



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

July 18, 2017 / KHRG # 16-92-S1

Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, January to October 2016

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District during the period between January and October 2016, and includes issues regarding army base locations, rape, drugs, villagers' livelihood, military activities, refugee concerns, development, education, healthcare, land and taxation.

- *In the last two months, a Burmese man from A--- village raped and killed a 17-year-old girl. The man was arrested and was sent to Tatmadaw military police. The man who committed the rape was also under the influence of drugs.*
 - *Drug abuse has been recognised as an ongoing issue in Dooplaya District. Leaders and officials have tried to eliminate drugs, but the drug issue remains.*
 - *Refugees from Noh Poe refugee camp in Thailand are concerned that they will face difficulties if they return to Burma/Myanmar because Bo San Aung's group (DKBA splinter group) started fighting with BGF and Tatmadaw when the refugees were preparing for their return to Burma/Myanmar. The ongoing fighting will cause problems for refugees if they return. Local people residing in Burma/Myanmar are also worried for refugees if they return because fighting could break out at any time.*
 - *There are many different armed groups in Dooplaya District who collect taxes. A local farmer reported that he had to pay a rice tax to many different armed groups, which left him with little money after.*
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Situation Update | Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (January to October 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Dooplaya District, including 169 photographs and 22 video clips.²

¹ 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.

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.

Introduction

This Situation Update describes the events which have occurred in three different Townships in Dooplaya District during the period between January and October 2016. The Situation Update includes issues regarding a rape and killing, army base locations, drugs, villagers' livelihoods, military activities, refugees, development, education, healthcare, land issues and taxation.

Rape and Killing

In the last two months [between September and October 2016], a Burmese man from A---village raped a 17 year old girl and then killed her. The man [who committed the rape] was arrested and he was sent to Tatmadaw military police. The man had also taken drugs before committing the rape.

Army bases location in Dooplaya District

1. Thit Kha Law Taw or Than Ken Nyi Naung
2. Myawaddy
3. Dih Klow or Par Chaung
4. Palu
5. Moto Talay
6. Ghaw Lay 362
7. Ka Nel Lay 2006
8. Ba Yin Naung Kone 3997
9. Maw Khee 2036
10. Htee Tapan
11. Tha Waw Thaw or Sa Khen Thit
12. Suu K'lee
13. Meh K'tee
14. Taw Wa Law
15. Pen Klen
16. Kwin Ler Ter
17. Htee Hta Baw
18. Kyaik Doe
19. Kalee Khee K'ter Koh
20. Buyar Ngue Toe
21. Htee Ghuh Thaw [BGF]
22. Taray or Kalay
23. Kyaw Hta [BGF]
24. Taw Tee
25. Anar Kwe
26. Lay Per Htaw or Taw Soe
27. Ghoh Than Plat- Bu Yin Naung Kone
28. Ghoh Than Plat- Pyan Mam Kone

These are the locations in Dooplaya District where Tatmadaw and two BGF camps are based. There were no army bases in these places until 1995 or 1996. After 1997, they [Tatmadaw] began to base their camps in these places.



This photo was taken nearby B--- village, Kawkareik Township, Taw Naw Mu Htaw area and shows villagers using a road. However, starting from May to October 2016, some villagers reported it was difficult for them to travel by car, motorbike and tractor in this place because Tatmadaw army bases were located nearby. If Tatmadaw wanted to call villagers for help, villagers had to transport Tatmadaw supplies and Tatmadaw soldiers, which created problems for villagers to travel. [Photo: KHRG]

Drugs

There are drug issues [regarding Yaba] in Dooplaya District. Village authorities have tried to solve the drug problems, but they have not been successful because they cannot eliminate all the drugs [yaba]. Some people rely on drugs [yaba] for their work [to sell and earn an income]. Some people use drugs [yaba] chronically until they experience psychosis and engage in dangerous activities. Some parents have had family problems because their children use drugs [yaba]. It [yaba] also causes problems in the village, and it creates more problems for women and girls. The leaders and village authorities have been trying to eliminate drugs [yaba], but the drug issues remain.

Villagers' livelihoods

This year villagers in Dooplaya District had difficulties earning their living because villagers' paddy fields in Kawkareik Township were infested and eaten by insects, which turned their paddy fields yellow. Farmers applied a chemical fertiliser to the paddy plants in order to make them grow well, but they [farmers] still worry that their paddy fields will not yield enough rice in the upcoming year. They had never seen [an insect infestation like] this happen in the past, but this year it has turned their farmlands and paddy fields yellow. Therefore, villagers are concerned.

