



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

September 18, 2017 / KHRG #17-1-S1

Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, December 2016 to January 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District during the period between December 2016 and January 2017, including Tatmadaw camp information and activities, Internal Displaced Peoples (IDPs), villagers' livelihoods, land confiscation, education and health.

- *There are nine Tatmadaw camps – under the control of Strategic Operations Command (SOC) #3 and Military Operations Command (MOC) #20 – in four of the five village tracts in Lu Thaw Township. Villagers from those four village tracts have been displaced to other areas since before 2000.*
- *Civilians report restricted freedom of movement and increased security and livelihood concerns due to Tatmadaw activities such as increasing patrols along civilian areas as well as attempts by the Tatmadaw to induce civilian cooperation by keeping food, money and medicine beside the 'Tatmadaw road' that the civilians have to cross. The food, money and medicine are free for civilians to take if they want.*
- *Civilians feel uncertain about the current peace process due to recent Tatmadaw activity and request that the Tatmadaw withdraw their camps.*
- *Civilians do not want the Burma/Myanmar Education Department government workers to interfere with their current educational system because they prefer to remain under the Karen National Union (KNU) education system.*

Situation Update | Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District (December 2016 to January 2017)

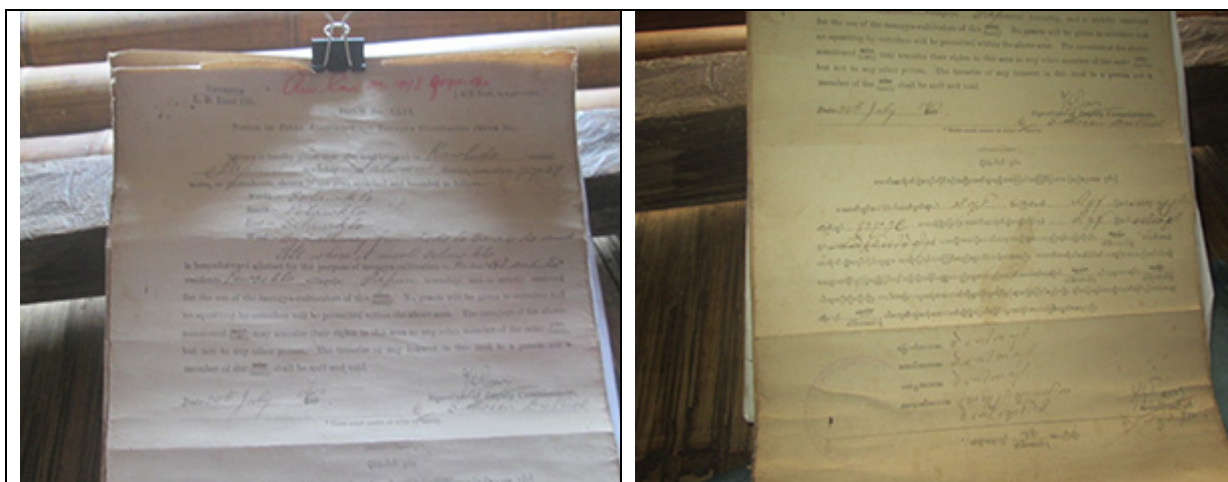
The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in January 2017. It was written by a community member in Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with 94 photographs from Hpapun District.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

There are five village tracts in northern Lu Thaw Township. Villagers in four out of the five village tracts in Lu Thaw Township report that they have not been able to stay in their villages because the Tatmadaw [camps] have been in their area [for a long time]. The four village tracts are: (1) Hkay Poo village tract (2) Ler Mu Plaw village tract (3) Saw Mu Plaw village tract and (4) Kaw Loo Der village tract. There are no Tatmadaw [camps] in Naw Yo Hta village tract; however, villagers in Naw Yo Hta village tract are experiencing food shortages because Internal Displaced Peoples [IDPs] from other village tracts who fled the Tatmadaw have fled into [Naw Yo Hta] village tract [sometime before 2000]. Due to the increase in demand, there are not enough hill farms and trees available for everyone [all local people and IDPs] to work on for their livelihoods.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on July 30th 2016 in Lu Thaw Township. These photos show two of the three land titles that Saw A--- obtained from the British during the British colonial era. However, his land has been confiscated by the Tatmadaw for use as an army camp. Saw A---, the land owner, is planning to start measuring the number of acres of he owns. [Photos: KHRG]

