



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, July to September 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District during the period between July and September 2017, including education, health, freedom of religion, arbitrary land confiscation, gold extraction, domestic violence and military activity.

- *At one Burma/Myanmar government school in Meh K'Naw (Hat Gyi) village, teachers are receiving unequal payments based on whether they were supported by Burma/Myanmar government or not.*
- *Although villagers in Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District are happy that now they have more freedom to travel and access clinics or hospitals wherever and whenever they would like to go, the on-going notable issue in regards to healthcare is that there are still no free healthcare services in the community.*
- *Arbitrary land confiscation occurred on May 14th 2017 in Section #2/Ohne Daw section, Ka Ma Maung Town, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. There were a total of 107 acres of land confiscated by township administrator Saw Tha Klo Htoo and Section #2 administrator U Myint Tin. They sold the land they confiscated for 300,000 kyats (\$225.08 US) for a land area of 40 feet by 60 feet*
- *In F--- village, huge amounts of farmland were arbitrarily confiscated by the Tatmadaw for leasing the land for business purposes and for establishing Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #340, LIB #341, LIB #434 military bases there. The Tatmadaw LIB #340 Lt. Colonel Zaw Min Oo began to lease land on July 13th 2017.*
- *On July 19th 2017 in G--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township following domestic violence where Naw H--- was hit by her husband with a bamboo stick until unconscious, Naw H--- requested a divorce letter from her village tract leader. However, the village tract leader Saw Kyaw Boh Pa. decided the case is on hold and a decision will be made after three months. .*
- *Military activity in both townships in Hpapun District became more stable, as there was no fighting and no new landmines. However, villagers are concerned that there are still a few old landmines previously laid by Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers in a rubber plantation near Yun Slin river bank, western Daung Mweh village, which have not yet been found even though the area was demined.*

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (July to September 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 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 other information from Hpapun District, including four incident reports, 9 interviews and 165 photographs.²

Introduction

This situation update describes events occurring between July 3rd 2017 and September 9th 2017 in Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, Mutraw [Hpapun] District. It includes information on arbitrary land confiscation, domestic violence and other topics.

Education

There are different education systems based in different controlled areas. The three types of controlled areas are Burma/Myanmar government controlled areas, KNU (Karen National Union) areas and mixed control areas (between Burma/Myanmar government and KNU).

Government schools are mostly located in town and they are run by the Burma/Myanmar government or Ministry of Education. Schools that are controlled by the KNU are run by the Karen Education Department (KED). However, issues usually arise in Burma/Myanmar government and KNU mixed control areas. For example, there is discrimination between non-government school teachers and government school teachers in Meh K'Naw village (also known as Hat Gyi village), Kyaw Pa village tract, Bu Tho Township. Teachers [from the same school] receive different salaries based on the subjects that they teach. One case shows that teachers who teach Burmese, English, History and Geography [and Mathematics] receive more than 100,000 kyats [\$75.03 US]³ while teachers that teach Karen [language] receive only 30,000 kyats [\$22.51 US]. Even though they all are teachers, they do not receive the same amount of salary.

Health

Despite the improvement of healthcare services after the ceasefire⁴ was signed, healthcare service providers such as the Backpack Health Worker Team⁵ (BPHWT) and Karen Department

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.

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 25th 2018 official market rate of 1,330 kyats to US \$1.

⁴ 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 \(NCA\)](#)

of Health and Welfare (KDHW) are still giving treatments in KNU controlled areas instead of the government. Backpack health workers are travelling around KNU controlled areas and building clinics and giving treatment to community members.

In Burma/Myanmar government controlled areas, the Ministry of Health has built clinics/hospitals and given treatments to civilians. The hospital that the Ministry of Health has built in Hpapun Town is a 100-bed civilian hospital. There is also a Strategic Operations Command (SOC) #1 of Hpapun Town Operation Command Headquarter 100-bed military hospital, a civilian hospital in K'Taing Ti and a civilian hospital in Ka Ma Maung Town. They [Ministry of Health hospitals] also have sub-clinics in almost all of the villages so civilians receive proper treatment.

