



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

July 25, 2018 / KHRG # 17-133-A6-I1

Hpapun Interview: Naw A---, November 2017

This Interview with Naw A--- describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, during the period between 2016 and November 2017. It includes information about internal displacement, the killing of civilians and landmines. It also provides local perspectives on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), peace, women's issues, education and healthcare.

- *Saw B--- was shot by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group on November 8th 2017 while he was going to buy petrol on his motorboat. It is unclear what has happened to him since the incident occurred. Community members presume that he is dead.*
 - *The DKBA splinter group attempted to burn down C--- village. Community members from C--- village were accused by the DKBA splinter group of cooperating with the Tatmadaw and Border Guard Force (BGF).*
 - *Villagers from C--- who were displaced after this attack do not feel secure enough to return to their homes. They are concerned about the possibility of an attack by the DKBA splinter group, and about the danger of landmine contamination in their area.*
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Interview | Naw A---, (female, 48), C--- village, Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District (November 2017)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Hpapun District on November 27th 2017 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including 15 other interviews and 200 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

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.

Position: Villager

I heard that your son was shot dead. I would like to know more about his murder. [I also want to know about] your displacement.

What is your name?

My name is Naw A---.

How old are you?

I am 48 years old.

Where do you live?

I live in C--- village.

What is your ethnicity?

I am Karen.

What is your religion?

I was a Christian but when the conflict happened, I converted to Buddhism. [The interviewee is referring to fighting between the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group and Border Guard Force (BGF) in Meh Tha Waw, which started in 2014.]

What is your occupation?

I am a highland farmer.

What is your role in the community?

In the past, I was a teacher in Meh Pru village tract. Now, I do not have a position of responsibility in my community. I am just a regular villager. I was still a teacher when my last daughter was born.

What is your village tract, Township and District?

Meh Pru village tract, Lu Pleh [Hlaingbwe] Township, Hpa-an District.

Do you have a family?

Yes, I do.

How many children do you have?

I have eight children. One passed away [because of sickness] and one was shot dead by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group, so [now] only six of them are left.

How many households do you have in your village?

I do not remember how many households we have in this village. In the past, when I was working for the community, I knew the list of households. There were over 40 households.

What kind of problems have you faced after the 2012 ceasefire?

I do not know whether I faced problems. I feel like I do not have any problems.

So, you can stay in the village peacefully?

Currently, we do not feel secure [enough] to go back to our own village. The DKBA splinter group is operating around there. Therefore, we have fled to D--- village in Mu Traw District.

So, you mean you cannot stay in your village peacefully.

Yes. How can we stay in our village? The DKBA splinter group is patrolling our area all of the time.

Were you forced by the DKBA splinter group to leave, or did you flee because you did not feel safe?

In the beginning, when the fighting had just started, the DKBA splinter group asked the villagers to leave their village. There were villagers who fled to Hkaw Taw Poo (also known as Myaning Gyi Ngu) area and to Brigade #5. Poor people like us mostly fled to Brigade #5.

How many households came along with you to D--- area?

Since I do not have the [village] name list, I do not know how many households fled to D---. If you want to know this information, you should ask the village tract leader.

When did you flee your village?

I do not know the exact date that we came here. I think we have stayed here for over a year.

Can you tell me in which month you were displaced? Do you remember?

It was around *Taw Tha Lin* month [between September and October 2016].

What problems are you facing since you fled here?

We have not faced any notable problems. We have secured our livelihoods from whatever assistance we received.

Have you visited your village [since you fled]?

Yes, I have. We feel comfortable enough to go back for a visit but not to live there. The problem we are currently facing is that we do not have enough food.

How do you secure enough food? Are you receiving support from anyone?

We do not have anywhere to work for our living. We receive donations.

Where are the donations from?

I do not know where the donations come from. I only know that the donations are managed by the village tract leader and the teachers. I am not working on the logistics [of distributing donations]. However, the village tract leader and the teachers know very well [where the donations come from]. Previously, we were told the names of the donors but we are not aware of their names [now].

How many rations do they give each person per month?

Each villager is given 15 kilos of rice.

Only rice? Are there any other types of items included?

Previously, we were given salt and three litres of oil monthly.

What about now?

Now, I do not think that they provide oil and salt for us. They used to give oil and salt to us. We heard that they will stop [giving out] rations in December.

What about rice?

I think they will provide rice after December. In the past, they provided rations to us every month.

Was it enough for you?