Tatmadaw camps

The Tatmadaw camps in Hkay Poo village tract, northern Lu Thaw Township, are under the control of Military Operations Command [MOC] #20³ and are patrolled by the following Tatmadaw battalions: (1) Hkaw Daw Kho [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by Light Infantry Battalion [LIB] #596;⁴ (2) Khssa Law Kyo [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by LIB #592; (3) Ta May

³ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

⁴ 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. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

Hta [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by Infantry Battalion [IB] #30.⁵ The Tatmadaw camp in Hta Mu Pleh Meh area, Ler Mu Plaw village tract is patrolled by IB #60. The Tatmadaw camps in Saw Mu Plaw village tract are under the control of Strategic Operations Command [SOC] #3⁶ and are patrolled by the following Tatmadaw battalions: (1) Hpah Gaw Lo [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by LIB #60; (2) Der Kyu [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by LIB #124; (3) Kaw Thway Kyoh [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by LIB #598; (4) Ler Klay Kyoh [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by LIB #598; (5) Maw Hpu [Tatmadaw camp] is patrolled by LIB #74. The Tatmadaw camp in the Hpla Hkoh village tract is patrolled by LIB #598 and is also under the control of SOC #3. Tatmadaw camps between T'Hkaw Hta area and Ler Say area in Kaw Loo Der village tract are patrolled by LIB #80.

Tatmadaw soldiers have been inducing the civilians [to cooperate with them] by keeping free food, money and medicine beside the 'Tatmadaw road' [which the Tatmadaw constructed to transport their vehicles] that the civilians have to cross in Saw Mu Plaw village tract, Ler Doh Htee area, Hkay Poo area, and Ler Beh Der area. Civilians are free to take the food, money and medicine if they want. [Lu Thaw Township] security guards reported this information to us [KHRG researchers]. Tatmadaw soldiers have also served salt to the civilians' buffalos that approach their area so that the buffalos would not want to return to their owners. The [Lu Thaw Township] security guards also reported that, *"The Tatmadaw is patrolling in [Lu Thaw Township] areas more but we do not know what their objectives are"*.

Villagers report that they do not want to meet the Tatmadaw [face to face] because they are not sure how effectively their leaders [from the KNU] are working [on the peace process with the Burma/Myanmar government]. Some [civilians] want to meet with the Tatmadaw but the current situation is unreliable [unstable for civilians] so [local] leaders have not allowed them to meet. Civilians report that the Tatmadaw are traveling and that their military numbers have increased since early December [2016]. Since the [KNU] signed the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement with Burma/Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw has not withdrawn any of their military camps.⁷ In fact, in 2013 they established more army camps. In addition, the Tatmadaw are

⁵ An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 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.

⁶ Strategic Operations Command; under regional command and comprises three to four battalions and a headquarters. It mostly covers an area for defensive purposes.

⁷ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage](#) on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors began in Yangon, see ["Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations," Karen National Union Headquarters](#), March 18th 2015.

continuing to cross over delimited territory [areas that the Tatmadaw agreed with the Karen National Union [KNU] not to travel on],⁸ change their troops [every month or every quarter], send rations [to their camps], repair their roads and shoot at any villagers and security guards [who approach them].⁹ Therefore, the civilians [from Lu Thaw Township] always have to work [on their farms] in fear. Between 2015 and 2016, the Tatmadaw sent their rations frequently and they did not often travel across delimited territory. They were more likely to cross over delimited territory when they were repairing their army camp because they would cut the bamboo that civilians planted [in their area]. They kept food and letters beside the 'Tatmadaw road' [which the Tatmadaw constructed to transport their vehicles] that the civilians have to cross in some areas [in Dwe Lo Township] in order to induce the civilians to cooperate with them. Some civilians from Hkay Poo village tract have temporarily returned to work on their farms in T' May Hta area. They are disturbed by the Tatmadaw because the Tatmadaw [came to them] and pretended that they will help the civilians [on their farms] but the civilians distrust [fear] them. The civilians are worried that the Tatmadaw will persuade them [to be under their control] and that this will cause conflict [in civilian areas], so the farm owners have left their farms [and stopped working on their farms]. [The civilians' perspective on] the Tatmadaw is that they are hoping to create conflict [in civilian areas] due to the fact that they are continuing to cross over delimited territory.