Regarding healthcare, the situation is better now that there are no travel restrictions because there is no fighting like in the past.⁶ As a result, villagers are happy since they are freer to travel and they can now go to clinics or hospitals wherever and whenever they would like to go. However, a notable issue that there are still no free healthcare services in the community.

Freedom of religion

Though villagers feel that they have some amount of freedom of religion, all religions still do not have equal rights to practice their religions. Buddhists can celebrate their festival freely in *T'Khoo* [April] month and *Tha Din Kyut* month [Between September and October]. However, religions such as Christianity and Islam do not get equal rights to celebrate their religious festivals. Moreover, the conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Ratheduang, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rakhine State is still on going.⁷ This intimidates and creates security concerns [within Hpapun District] and both Muslims and Buddhists are fearful. As Muslims are facing so much pressure, Buddhists are also worried that Muslims will declare Jihad. So, civilians in

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. Karen civilians and the KNU have more recently expressed their concerns about the lack of progress in moving from a ceasefire towards genuine political dialogue. See, [KNU Chair Highlights Weaknesses In The NCA During Anniversary Celebrations](#), Karen News, October 2017 and [NCA signatories urge govt to reboot peace process](#), DVB, October 2017.

⁵ Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is an organisation that provides health care and medical assistance to displaced civilians inside Burma. KHRG reports that cite BPHWT include "[Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe Township \(February to April 2016\)](#)" and "[Thaton Township, Thaton District \(January to June 2015\)](#)."

⁶ For more information on restrictions faced by Karen villagers when accessing healthcare and medical supplies during conflict see "Chapter 4: Health" in "[Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers voices from southeast Myanmar](#)," October 2017.

⁷ For more information see "[Statement by Ms. Yanghee Lee, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar at the 72nd session of the General Assembly](#)," OHCHR, October 25, 2017.

Hpapun area are diligent so that this situation does not happen [in Mutraw] like in Rathduang, Buthidaung and Maungdaw.

Social and business

Nowadays, more civilians work in business so it is very competitive, and this affects various forms of social relations between them. It brings about human right abuses in cases such as 1) arbitrary land confiscation, 2) leasing land confiscated by the Tatmadaw, and 3) farmland destruction caused by gold extraction.

1) Arbitrary land confiscation

Arbitrary land confiscation happened on May 14th 2017 in Section #2/Ohne Daw section, Ka Ma Maung Town or [also known as] Ohne Daw section, Htee Th'Daw Hta village, Bu Tho Township, Mutraw [Hpapun] District. The perpetrator is Ka Ma Maung Township administrator Saw Tha Klo Htoo (45 years old) and the victims are Daw I---, J---, U K---, Daw L---, U M---, U N---, U O---, Naw P---, U Q---, Ma R---, Daw S---, U T---, U---, U V---, U W--- and local villagers in Ohne Daw Section, Ka Ma Maung Town. The actions of Township administrator Saw Tha Klo Htoo and Section #2 administrator U Myint Tin show that they deliberately targeted Muslims [as the majority of victims are Muslims]. Regarding the land confiscation in Section #2, Ka Ma Maung Town, a local resident named U X--- said,

“The land has been confiscated since Myaing Gyi Ngu was established [when nearby villages were organised by Myaing Gyi Ngu monk in 1994 during the DKBA transformation⁸ and asked to stay in Myaing Gyi Ngu Town]. At that time, Tatmadaw general Thura Sit Maung ordered to place the nearby villagers in Ohne Daw [section]. The land has been confiscated by Saw Tha Klo Htoo since 1995 until May 14th 2017. [Saw] Tha Klo Htoo confiscated most of the land in this area.”

The total land area that was confiscated by township administrator Saw Tha Klo Htoo and Section #2/Ohne Daw section administrator U Myint Tin is 107 acres. Then they sold the land for 300,000 kyats [\$225.08 US]⁹ per land area of 40 feet by 60 feet.