Yes, it was. They [the donors] said that they will evaluate the situation at the end of December [2017]. We have been told that we will not be provided with rations anymore if the situation in our village is stable enough for us to go back.

If [the situation is not stable], we will continue to receive support [after December]. However, I am not sure if this information is true or not. If you want to know more detailed information, you

should ask the village tract leader and the teachers. As I am a villager, I do not know every detail.

You told us about how your son was shot dead by a soldier of DKBA splinter group. Can you tell me more about your son's death?

At first, I did not have any information about how my son was shot dead [by the DKBA splinter soldier]. One morning, he went to buy some provisions, including petrol, because I run a small shop. I asked him to go because we needed petrol to travel. We did not know that the DKBA [splinter group] was waiting for him along the way. When the DKBA saw him [on his motorboat], they opened fire at him.

Where was he shot by the DKBA splinter group?

He was shot in Ma Ta T'Hka area.

How many people were in the motorboat [with him]?

There were three of them [in the motorboat].

Were there any soldiers with him?

His uncle, who is a member of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), was with him.

Was his uncle wearing a military uniform?

He was in civilian clothes, but he was wearing a military cap. A [Karen national] flag was waving [in front of the] motorboat. When we travel, we usually have the flag attached to the boat but we were not aware that this could be an issue.

[The DKBA splinter group] said that my son's motorboat was full of soldiers. How could they say this? He was travelling on the motorboat with a woman and his youngest uncle.

Actually, my son did not know anything. He was always afraid [to go outside]. When I asked him to go to the east of the village, he never went. [Because he was afraid of the danger]. He would say that he was afraid of landmines. He always sighed and scolded me when I went back to my home to pick betel nut [because he was concerned for my safety].

When he was shot, I did not know what to say. He was accused of having been a DKBA splinter soldier in the past, and then of changing sides and coming here to spy [on the DKBA splinter group]. My son has never been involved with the DKBA.

Do you know who led the group of DKBA splinter soldiers that shot your son?

I heard that the [DKBA soldiers] that shot my son were led by Sayar Myint. Saw K'paw Leh Leh said that this group was led by Sayar Myint.³ We do not know the number of the soldiers involved.

My son's youngest uncle said that there were probably five DKBA splinter soldiers involved. He did not see the DKBA splinter soldiers. When the DKBA started opening fire, he crouched down in the boat and listened to the guns. He was shot in the hand.

Did the [DKBA splinter] take any accountability for your son's case?

No. A [KNLA] battalion commander called Moses gave us 100,000 kyat (US \$74)⁴.

Which [KNU] brigade is he from?

³Saw K'paw Leh Leh is a supporter of the DKBA splinter group currently resettled in the United States. He frequently shares information about and raises funds for the DKBA.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 18 March 2018 official market rate of 1,335 kyats to US \$1.

He is from Brigade #7.

Which battalion does he lead?

He is a Battalion Commander.

Did the DKBA soldiers that shot your son give you any assistance?

No, they did not give us anything. Their goal was to kill us.

Do you have any plans to report this case to the authorities [for them] to take action about your son's case and support you?

We need [to do] it but we do not know how to [report the case to the authorities]. I want the group that shot my son dead to [compensate me for] the value of my son's life.

Do you expect to get compensation?

I expect that the perpetrators will face retribution. We did not do anything wrong to them but they wanted to kill us. [Saw K'paw Leh Leh] released information that my son was a DKBA soldier under the Second Commander-in-Chief Bo Bi. [Saw K'paw Leh Leh claimed] that my son was a spy. [He claimed that my son] helped the enemies of the DKBA splinter group attack DKBA splinter soldiers. When I heard about [this allegation], I was unhappy and unsatisfied with that. If you could talk to Saw K'paw Leh Leh, I would like to tell him something.

Was your son a soldier in the DKBA?

He was never a soldier in the DKBA. However, Saw K'paw Leh Leh spread rumours that my son used to serve as DKBA splinter soldier. [Since Saw K'paw Leh Leh is currently in the US], he must have been informed by someone from the [local] DKBA splinter group. How can my son be a soldier? He is a teenager who is only 17 years old.

What is the name of your son?

We call him [censored for security] He just started driving a motorboat this year.

How old is he?

He is 17 years old.

Can you tell me the date when he was killed?

He was shot on November 8th 2017, at around 10:30 AM.

Did the other two people on the boat sustain any injuries?

Yes, of course. Both his youngest uncle and the woman [who was riding with them] sustained injuries.

Was the woman hospitalised?