The civilian situation

Civilians [from Lu Thaw Township] do not yet feel it is safe to return to their original area and work on their hill farms and plain farms. Therefore, they have to work [on hill farms in other villages] in fear [of the Tatmadaw] and [annually] face food shortages. This year, some civilians have returned [to their original areas] to work on their farms.

Civilians from many areas who worked on hill farms and plain farms faced the problem of insects [caterpillars] and mice attacking their paddy. Civilians from Pay Kay village tract face the problem of caterpillars attacking their paddy the most, so they are facing rice shortages this year. In addition, civilians from other village tracts (Kaw Loo Der, Ler Mu Plaw and Saw Mu Plaw) are also [facing food shortages].

Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see "[KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders' Summit](#)," *Karen News*, April 22nd 2015

⁸ As per the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw are only allowed to operate and travel up to 50 yards from either side of roads that connect their army camps through KNLA territory, and only within a 150 yard radius around their own army camp.

⁹ For instances of BGF killing civilians in Hpapun Township since the 2012 Preliminary Ceasefire, see "[Hpapun Field Report: Killing, violent abuse, landmine incident, military activity, forced labour, displacement, and poor health and education make villagers feel insecure, January to December 2015](#)," KHRG, December 2016.



These photos show villagers' hill farms in Pay Kay village tract that were destroyed [by caterpillar and mice] so villagers could not work on their farms anymore. Some villagers could work on their farms but were only able to farm a few paddies. The villagers killed mice that were attacking their paddies with snares and by sling shooting. They killed several hundred mice per night. [Photos: KAD]

Education

Education [in Lu Thaw Township] is run by the Karen Education Department [KED] education curricular.¹⁰ The civilians do not want the Burma/Myanmar government [Education Department] workers to disrupt their work by persuading them to change to a different education system. They want to keep following the KED, which is the KNU education system. There are no engineering or economic programs in the KED education system yet. Each teacher [from the KNU schools] gets a [salary] of only 7,000 baht [\$210.78 USD]¹¹ per year which is not enough to support his or her family.

Health

There are clinics [in Lu Thaw Township area] which are supported by the [KNU] health department and sometimes by Free Burma Ranger [FBR].¹² Between 2015 and 2016, the most common illnesses that civilians faced were malaria, liver failure, diarrhoea, dengue fever and the loss of circulation for women after they gave birth (which causes their hands and feet to

¹⁰The main goals of the Karen National Union's Education Department (KED) are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture. During the civil war in Burma/Myanmar the KED became the main organisation providing educational services in the KNU controlled areas in southeast Burma/Myanmar. The KED also previously oversaw the educational system in the seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, however in 2009 these activities were restructured under the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE). See "[Conflict Erupts over Govt teachers deployed to KNU areas](#)," Karen News, August 20th 2013 and the KRCEE website: "[About](#)," accessed July 21st 2015.

¹¹ All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the 22nd of August 2017 official market rate of 33.21 baht to US \$1.

¹² Founded in 1997 in response to Tatmadaw offenses, Free Burma Ranger (FBR) is a multi-ethnic humanitarian relief organization that specializes in providing emergency health care, shelter, food and clothing to civilians in war zones and prioritizes assisting IDPs. In addition to their relief activities the FBR also conducts capacity building trainings, documents human rights violations and advocates regularly on the situation in Burma/Myanmar. There are currently 71 active FBR teams that go on 2-4 missions a year. Additional KHRG reports that cite FBR include "[Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District \(March to May 2016\)](#)" KHRG, September 2016.

become cold). [KNU] health workers from northern Lu Thaw Township reported that, *“In 2016, the number of patients [they treated] has increased but there is not enough medicine for them so some patients have to get medicine from outside [shops]”*. Other illnesses [that civilians face] include blood hypertension, arthritis and hand and feet pain.

Opinion and desire of civilians

Civilians [from Lu Thaw Township] want the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement¹³ that was signed by the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government to stop all the wars between the Burma/Myanmar government and ethnic armed groups.

Conclusion

The Tatmadaw in northern Lu Thaw Township have not withdrawn any of their army camps and are upgrading their military in many different ways [training, repairing their roads and camps etc.]. Civilians report that, *“If the Tatmadaw leaves our area we will be able to return to our own area and there will be fewer worries and fewer problems in our [work] for our livelihood”*. The situation in 2016 is improving. The civilians can now live their lives peacefully and are hoping that the situation will get better in coming years.

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, 2016 to February 2017” (August 2017)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, September to November 2016” (June 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)

¹³ 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.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



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