⁸ The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was originally formed in 1994 as a breakaway group from the KNLA. Since its separation from the KNLA in 1994, it was known to frequently cooperate with and support the Tatmadaw in its conflict with the KNLA. The original group underwent major change in 2010 as the majority of the original DKBA was transformed into the BGF, which is under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government. The remainder of the original DKBA formed a smaller splinter group in 2010 and then changed its name in 2012 from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army to the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army. Following this major change in 2010, the original DKBA is considered to no longer exist as a distinct entity as it has now been submerged within the BGF. This original DKBA (Buddhist) (1994 – 2010) should not be confused with either the DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) which was formed as a breakaway group from the original DKBA, or with the DKBA (Buddhist) (2016 – present) which was formed as a splinter group from the DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) in 2016. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see “Inside the DKBA,” KHRG, 1996.

⁹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the March 2nd 2018_official market rate of 1332 kyats to US \$1.

2) Leasing land confiscated by the Tatmadaw

The whole area of F--- village was arbitrarily confiscated [by the Tatmadaw] in order to establish military bases for Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #340, LIB #341, LIB #434 under Strategic Operations Command, Hpapun Operation Command Headquarter #1. LIB #340, #341, #434 confiscated huge amount of villagers' farmland, but the Tatmadaw [soldiers] are not able to work on all the land that they arbitrarily confiscated, so they leased the land to villagers from neighbouring villages. They also worked with people from brick production. In addition, they dug a pool for raising fish on the rest of the land so that they do not have to return the land to land owners, even though the land is damaged and left without implementing any projects [buildings]. According to a Y--- villager, Ko Z---

"How can they [who] do anything with it? They have nothing with them. They do not have any machines. They do not have cattle or manpower. They also do not want to leave the land like this because the owners will take back their land if the Tatmadaw do not work on it."

The ones who lease the land that was confiscated by the Tatmadaw are LIB #340, led by Lit. Colonel Zaw Min Oo. Warrant Officer (2) Hla Min managed the process of leasing land around Meh Th'Lote village, Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mutraw [Hpapun] District. The land leasing started taking place on July 13th 2017. U A---, B---, C---, D---, E---, Ff---, work leasing the land in Y--- village, Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township. People who work on this farmland receive 70 baskets of paddies [from the Tatmadaw who leased the land]. They have to use their own materials and food during harvesting. B--- said, *"Since we do not have our land with us anymore, it is still better for us to have a chance to work on the farm than not work no matter if our wage is fair or not."*

3) Farmland destruction caused by company's gold extraction

On July 3rd 2017, gold extraction caused villagers to stop farming because the company that extracted gold polluted the river and covered the villagers' farms with soil in Gg--- village [also known as Hh--- village], Waw Mu village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mutraw District.

A company led by U Yan Naing (52 years old) conducted gold extraction in Meh Kleh River [also known as Meh Kleh Lo River]. The company started conducting its gold extraction project in early 2017 in the west part of Gg--- village. People who have suffered from this project include li--- (57 years old) and other farmers in Gg--- village. Villagers have stopped farming because they [the company] dug around and damaged the water channel to find gold. In this gold extraction project, they used big machines that excavated significant amounts of soil, so it damaged the water channel that was constructed by the Gg--- villagers. This gold extraction company extracted gold until the end of the year [2017]. After the project finished, U Yan Naing

fixed the water channel by rebuilding it but villagers still do not feel confident to release water [from the channel] into their farms due to the many piles of soil still existing. The piles of soil near the water channel mouth include sand, stone and mercury [chemical], so villagers are afraid that they will damage villagers' farmland if they open the water channel mouth to let water flow into their farms. As a result, villagers cannot farm anymore since they do not have access to water from the river. According to a Gg--- villager li---, there are approximately 30 farmlands/100 acres affected by gold extraction. Regarding the water channel, he said,

“Gg--- villagers cannot farm this year because we cannot release water into our farms. If we release water to flow into our farms, the soil near the water channel mouth will go into our farms. It will bring stone, sand, and mercury [chemical] to our farms. We will just stay in this situation [not farming] this year. I think we will be able to work on our farm in the next year.”