I heard that she had to be admitted to hospital. She has since been released from the hospital. She is called Naw F---

Did anyone help you [organise] your son's funeral?

I have not yet organised his funeral. This is because a shaman told me that [my son] is still alive so I would like to find him.

Has his body been found?

No, not yet. The shaman told me that my son will return home within a month. If not, the shaman asked me to come to see him again. This is why I have not yet had a funeral for my son. I did not want to disobey the shaman.

If I had found [my son's] body, I would have held a funeral event for him. Since his body has not yet been found, we are not sure whether [my son] is dead. I did not organise his funeral yet.

However, the Meh Pru village tract leader told me to organise my son's funeral for the sake of my son's spirit. I told the village tract leader that I need to wait and see what the shaman says. I begged the village tract leader to wait and see.

At the moment, local communities have fled because of fighting between DKBA splinter group and the Tatmadaw. Do you know why they are still fighting each other, despite the NCA?

Actually, I do not know any detailed information about the fighting. However, I think that the DKBA [splinter group] is stubborn, and that is why the fighting happened. We have not been able to go back and live in our village peacefully yet. This is because the [DKBA splinter] accused us villagers of being their enemies.

Who accused the local villagers of being their enemies?

The DKBA splinter group.

Do you know which [DKBA] leader is saying this?

I think the leader is Bo Bi. I think the person who is trying to kill us is Hpa K'tone. Hpa K'tone wanted to kill his friends and people from this village.

Why do you think he wants to do that to his friends and people from this village?

He has an evil heart. At first, he asked us to flee to Myaing Gyi Ngu region but we chose not [to go to] Myaing Gyi Ngu.

Is Hpa K'tone a soldier from the DKBA splinter group?

Yes, he is. One of his legs was amputated [when he stepped on a landmine]. At the time, soldiers from Brigade #7 took care of him. He was then sent to Brigade #5 for further treatment. When his leg was recovering, he went to live in Bae Klaw [Mae La Refugee Camp]. However, he was not satisfied with villagers from C--- [because he assumed that they were opposed to the DKBA]. So, he came back here to kill us, and my son was shot. [Hpa K'tone] said that he wanted to kill [my husband] but ended up killing my son.

So, was Hpa K'tone the person who shot your son?

My son was shot by a group of DKBA splinter soldiers who were [under the leadership of] Hpa K'tone. People said Sayar Mint was the person who shot my son.

You said they intended to shoot your husband but shot your son instead. What were the problems between your husband and Hpa K'tone?

Perhaps Hpa K'tone thinks that my husband helped his enemies. My husband [was forced to work for certain armed groups] in the past but now he is just a regular villager. My husband was also asked [to work as a porter] in the Ta Moh Poe area [where there was fighting]. But my husband got very tired, so he was sent back home.

Where did Hpa K'tone step on a landmine? Was it in Brigade #7?

He stepped on his own landmine, on a landmine that was laid by the DKBA splinter group. [The DKBA splinter] ordered us to leave our homes. When we left, they laid landmines in our area. When [Hpa K'tone] patrolled the area, he stepped on one of those landmines. We thought that we would not flee if they do not lay any landmines.

What about the local villagers? Have any of the villagers from C--- been injured by landmines?

The first person who stepped on a landmine [laid by the DKBA splinter group] was my nephew. He was sent to Brigade #5 for treatment.

Did this happen a long time ago?

Yes, he stepped on a landmine when fighting occurred between the DKBA splinter, the BGF and Tatmadaw in Meh Tha Waw area [in 2016]. His name is Saw G---

Did he recover from his injury now?

Yes.

Do you know the date when he stepped on a landmine?

I do not remember the date [when he stepped on a landmine]. The village head or village tract [head] might know. Saw G--- stepped on a landmine last year [in 2016]. He stepped on a landmine after we fled from our village. At the time, we were about to harvest our rice paddies because they were ripe. He stepped on a landmine that was laid by the DKBA splinter group.

What about now? Do you feel safe enough to go back to your village?

Now, we are afraid of going back to our village. We still feel insecure to go in the area surrounding our village. We are afraid that we will encounter the DKBA splinter [group]. The [DKBA splinter soldiers] usually patrol the area outside of our village.

Since the NCA was signed, what do you think about their position? What do you think about the purpose of their continuous fighting?

Do you mean the DKBA splinter group?

Yes, [what do you think about the] DKBA splinter and the Tatmadaw?

I do not know about the Tatmadaw's motives. I only know that the DKBA splinter group is planning to destroy and set fire to C--- village.

