



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

March 1, 2018 / KHRG #17-107-S1

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## **Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, August to September 2017**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between August and September 2017, including civilians' livelihoods, education, military activities, development projects, drug issues, and healthcare.*

- *Most of the schools in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township are primary schools, so students do not have opportunities to further their studies to high school.*
  - *Students from civilian schools receive free school materials from the Karen Education Department (KED), but teachers receive only about 4,600 baht (\$146.14 USD) per year so students have to pay schools fee in order to support the teachers.*
  - *Development projects in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township gradually increased after the 2012 Preliminary Ceasefire. The CKB Company has operated in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township since 2003 and has confiscated more than 200 acres of villagers' land for their projects' purpose.*
  - *The number of individuals who use and sell drugs like opium, yaba and marijuana has increased because young people have started to use these drugs more. Karen National Union [KNU] police officers in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township arrested more than 30 drug sellers at the KNU police gate in Kay village, Kay area, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District between June to September. Most drug sellers transfer drugs to Bamar villages on Ta Naw Th'Ree beach side and the Thai/Burma border side.*
  - *Drug users and sellers who were arrested by the KNU police officers have to go to KNU prison for 15 days and pay 300,000 kyats (\$225.56 USD) as punishment.*
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### **Situation Update | Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (August to September 2017)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2017. It was written by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Mergui-Tavoy District, including one incident report, four interviews and four photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 events that occurred in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township between August and September 2017. It includes civilians' livelihoods, military activities, education, development projects, drug issues and healthcare.

## Civilians' livelihoods

Most of the civilians in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township work on plantations, as daily labourers, on hill farms and on plain farms. Some civilians face livelihood challenges during rainy season because there are no other job opportunities and their families have no income. Some families fall into debt because their paddy fields flood and some are attacked by insects.

## Military activities

There were 42 Tatmadaw battalions in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District before the [2012 Preliminary] Ceasefire<sup>3</sup>. After the Preliminary Ceasefire was signed between the Karen National Union [KNU] and Burma/Myanmar government in 2012 [human rights abuses] such as torture and military activity by the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]<sup>4</sup> against civilians decreased. Regarding the Tatmadaw, they regularly rotate their troops once per quarter in every area in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, but villagers do not know their battalion numbers.

## Education

There is only one high school which is up to Standard<sup>5</sup> Nine in Ta Naw Th' Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The high school is located in T'Keh village, and though there are schools in other villages, they are all primary schools. Some primary schools are civilians' schools so students have to pay school fees.<sup>6</sup> For example, T'Keh village school primary students have to pay 5,000 kyats [\$3.76 USD],<sup>7</sup> Standard Four to Eight students have to pay 10,000 kyats [\$7.52 USD] and the Standard Nine students have to pay 17,000 kyats [\$12.78 USD] for enrolment fees in order to support the teachers. Consequently, some parents cannot support their children to go to school because of their livelihoods challenges. Regarding Standard Nine, school principle Daw Mya Mya Htway made an agreement [with the Burma/Myanmar government Education Department] for the Standard Nine students to be recognised by the Burma/Myanmar government in 2017.<sup>8</sup> The Karen Education Department [KED] provides free school materials

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<sup>3</sup> On January 12<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 2015. 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the KNU.

<sup>5</sup> A standard refers to a school year in the education system of Burma/Myanmar. The basic education system has a 5-4-2 structure. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 5, lower secondary school is Standard 6 to Standard 9, and upper secondary school is Standard 10 to Standard 11.

<sup>6</sup> Civilian schools are not financially supported by either the KNU or Burma/Myanmar government, thus, parents of students who attend civilian schools often have to pay school fees to cover teachers' salaries and classroom expenses.

<sup>7</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 30, 2018 official market rate of 1,319 kyats to US \$1.

