



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township and Kyainseikgyi Township, September and October 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Win Yay Township and Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District during the period between September and October 2017, including reports on Tatmadaw activity, education, development, and drugs.

- *During the period between September 10th and October 23rd 2017, Tatmadaw military patrolled in Win Yay Township and Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District. Due to Tatmadaw's increased activity, villagers are concerned that fighting will break out again.*
 - *KNU (Karen National Union) school teachers who were recruited by the villagers in Win Yay Township have encountered a lack of funding for their classrooms and a decrease in their stipends. As a consequence, parents were asked to pay but the result was that some could no longer afford for their children to attend school.*
 - *The Asian Falcon Company continues to assess Khonkhan Mountain for cement production even though local villagers who rely on this mountain for their livelihoods are trying to prevent further development of the mountain.*
 - *Villagers from C--- village stated that they feel insecure and unsafe to report drug cases to authorities because they know that Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) and Tatmadaw soldiers are using and selling drugs in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District.*
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Situation Update | Win Yay Township and Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District (September to October 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2017. 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

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.

report was received along with other information from Dooplaya District, including two interviews and 62 photographs.²

Introduction

This Situation Update describes events that happened in Win Yay Township [and Kyainseikgyi Township], Dooplaya District between September 10th and October 23rd 2017. It includes information on military activity, education, development, and drugs.

Military activity

During the period between September 10th and October 23rd 2017, the Tatmadaw³ increased military activity in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District. Due to the Tatmadaw's increased activity, villagers in Win Yay Township wondered if fighting would break out again and questioned why the Tatmadaw appeared to be more active than before.

A Tatmadaw column⁴ went to D--- village, Kyainseikgyi Township on October 13th 2017 at 08:00 A.M with 20 soldiers and stayed in a monastery. D--- villagers did not know the name of the leader of this Tatmadaw column. Then, on October 15th 2017 at 06:05 A.M, the column went to Kyauk B'Loo area and patrolled in E--- village. 36 soldiers of Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB)⁵ #284, which was led by Taung Sone Camp Battalion Commander Aung Shwe Oo and Battalion Deputy Commander Kyaw Zin Min, also patrolled due to an order from Strategic Operations Command #3, which is based in A Nan Kwin.

According to the KNU [Karen National Union]⁶ police officer, Chan Nyein, and the village head, after IB #284 patrolled on October 18th 2017 at 06:30 A.M, they went to Hpa Pya [also known as Hpa Pra] village and demanded two transportation trucks in order to get back to Taung Sone.

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 Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military throughout KHRG's 25 year reporting period. The Myanmar military were commonly referred to by villagers in KHRG research areas as SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) from 1988 to 1997 and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011, which were the Tatmadaw-proclaimed names of the military government of Burma. Villagers also refer to Tatmadaw in some cases as simply "Burmese" or "Burmese soldiers".

⁴ Combination of companies assembled for operations, usually 100-300 soldiers fighting strength.

⁵ An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most 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. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁶ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

The car drivers were G--- and H---. Villagers collected money and gave 10,000 kyat [US\$ 7.50 USD]⁷ to each car driver to pay for the transportation tax and petrol.

On October 11th 2017, KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]⁸ Battalion Headquarter #16, led by the company's second-in-command, set up a security checkpoint along the Win Yay Township boundary between Brigade #4 [Mergui-Tavoy District] and Brigade #6 [Dooplaya District]. A local militia officer's logging truck was stopped by KNLA Battalion #16, and according to Headquarter Warrant Officer Saw Htoo Yaw, the local militiaman was unhappy that Battalion #16's stopped his logging truck, so he reported the incident to the Colonel Saw Htun from Military Operations Command (MOC) Headquarter #19 [Tatmadaw]. Colonel Saw Htun then commanded the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #299 Commander Maj. Zaw Lin to go with 30 soldiers and notify KNLA Battalion Headquarter #16 to remove their checkpoint. However, KNLA Battalion Headquarter [#16] refused to remove the checkpoint, so the Tatmadaw [LIB #299] came again at 01:00 PM and told them again to remove the checkpoint. In order to avoid conflict, KNLA Battalion Headquarter [#16] agreed to remove its checkpoint from there [the Win Yay Township boundary].

According to the Battalion Headquarter Warrant Officer, Saw Htoo Yaw, LID⁹ Commander Thet Paing Oo also told the KNLA that the KNLA does not need to have any security checkpoints. Now, the company Second-in-Command Dah Ku Htoo said that they went back to the checkpoint on October 24th 2017. According to information from KNLA Battalion #16 Company #2 Warrant Officer, IB #283, led by Aung Swe Oo and IB #284 Commander Kyaw Min Aung with 30 soldiers went from Taung Sone to Meh K'War at 06:30 A.M. They said that they went to distribute medicine.

[In another incident] A villager reported that IB #284 Captain Hein Ya Za Hpyo told the village chairman Mann K--- and his wife Nan G--- that they were disrespectful to him [when Nan G--- did not invite him into their house]. He [IB #284 Captain Hein Ya Za Hpyo] became upset and abused his power by punishing them [Mann K--- and Nan G---] and forcing them to clean the grass in the surrounding area on October 30th 2017. Information received from a villager named

⁷ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 25th 2018 official market rate of 1,319 kyats to US \$1.