In regards to farming and selling betel nut, the price is good, but some of the betel nut plantations in Dooplaya District have died due to the high temperatures this summer. Some of the betel nut plants that survived [the heat] were not able to produce enough fruits. The price of betel nut is very good, but the price of limes and large sour limes is unpredictable. If the size of the lime is big, it costs 2,000 kyats [US\$1.46]³ for 100 limes. If the size of limes is small, the price is 1,200 kyats for 100 small limes. For large sour limes, it costs 12,000 kyats [US\$8.78] for 100 fruits. However, the price of limes and large sour limes is not stable. Sometimes their price increases and sometimes it decreases. However, the price of elephant wild yam is very good. It costs 500 kyats for one viss⁴ of elephant wild yams. If people come to buy elephant wild yams from those who sell them, it costs 400 kyats [US\$0.29] for one viss. I do not know the price of rubber and rice, because it is not the season for [selling] rubber and rice.

Military activities

Starting from September to October 20th [2016], military activities in Dooplaya District have increased. Since the military activities have increased, Bo San Aung [DKBA splinter group

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 18 2017 official market rate of 1366 kyat to US \$1.

⁴ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg or 3.52 lb.

commander] and his soldiers, who were more than 40 soldiers, came to hide at a place beside C--- village at 2:00 PM on September 10th. They planned to ambush another armed group [BGF], but no one knew that they [Bo San Aung's groups] came to hide in that place. Then, Bo San Aung's groups fired and hit a car from KNLA battalion #17 when they [KNLA] were travelling. Three soldiers in the KNLA car were injured. One of them injured his arm, another injured his back and the third injured his legs. None of the soldiers [KNLA] were killed. During the same time period, military activities increased. Because of the military activities, the Burma/Myanmar government military [Tatmadaw] did not allow anyone except local authorities to travel. They [Tatmadaw] closed the route that people used for travelling from September 11th to September 19th. Thus, BGF, Karen Peace Force (KPF), Tatmadaw, KNU and DKBA (splinter) called a meeting in Lay Law Saw area, which is controlled by KPF. In the meeting, they discussed their activities and plans [to reopen the road]. After that, the route was opened for everyone to travel freely starting from September 20th 2016.

Refugee Concerns

After the NCA [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement] was signed [in October 2015], the local villagers and refugees started to feel confused in 2016 because the situation was just getting a bit [better] and there is no land for refugees to resettle. Some refugees have their relatives who live in Myanmar so it will be a bit easier for them to go back and stay with their relatives. Some of the refugees do not have any relatives or land in Myanmar; therefore, they will follow what is planned for them. Some of the refugees thought that nothing [about their situation] would be different for them [than it was during the conflict] so they reported it to UN [the United Nation]. It would be easier for their return if the UN made a plan for them.

53 households from Noh Poe refugee camp [in Thailand] submitted a list of their names to the UN for their return. Then the UN came to meet and interview them [refugees] several times in order to make sure everything would be prepared for them if they go back to Burma/Myanmar. We have known about their [refugees'] opportunity to go back to Burma/Myanmar since October 25th 2016. They [refugees] left Noh Poe camp and went to stay at Kyout Bu's place in Myawaddy temporarily and then they returned to their own places or villages in accordance with the UN's plan. By the time the refugees were ready to go back to Myanmar, Bo San Aung's group [DKBA] started fighting with BGF and Tatmadaw, which creates problems for refugees if they return. Local people in Myanmar are also worried for refugees if they come back to Myanmar because the fighting could break out at any time. They [villagers] also worried that refugees will face difficulties and problems if the UN does not plan anything to support their livelihoods. There is not much land available for refugees to work on, therefore, they will confront many different difficulties if they come back immediately. These are the villagers' concerns and challenges.

