



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

March 13, 2018/ KHRG #17-25-S1

Hpa-an Situation Update: Paingkyon Township, Hlaingbwe Township and Nabu Township, November 2016 to October 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Paingkyon Township, Hlaingbwe Township and Nabu Township, Hpa-an District during the period between November 2016 and October 2017, including development projects, military activity, land confiscation and logging and taxation.

- *The Hlaingbwe Township administrator and the Paingkyon Town administrator cooperated with the Telenor Company to conduct a telecommunication network project. As part of the project, approximately four feet of land was dug out in order to create a channel connecting Hlaing Bwe Town to Kawkareik Town. During the construction process, villagers' farmlands and plantations were severely damaged.*
 - *In mid-September 2016, fighting between the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter and the Border Guard Force (BGF) broke out in Hlaingbwe Township. Consequently, villagers began displacing from their villages because they did not feel safe to return to their village areas due to the presence of DKBA-splinter group landmines.*
 - *Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army – Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC) Battalion #776 soldiers led by Commander Hpah Htaw conducted logging in P'Ta Hkee Mountain near E--- village, F--- village, G--- village that are located in May Loh Baw village tract, Nabu Township.*
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Situation Update | Paingkyon Township, Hlaingbwe Township and Nabu Township, Hpa-an District (November 2016 to October 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2017. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an 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 Hpa-an District, including one other situation update, two interviews and 15 photographs.²

Development projects

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.

Human rights violations continue to be committed in Ta Kreh [Paingkyon] Township. The Burma/Myanmar government and the Telenor [Company] are cooperating to establish a telecommunication tower. Burma/Myanmar government state leaders have authorised the Lu Pleh Township administrator and the Ta Kreh town administrator to cooperate with the Telenor Company for this telecommunication project in H--- village, Peh Kru village tract, Ta Kreh Township. They have started assembling the electrical wires by digging out soil and constructing a channel from Lu Pleh [Hlaingbwe] Town to Kawkareik Town. After they finished constructing the channel and placed the electrical wires inside, they covered it [the channel] with soil. The depth [of the channel] is approximately four feet. As they were digging besides the vehicle road, it [the construction of the channel] severely damaged villagers' farmlands, porches, rubber, bean, and mustard plantations.

The construction was initiated from I--- village, Plah Saw village tract, J--- village, K--- village in K'soe village tract, L--- in Ta Kreh village tract, M---, N---, and O--- villages in Peh Kru village tract, P--- village in Kye Too Ray village tract, Q--- in Htee Poe Tray village tract, R--- village in Paw Yay Poo village tract, S--- village in Paw village tract, and T---, U---, V---, W---, and X--- in Taw Soe village tract, Ta Kreh Township.

This project has been conducted since early December 2016 and was completed in the end of January 2017 but the project could potentially restart in Ta Kreh Township.

In T'nay Hsah [Nabu] Township, the Burma/Myanmar government and a Telenor [Company] manager cooperated to dig out soil beside the vehicle road, which damaged the villagers' farmlands, porches and rubber plantations. This dissatisfied many villagers. The construction of the vehicle road and the bridge construction was also a barrier for local civilians travelling because all travellers had to avoid the unfinished constructed road and instead travel via a longer curved road.

Military activity

In mid-September 2016, there were clashes between the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army [DKBA splinter]³ and the Border Guard Force [BGF]⁴ in Lu Pleh [Hlaing Bwe] Township. Consequently, villagers have been displacing from their villages. Villagers did not feel safe to return to their villages because the DKBA [splinter] laid landmines within their village areas.

³ The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was re-formed on January 16th 2016 as a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (2010 – present), and is also referred to as Na Ma Kya ('Deaf Ear'). During fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA Benevolent throughout 2015, there was internal disagreement within the DKBA Benevolent which resulted in a number of commanders being dismissed in July 2015. These former commanders then issued a statement in January 2016 declaring the formation of a new splinter group. This organisation has phrased the formation of this group as the revival of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army which was formed in 1994 until it was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the still-active DKBA Benevolent. The group is led by General Saw Kyaw Thet, Chief of Staff and General Saw Taing Shwe aka Bo Bi, Vice Chief of Staff. Other lower ranking commanders in the DKBA Buddhist splinter group are San Aung and late Kyaw Moh aka Na Ma Kya (reportedly killed on August 26th 2016). The group is currently based in Myaing Gyi Ngu area in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State. This DKBA Buddhist (2016 – present) should not be confused with the DKBA Benevolent (2010 – present) from which it broke away in January 2016, or with the original DKBA (1994 – 2010) which was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the DKBA Benevolent. Importantly, the DKBA Buddhist has not signed the preliminary or nationwide ceasefire with the Myanmar government whereas the DKBA Benevolent has signed both agreements.