<sup>8</sup> Certification that students receive in 'civilian' schools that are not supported by the KNU or Burma/Myanmar government is often not recognized by either authority as valid. For this reason, the principle had to make an

such as pens, pencils, notebooks and one school uniform for each student up to Standard Four, but I [KHRG researcher] do not know if the other Standard [students get these or not]. Mostly, schools [in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township] are teaching Karen language one period per week, but some schools teach Karen language only on Saturdays. This is because students have many subjects to study so teachers choose to teach Karen language in extra time outside of school hours.

### Development Projects

After the [2012 Preliminary] ceasefire, development projects like rubber plantations, palm oil plantations and lead mining projects have increased [in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township], but some projects have been on-going since before the [2012 Preliminary] ceasefire. The CKB Company<sup>9</sup>, also known as Teh Nay [in Burmese], started operating in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township in 2003. The CKB Company is based in Plaw Thaw village, T'Keh area [Ta Naw Th'Ree Township] where they have confiscated more than 200 acres of villagers' land. Plaw Thaw village includes both Karen and Bamar<sup>10</sup> ethnicity.

In addition, the ASI-Advance Seafood Company planted palm oil trees in Meh Wah village [Ta Naw Th'Ree Township], but I [KHRG researcher] do not have complete information regarding their project yet. Plus, P'Doh Tamla Gaw, a Judge in Ta Naw Th'Ree area and the KNU authority leader, reported that, "*Pwin Pyo Hton [PPT] Company has been based in Mo Taw village for more than ten years before [2012 Preliminary] Ceasefire. The PPT Company did not confiscate the land of villagers, but they bought the land [to conduct their projects] from the land owners.*"

A lead mining project is also being conducted in Kay Hkee village by around 15,000 villagers, three companies, one which is named the ABC Company, and wealthy individuals who were granted permission from the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government. The administrators of the KNU Breeding and Fishery Department, P'Doh Mya Muang and P'Doh Nyaw Wah, are in charge of the lead mining projects' security and taxation. There have been no negative consequences from the lead mining project recently that villagers have noticed. Local villagers received job opportunities for their family income because of the lead mining project. Two years ago [2015], however, Kay Hkee villagers faced problems because lead mining workers poured polluted water into Kay River, which villagers rely on for their livelihoods. Since then, though, they [lead mining workers] pour polluted water into a pond so that the polluted water does not flow into the river.

### Drug issues

Numbers of opium and yaba<sup>11</sup> sellers and users have gradually increased in almost all villages [in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township]. Most drug users are young Karen, Bamar, Kaw La<sup>12</sup> and other

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agreement with the Burma/Myanmar Education Department to ensure that Standard Nine students would be recognized and thus able to continue on to Standard Ten in upper-secondary school.

<sup>9</sup> KHRG has started to receive reports of land confiscation by the CKB Company, also known as the Green Dragon Myanmar Company, in Mergui-Tavoy District, "[Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A--, February 2017](#)," KHRG, 2017, "[Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Taw Na Th'ree Township, 2017](#)," KHRG, 2017. According to the company website (<https://www.greenmyanmardragon.com/about1-c221j>) CKB Company currently has 20,000 acres of palm oil plantation and an additional 3,500 acres for further planting in Mergui-Tavoy District.

<sup>10</sup> The majority ethnic group in Myanmar, also known as ethnic Burmese or Burman.

<sup>11</sup> *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; Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014; "Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, July to September 2016," KHRG, April 2017; and "[Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-](#)