Why would they target C--- village and destroy it? Is it administered by the BGF or Tatmadaw, or is the KNLA based there?

Honestly, I do not know. I just think one day, they will come to C--- village and destroy the village. They have said that they will destroy the village and burn down the school.

Do you know why they plan to burn the village? What is their purpose?

I do not know why they would want to destroy the village. Maybe they have evil minds.

There is news that a dam will be built on the Khoh Lo Klo [Salween] River. Have you heard about this?

Yes, I have heard that a dam will be built on the Khoh Lo Klo River.

When did you first hear about this?

I first heard about this right before the death of the KNLA commander Saw Hpa Nwee.

Has the construction of the dam started?

I do not know. Since I am just a regular villager, I do not know anything about it. If they build the dam, this area will be covered in water. We will not be able to live here anymore.

If the dam is built, how many villages will be affected?

A lot. Even in rainy season, the place where we live is flooded. I cannot imagine [what would happen] if they built a dam.

What do you think about the ceasefire?

I do not know. I am just a villager.

What are your perspectives?

If our leaders think it is good, then I think it is good. Now, we are in the shadow of our leader [we follow what they do].

Why is it good?

I do not know how to describe it. Because I am a villager, I do not know anything about [local politics or] administration. I am a villager. With regards to the military, I do not know anything about them.

Is there a school here?

Yes, there is.

How many standards [grades] does it have?

It goes up to standard [grade] #3.

How many teachers does the school have?

There are two female teachers and one male teacher.

How much is the teachers' salary?

I do not really know how much they receive. I have never asked them.

Is the school supported with educational materials?

Yes, I have seen the teachers distributing notebooks, pens, pencils, and so on.

Who supports the school? Is the school supported by Burma/Myanmar government, the Karen Education Department (KED), or civil society organisations?

I have not asked the teachers about that either. I just saw that the teachers offered [free] school materials. I think we should ask the teachers who are teaching there.

Is the school a Burma/Myanmar government, KNU, or self-funded school?

I am not sure. The school is located in D--- village.

Is there any clinic?

In the past, there was a clinic in D--- village. But now, there are no health workers [in the clinic].

Who built the clinic?

The KNU from Brigade #5 built it.

You said that there is a clinic but no health workers. Is this because there are no medicines?

I also do not know about that.

So, when people are sick, how do they seek treatment?

Villagers who are sick receive treatment from Brigade #7 health workers.

Are the Brigade #7 health workers based in this village?

Yes, in case we are sick, we go to see them. There are a couple of health workers. They offer treatment to both villagers and soldiers.

What are the common illnesses or diseases that villagers in this area suffer from?

Villagers sometimes suffer from malaria and sometimes from abdominal pain. Recently, my daughter suffered from abdominal bloating that made it difficult for her to breathe. This could have become a serious health condition had we not visited the health workers on time.

Do the villagers have to pay for the treatment?

No, it is a free treatment.

Since you arrived here, have you faced any other problems?

The problems that we are currently facing are [difficulties in] returning to our own village and travelling. We are concerned that the DKBA splinter group will shoot our boat when we are travelling. The DKBA splinter group threatened to shoot our boat for a long time. Finally, they [shot my son's motorboat].

After the ceasefire, have women's rights improved?

In this area, when a meeting is held, the villagers who attend are mostly men.

Would you like to add anything else?

I would like to say that my innocent son was shot by soldiers from the DKBA splinter group. One day, if they are caught, I would like to meet the ones who shot my son. They must pay for what they have done. My son was so honest and innocent. He would never hurt other people. He was just becoming an adult this year, when he learned how to drive the motorboat. When we needed to buy provisions, the two of us used to go together because his father does not drive the motorboat this year.

Have you reported the case to the relevant authorities?

How can we do that? At present, we cannot even live in our own village. I have no idea how to do that.

Is there anything that you want to say more?

I think not.

What do you hope for the future?

One day, I hope that the DKBA splinter group will work together with [the KNU] so that our community will be at peace and so we can return to our village safely. We do not want any fighting between us. We also do not want any dam to be built in this area. If it is built, we will not have any place to live because we are villagers.

Do you think they will surely build a dam [in Salween River]?

I do not know exactly. We just heard that they will build a dam but we are not sure whether they will build it or not.

Is there anything else?

I think it is enough.

Thank you so much for your time. We would like to use this interview for publication. Do you agree?

Yes, I would like you to show Saw K'paw Leh Leh about what I am talking about. If it includes sensitive issues within here, please adjust it [for my security].

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)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)