⁴ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

After January 15th 2017, four [soldiers] in the DKBA splinter group led by Hpa Ta Kee patrolled around Kaw Ka Ti army camp near the Moe Pyan [Tatmadaw] camp. Meanwhile, the KNU/KNLA Battalion #21 and Lu Pleh Township KNU authorities were monitoring the forest and accidentally encountered the DKBA [splinter group]. The DKBA [splinter group] started firing at the KNLA soldiers but the KNLA retreated without firing back. Two KNLA soldiers suffered minor injuries. The KNU/KNLA, BGF and the Tatmadaw all are operating on a high security alert in Lu Pleh Township.

The BGF Commander Dee Ter Ler is under the control of Commander Kya Aye, Cantonment Area #2. BGF Battalion #1015⁵ is based in Paingkyon Township. In October, they attacked the DKBA [splinter group] in Meh Prow village tract. BGF and DKBA attacks occurred on October 15th 2017 in Y--- village, Meh Prow village tract. Again, on October 23rd 2017 at 9:00 AM, another attack occurred in Z--- village, Meh Prow village tract but the villagers were no longer living in the village at that time; they had already moved to Hkaw Taw Poo [also known as Myaing Gyi Ngu] village since October 2016 [due to the conflict situation]. They [BGF] are planning to make stronger attacks in the future. The BGF Battalions involved in the Meh Prow village tract attack include Battalions #1012, #1014,⁶ #1016⁷ and #1020, as well as Tatmadaw Division #22, Military Operations Command [MOC]⁸ #12, Light Infantry Battalion [LIB]⁹ #338 and LIB #339.

Land confiscation

On October 5th 2017, Border Guard Force [BGF] #1015 led by Commander Dee Ter Ler confiscated villagers' land in Yay Pu Kyi village, Yay Pu Kyi village tract, Paingkyon Township. The lands of 11 villagers were confiscated by BGF and the land was sold [by the BGF] to other villages. In mid-October 2017, the BGF Commander Dee Ter Ler also began constructing a pagoda which is currently still under construction [as of October 2017].

Logging and taxation committed by KNU/KNLA-PC

⁵ KHRG has received numerous reports of human rights violations by BGF Battalion #1015, including arbitrary killing of civilians, arbitrary taxation and demands, forced labour, as well as additional cases of land confiscation. For detailed information see, "[Human rights violations by BGF Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, February 2013 to July 2014](#)," KHRG, September 2014.

⁶ KHRG has received numerous reports of human rights violations committed by soldiers from Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014, including killing, torture, violent abuse, explicit threats, arbitrary taxation and demands and land confiscation. For more information, see "[BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015](#)," KHRG, December 2015; "[Human rights violations by Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1014 in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, May 2012 to March 2014](#)," KHRG, July 2015.

⁷ KHRG has reported on the sale of methamphetamine in Nabu Township, Hpa-an District by BGF Battalion #1016 under Commander Saw Mya Khaing, see "[Chapter: Drug production, use and the social impacts in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire](#)," in "[Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#)," KHRG, May 2014. Since the preliminary ceasefire, at least one villager has been violently killed by BGF Battalion #1016 after confronting them about the drug trade. See "[Hpa-an Field Report: January to December 2013](#)," KHRG, January 2015. BGF battalion #1016 have caused land confiscation and displacement for communities in Hpa-an Township, including for sale to private companies, see "[Hpa-an Incident Report: Land confiscation in Paingkyon Township, May 2015](#)," KHRG, January 2016.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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. Yet up to date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

In T’Nay Hsah [Nabu] Township, Peace Council [KNU/KNLA-PC]¹⁰ Battalion #776 Commander Hpah Htaw and his soldiers conducted logging in P’Ta Hkee Mountain near E--- village, F--- village, G--- village which are located in May Loh Baw village tract. The PC soldiers earn [additional] income by logging [near the village]; this violates customary land use practices. The KNU/KNLA-PC Battalion #774 and 776 also demanded [from villagers] a tax for wild yam, fish traps and fish nets. The taxes collected by the KNU/KNLA-PC soldiers was used for their own personal benefit because villagers did not receive any receipt [explanation for what the tax money is used for] and moreover, because the leaders [of the KNU/KNLA-PC] also did not know about the incident [unaware that KNU/KNLA-PC soldiers are taxing villagers for their own benefit].

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

- “Hpa-an Field Report: Explicit killing, fighting leading to massive displacement, arbitrary taxation and the improvement of healthcare and education, January to December 2016,” (January 2018)
- “Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe Township, Paingkyon Township and Nabu Township, March to May 2017,” (August 2017)
- “Three separate killing incidents based on witchcraft suspicion in Hpa-an District,” (July 2017)
- “Hpa-an Interview: Naw A---, September 25, 2016” (July 2017)
- “Hpa-an Short Update: Hlaingbwe Township, March to October 2016,” (April 2017)

¹⁰ The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Kaw Koh, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC government in 2007. The KNU/KNLA-PC subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform into a Tatmadaw Border Guard Force in 2010. The KNU/KNLA-PC signed a preliminary ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government on February 7th 2012, and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15th 2015.

Hpa-an District



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