unknown ethnic groups. Most drug sellers transfer drugs along the Burma/Myanmar and Thai border, to Bamar villages like Nyaung Mein, Meh Taw and Mo Taw (mixed Bama and Karen) villages on [Ta Naw Th'Ree] beach side and then to the Thai side. Some villagers sell drugs to earn income for their family. In the last four months, Karen National Union [KNU] police officers arrested more than 30 drug sellers at the KNU [police] gate in Kay village. [In one case,] the Karen National Union [KNU] police Major Seh Leh and his co-workers arrested four Bamar men who carried a bottle of yaba at Kay village river side, Kay area, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District at 8:00 PM on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017. They are U Than Paing, Naung Mot, Tha Ngel Naung and Hkan Min Zaw. U Than Paing lives in Bel Kwin village, Nyaung Pin Kwin village tract. Naung Mot lives in Thee Hko village, Nyaung Pin Kwin village tract. Tha Ngel Naung lives in Mo Hsait Kwin village, Nyaung Pin Kwin village. Hkan Min Zaw lives in Bel Kwin village, Nyaung Pin Kwin village tract. These four men are between 30 and 40 years old. Regarding this issue, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township KNU lawyer P'Doh Saw Ta Mla Gaw reported that, *"The four yaba users have to be in [KNU] prison for 15 days and have to pay 300,000 kyat [\$225.56 USD] each as punishment. They were released after giving money to KNU police officers and the KNU police officers taught [cautioned] them not to use yaba in the future."*

Similarly, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township KNU police officers arrested two Bamar men for carrying 1,000 packs of opium and one person with marijuana in his cigarette at Kay village river side on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. These three people are Myo Thu, Hpo Htun Oo and Nga Oo. Myo Thu is 23 years old and he lives in Ain Shay Kon village. Myo Thu was arrested by KNU police officers with dry marijuana in his cigarette. Hpo Htun Oo is 29 years old and he lives in Hto Ma Hka village, Nyaung Pin Kwin village tract. Hpo Htun Oo was arrested by KNU police officers with 500 packs of opium to sell in Mo Taw village at Kay village river side. Hpo Htun Oo claimed that the opium was not his but was being transferred for an unknown seller. Nga Oo is 18 years old and he lives in Hto Ma Hka village, Nyaung Pin Kwin village tract. Nga Oo was arrested by KNU police officers with 500 packs of opium for selling to Mo Taw village at Kay village river side. The opium that he carried also was not his, but he just carried it for the unknown people who sell opium. These three people had to go to Ta Naw Th'Ree Township KNU prison for 15 days and pay 350,000 kyat each as the punishment.

Again, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township KNU police officers arrested Saw Mee Mee who transferred 250 packs of opium for sale at Kay village river side at 11:00 AM on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2017. He lives in Plaw Thaw village, T'Keh area, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. [Ta Naw Th'Ree Township] KNU lawyer reported that, *"Saw Mee Mee has to go to KNU prison for 15 days and pay 300,000 kyat [\$225.56] as the punishment."* He was released from the KNU prison after the KNU lawyer taught [cautioned him] him not to do it [sell opium] in the future.

## Healthcare

Mostly, children and young people [from Ta Naw Th'Ree Township] had illnesses such as malaria, anaemia, hepatitis and tuberculosis [TB]. There are some villages that have Burma/Myanmar government clinics, but there are shortages of health workers and medicine. If villagers who are sick need to get a medical check [or treatment] they have to pay the healthcare services fee. However, villagers who live in rural villages who do not have money face challenges to access to healthcare services. In regards to healthcare services [in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township], villagers report that [the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government] should increase the numbers of clinic, medicine and health workers. There are two KNU health workers in T'Keh area, they are Naw Say La, who is responsible for the western T'keh area, and Naw

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[ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016,](#)" KHRG, September 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Kaw la, is a Karen term which is sometimes used to refer to individuals in Burma/Myanmar who are perceived to have a darker skin colour. In Kayin state, it is often associated specifically with followers of Islam (Muslims), although this association is sometimes erroneous, and Muslim individuals do not typically self-identify with this term.

Hsee Hsa, who is responsible for T'Keh Bweh Plaw area. In addition, the KNU are currently building one hospital in Meh Wah village.

Further background reading on the situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Hpuh A---, June to September 2017” (December 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Hpuh A---, January 2017” (October, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, March 2017” (September, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, February 2017” (September, 2017)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw A---, February 2017” (September, 2017)

### Mergui/Tavoy (Thanintharyi) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)