Domestic violence

Domestic violence is an abuse that is common in the community. On July 19th 2017, a domestic violence incident occurred in G--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township. The villager who committed this abuse is 45-year-old Saw Khin Aye and the victim is 42-year-old Naw H--- Aye from G--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township. This incident happened due to jealousy.

Naw H--- is a member of [censored for security] and she sometimes has to go on field visits with workers from NGOs/CBOs/CSOs. While she travelled with one, her husband misunderstood her and accused her of having another relationship. So, there was an argument and fighting happened between them. Naw H--- was hit several times with a bamboo stick from the ladder and she was found unconscious on her porch beside the ladder.

According to Ma Htaw village tract leader who was involved in the case, the allegation made by Saw Hkin Aye [that Naw H--- had another relationship] did not have any evidence and it was just a rumour. After that, Naw H--- requested a divorce letter via Ma Htaw village tract leader, Saw Kyaw Boh Pa. Therefore, the village tract leader decided the case is on hold for three months and the decision will be made after three months [in order to encourage Naw H--- to not divorce]. According to Naw H---:

“When I stopped by the ladder, he [Saw Hkin Aye] hit me with a bamboo stick from the ladder. I do not know how many times he hit me because I was unconscious. After I became conscious, I was told that my son came to pull him and stop him so he stopped hitting me.”

Military activity

In 2017, the situation regarding military activity became more stable as there was no fighting and no new landmines [being laid]. However, there are still a few old landmines that were previously laid by KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army) soldiers in the rubber plantation near Yun Slin river bank, western Daung Mweh village [also known as Meh Mweh Hta village]. The landmines were not found when they demined the plantation. So, there is no conflict and the situation is very stable except having a few landmines left under the ground.

The Tatmadaw military camps along Hpapun-Ka Ma Maung main road built a strong fence/wall in the past. But now, they broke down the fence/wall and they just left it like this without rebuilding it. Still, a question popped up about whether they will rebuild the broken fence/wall or not. The Tatmadaw camp that is located along the road side provides security guards along the road sides when authorities, ministers and important people are coming.

The KNLA usually base their camps in areas 200 yards from the [main] road. They prohibit illegal things such as drugs, alcohol [spirit] and beer, and they investigate suspicious strangers for the purpose of regional security. Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #340, LIB #341 and LIB #434, under Operation Command and IB #19, walk back and forth every two or three months on the road between Hpapun Town and Ku Seik village to show their military forces and military training. Currently, BGF and LIB #1 base their troops in K'Taing Ti. LIB #340, #341 and #434, under Strategic Operations Command #1, and the police base their troops from Hpapun Town to Ku Seik. Currently, LIB #1 bases its troops in southern Ku Seik to Ka Ma Maung Town. Tatmadaw soldiers and BGF stay together in Taung Thone Lone [three hills] army camp. Tatmadaw soldiers exclusively base in Ma Htaw army camp, N' Sat Ta Maing [21 miles] army camp, Yan Aung Myay army camp, Sin Swan army camp, Yay Pu army camp and BGF soldiers exclusively base in Ka Nyin Don army camp and Maing Lay Sel [40 miles] army camp. The army camps that the BGF base along the Hpapun – Ka Ma Maung main road have checkpoints and they ask for money from transportation trucks. Each truck has to pay 500 to 1,000 kyats [\$0.38 to \$0.75 US] and a [big] truck that carries lots of products/stocks has to pay 5,000 to 10,000 kyat [\$3.75 to \$7.50US]. Particularly, the checkpoints that collect the money include Kyun Daw checkpoint, Maing Lay Sel checkpoint, Ka Nyin Don checkpoint, K'Taing Ti checkpoint and Taung Tone Lone checkpoint. There is no explanation of how that money will be used and how it will benefit the community.

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 Interview: Saw A---, July 2015,” (April 2017)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, October 2016,” (March 2017)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, March 2016,” (January 2017)
- “Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2015,” (December 2016)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)