Development

As people from other countries have come and given support to Burma/Myanmar, we have seen [more] development activities such as road construction in Karen State [southeast Burma/Myanmar]. Previously in Dooplaya District, there was not a large road. Now a large road has been constructed and the local villagers are happy because they can travel more easily and smoothly. However, some people are not pleased with the road because their long-term plantations were destroyed during the road's construction. For the people who lost many of their long-term plantations, the companies have paid compensation to them. However, the people who lost only a small number of long-term plantations did not receive any compensation from the companies. If we look at this situation, companies should also give compensation to those people who lost a small number of long-term plantations. According to a local elder, *"[if] we have many children, we still want our children even if some of them die. [If] we have only a few children, can you imagine how much we want them if they die? So consider this for people who lost a small number of their long-term plantations and how badly they feel [because of their increased dependency on a small amount of plantations]."*

Education

We have seen that education in rural areas has improved, so local teachers, leaders and parents are happy. Presently, if we look at the situation, there are a lot of our students who graduate from [migrant and refugee] schools on the border [in Thailand] as well as from Myanmar government schools. However, people [who graduate from schools on the border] do not get the same opportunities as people who graduate from the Burma/Myanmar government's schools, especially if they want to be a teacher in the local Burman/Myanmar government's school. According to a local elder, *“people who graduated from different schools want to work for the government, but they do not get the same opportunities [as those who graduated from government schools]. So why do we not have a discussion or meeting to talk about equal opportunities?”*

If we look at the education situation in Dooplaya District, it is getting better each year and the students' parents are supporting their children to study at the schools. Some people cannot afford school fees for their children, so they send their children to schools in the refugee camps. Their children can study at the schools in refugee camps until they graduate. KWO [Karen Women Organisation] has also tried to find a way for children who do not have parents in the refugee camps to study at the schools. KWO collaborated with TBC [The Border Consortium] to establish one dormitory for those children who do not have parents living there [in the refugee camp], so those children can study at the school. This has improved the education situation. Also, more schools are being established in almost all villages in Dooplaya District.

Healthcare

We have not seen any issues regarding healthcare in Dooplaya District during these five months. Karen Department of Health and Welfare [KDHW] have been doing their best to educate local villagers about hygiene. [They told villagers] that they should wash their hands before they eat food, should drink boiling water, and everyone should build their toilet in their house compound. In addition, KDHW distributed mosquito nets and malaria testing tools. KDHW told and informed the local villagers how to take care of their health. However, while some local villagers followed [their instruction], others did not. The number of local villagers who followed KDHW's advice are greater than the number of villagers who did not follow it, which has improved the healthcare situation.

Land issues

There are now many land issues in Dooplaya District since the [political] situation has gotten a bit better. In the past, many people left their lands and they fled to the [Thai] border. Since then, people from other villages have come to live and work on the land that refugees and IDPs left behind. When the [original] owners of the land came back, they told the people from the other villages [who had taken their land] that these lands are their lands. Then, the people from other villages responded that they had cleaned and cut the bushes in these lands and they worked on the land because it had turned into a jungle since nobody stayed on [and looked after] these lands from 1997 to 2016. Therefore, many villagers are experiencing land issues because in the past villagers did not have any legal land ownership documents or land titles and villagers did not know how to apply for land titles. I am not certain, but most of the lands on the border do not have land titles and legal documentation. Land titling is also a problem with land far away from the border. We heard that villagers who do not have land went to work on the land in Noh T'kaw [Kyainseikgyi] Township. Then, one leader [unknown] said that they [the IDPs] could work on those lands, but they could not own those lands because they were owned by the local authorities. The returning villagers, who had fled [and were previously displaced] questioned the authority's age when the other villagers began cultivating the land [since the authority might have been too young to remember that the returning villagers had owned the land originally].

Taxation

There are several types of taxes people have to pay because there are many different armed groups in Dooplaya District. All of the armed groups are Karen ethnicity. Many different armed groups have different roles in each area, so the villagers have to pay a lot of taxes. According to a farmer, he reported that he had to pay a rice tax to many different armed groups. He had to pay 10 kyats per one big tin of rice, so he had to pay 10,000 kyats [US\$7.31] for 1,000 big tins of rice. As a result, he had little money left after he paid the rice tax. He said that he did not officially report this case [to local authorities], but spoke truthfully about the situation [taxation issue]. He also said he would have more money if taxes are reduced and thought that other rice traders probably confront the same tax issues. Regarding taxation, there have been no changes. This taxation issue is normal [has been happening for many years] as usual. However, we have to survive and do our best based on the situation.

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

- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, September 2016,” (June 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)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, August 2015,” (February 2017)

Dooplaya District



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