⁸ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the KNU.

⁹ Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general, and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw in 1966. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units. Each division is directly under the command of the Chief of Staff (Army).

J--- indicated that Captain Hein Ya Za Hpyo threatened the village chairman, Mann K---, and told him not to disclose this incident to anyone and that he would get into trouble if he failed to follow this order by telling someone what had happened. The village chairman had to work from 08:05 AM to 4:15 PM [to clear the grass with his wife]. He was also asked to get his household registration [for an unknown reason]. He was threatened that, if he told anyone any details about this situation he would have to dig his own grave.

[In addition], KNLA Battalion #16 was concerned about the Tatmadaw's motives even though they signed the NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement).¹⁰ The KNLA wondered if the Tatmadaw wanted fighting to happen again. Because of this, villagers are suffering and feel fearful and worried.

Education

The education situation between September 10th and October 23rd 2017 remained unchanged from the time of the previous situation update¹¹. A new education curriculum was introduced to Karen State [southeast Myanmar], so students found it difficult to understand the lessons. Moreover, there are not enough teachers. According to the KNU school teachers who were recruited by the villagers in Win Yay Township, the KNU school teachers generally encountered a lack of funding for their classrooms and a decrease in their stipends. Because of this, students' parents said that they faced difficulties sending their children to school because they had to hire teachers [which caused them a financial burden] and consequently, some students had to give up on their studies. Some teachers asserted that the KNU should [financially] support the schools even if the Burma/Myanmar government does not. A teacher from Than Payar village tract stated that the KNU should support the KNU schools because it is essential for the children to get access to education.

Development Projects

¹⁰ 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. 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, "[Ongoing militarisation in southeast Myanmar](#)," KHRG, October 2016 and "[Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016](#)," KHRG, September 2017.

¹¹ For more information, see "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay and Kyainseikgyi Townships, June and August 2017](#)," (February 2018).

There are various types of development projects in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District. Though some development projects have benefited the community, some have also caused negative impacts on the community.

A dam project will potentially be implemented in Meh K'Thar area. However, villagers are still uncertain about this. The KNLA Brigade #6 Deputy Officer Par Thein confirmed that the dam will be built, but the villagers have not undertaken any protest or activity against the dam project.

Road construction [for the National Highway] is currently 60 feet in width, and it is planned to be expanded to 100 feet in width. [There is concern] because roads that are made with tar are usually damaged in the rainy season. In summer, there is also thick dust on the roads that causes health problems for villagers that stay near the roads.

Regarding cement production, the Khonkhan Mountain has been assessed by the company [Asian Falcon Company]¹² many times even though local villagers have tried to stop them. According to KNLA Battalion #16 soldiers, villagers are not sure whether these assessments have been authorised at the KNU township level, district level or central level. The local villagers who stay near this rocky mountain believe that the company would potentially be allowed to conduct their cement production project if the assessments are successful. Despite the political changes that have happened and even though the Myanmar government and KNU signed the ceasefire agreement, C--- villagers feel that Karen civilians are made to move from their villagers and areas by the Burma/Myanmar government [because of the government's relationship with private companies]. Since local villagers have tried to stop the cement production for quite a while, they are both physically and mentally sick and tired. Villagers said that they know the KNU can stop the project [but the KNU does not stop it]. A J--- villager named Daw K--- said that Asian Falcon Company called by telephone from Nay Pyi Daw [City] and said that J--- villagers are too vocal. The company also used divisive speech by saying that L--- villagers already allowed them to conduct the project.¹³

Villagers are really concerned for their security and livelihoods if the cement production project is implemented. They have raised their concerns that they have no idea how to manage the money to secure their livelihood even if they are compensated for land loss or land damages, because they cannot easily purchase another farm, betel nut plantation or rubber plantation to

¹² The Asian Falcon Company is also translated as the Asia Eagle Company. For previous KHRG reports regarding the company's involvement in stone mining in Dooplaya District, see "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Win Yay Township, November 2016 to January 2017](#)," August 2017.

¹³ For more information, see "[Villagers raise concerns regarding proposed stone mining and cement production in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District](#)," January 2018.

make a living. The more reserved forests [protected land], the more difficult it is for villagers to get access to land to work on for their living. There are seven villages and approximately 10 village tracts that are relying on this mountain. There are many villages that secure their livelihood on Win Yay River [which flows through Khonkhan Mountain]. According to Daw K---, the surrounding villagers raised their voices several times that they do not agree with the project, but whenever the Asian Falcon Company came to do assessments, they told villagers that they have already invested so much money on this project so it should be implemented.

Drugs

Some of the KNU/KNLA and Tatmadaw soldiers are using and selling drugs¹⁴ in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District. Villagers from M--- village tract asserted that the KNU should take serious action against drug issues because it affects the dignity of the Karen people. The villagers also stated that they do not feel secure enough to report [drug related] cases to authorities.

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

- “Dooplaya Incident Report: Forced labour ordered by Tatmadaw officer in Win Yay Township”, (October 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, February to May 2017,” (September 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)

¹⁴ KHRG continues to receive reports detailing villagers’ concerns over increased drug use and drug trading in their communities. See for example [“Growing drug use and its consequences in Dooplaya and Hpa-an Districts, between February and December 2015.”](#) May 2016.

