure whether they should be pleased because the future is still unknown and [the citizens] are "blown by the wind."

Education and health care have improved in the township. Regarding healthcare, the majority of malaria infections have been reduced. Despite this, the medication in Burma/Myanmar government provided clinics is under-stocked. The government provides only nurses or healthcare staff but we [villagers] have to pay for other medical expenses. The social situation has improved a lot; there is nothing special to say about social issues. Drugs still exist in Win Yin [Win Yay] Township, Dooplaya District, and in the Three Pagoda Pass region because you can witness drug users, including kids, who are on drugs there. Finally, the KNLA Battalion (16),

¹¹ Villagers here are expressing their concern that mining of the nearby mountain will ultimately result in their displacement. For similar concerns see, '[Villagers raise concerns regarding proposed stone mining and cement production in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District](#),' January 2018.

¹² U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

¹³ Saya (male) or Sayama (female) is a Burmese term used for any teacher, pastor, or any person to whom one wishes to show respect.

¹⁴ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

Company (2) is trying to arrest and issue punishments to those who use *yaba*¹⁵ [methamphetamine] in the villages.

There has also been recent activity regarding economic and taxation issues. Land owners with a land grant have to pay 60,000 kyat [US \$44.01] per year for tax. A five-year land grant costs 1,500,000 kyat [US \$1,363.45], 300,000 kyat [US \$220.03] of which goes towards paying tax, so no money is left over. Three years ago, land from one of the land owners was confiscated and used by constructors without compensation. [The land owner] took back the land and signed a contract which charged the constructor for staying on the land. [The land owner] still has to pay taxes for this land but she said this payment was not a burden because it was going to support the Karen ethnicity: “*It’s for our people,*” she said.

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

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, July to August 2017,” (December 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, November 2016 to January 2017” (October 2017)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, September 2016,” (May 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Noh T’Kaw Township, April to May 2016,” (March 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, June to July 2015,” (March 2017)

¹⁵ *Yaba*, which means ‘crazy medicine’ in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, [Yaba, the 'crazy medicine' of East Asia](#), UNODC, May 2008; “[Woman raped and killed in Pa’an District, October 2012,](#)” KHRG, December 2012; and Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014.

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)