



Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

August 2nd 2017 / KHRG #17-27-S1

Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, 2016 to February 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District between late 2016 and February 2017, including the negative consequences of gold mining, and events related to health, education and livelihoods.

- *Civilians from Hpapun District face food problems in 2017 because of unfavourable weather and mice and caterpillars which severely damaged their paddy in the period between the initial germination of the rice plant to its harvest.*
- *Gold mining in Meh Thu village tract and Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District is conducted by wealthy individuals thought to be connected with the Burma/Myanmar government. Civilians report that it impacts on their health and wellbeing because it produces a poisoned and polluted river. The project has also damaged civilians' houses, land and farms.*
- *Villagers affected by the gold mine are unwilling to protest against the project because some Karen National Union (KNU) leaders are also involved in the project. Local people report that, the gold mining project workers came to their area from outside of the community with their families, and they stay in the village. They report that some of these project workers do not follow the rules of their village.*

Situation Update | Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (2016 to February 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in February 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

Introduction

Between [late] 2016 and February 2017, civilians in Mu Traw [Hpapun] District area worked on farms in the plains and the hills for their livelihoods. These civilians faced the problem of food shortages from August [2016] until the paddy seed turned yellow [harvest time] because of unfavourable weather and mice destroying their paddy. There were plenty of mice attacking the civilians' paddy between 2016 and 2017, so the civilians reported this problem to the Mu Traw [Hpapun] District leaders. Moreover, caterpillars also ate the villagers' paddies' leaves after the villagers planted paddy seeds and young paddy plants, which meant that the paddy plants died. This is a repeated issue in Mu Traw [Hpapun] District which impacts on farmers' livelihoods every year.

Meh Thu village tract and Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District Situation Update

From December 15th 2016 to February 28th 2017, gold mining in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District damaged villagers' land, rivers and farms [located near the gold mining project]. Moreover, the gold mining project also caused damage some villagers' houses in Meh Way village. The house owners did not want to move to another place but they had to move because [the company leaders] bought this area to conduct gold mining [on the land with] the civilians' houses, gardens and farms. Therefore, [the gold mining project] is the biggest challenge [villagers have to face] and it impacts on civilians' livelihoods. The villagers in Dwe Lo Township are native people but they have lost [use of] their rivers, forests and farms that they rely on for their livelihoods because the rivers, forests and farms have been harmed [polluted] by the gold mining project. The villagers no longer get fresh drinking water [from the river]. Moreover [the local] fish have been lost [died]. The people who conduct this gold mining are from outside [not from the local area] and they are company staff members. There is no benefit [from gold mining] for the native people in this area, instead it causes them problems. When I travelled to Meh Way village and Meh Si village on January 13th 2017, one villager said, *"I understand that the gold mining project is not good. It [negatively] impacts on the villagers"*. They want to forbid the gold mining project [from continuing] but they are not willing to do so because the Karen Nation Union (KNU) leaders also cooperate with the company on this project. One villager asked me, *"In the future, will this group continuously conduct gold mining? If they continue to do it then we will face extreme problems with our jobs and livelihoods"*.

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.

Health

A negative effect of the gold mining project in Dwe Lo Township is [that there have been] consequences for the civilians' health. The reason is that villagers and animals such as cows, buffalos, and goats breathe the poisonous fumes from the gold mine, and drink the water from the polluted river. People mine for gold every day and every night, therefore the poisonous runoff from the gold mining flows into the river. Therefore, it causes numerous illnesses to villagers and animals. There were some animals which died [after drinking the polluted water]. Villagers shared their opinion regarding the gold mining project and reported this issue [to KHRG]. According to one villager, *"The gold mining [project] needs to cease. If not, then it will impact the local native people in many different ways in their life"*.

The situation of the gold mining company and their workers

Villagers perceive that the gold mining project is organised by wealthy individuals and the Burma/Myanmar government, in order to negatively affect all of the villagers' farms and land that they rely on for their livelihood. It is felt that the Burma/Myanmar government oppresses the Karen people through many different strategies, such as education, health and development projects designed to destroy [and weaken] the Karen people. [Villagers perceive that] they [Burma/Myanmar government] use these strategies so that the Karen people will be under their control and not under the KNU administration. [Villagers perceive that] the Burma/Myanmar government sends the gold mining company and wealthy individuals on their behalf to request permission from the KNU government for the gold mining project. The KNU government gave them permission for the gold mining project [thus] damaging the native villagers' farms and lands which they work on for their livelihood. Most of the company workers came with their families to the gold mining area and then they did not return to their home village. They built their houses and confiscated [settled on] the native villagers' land. Moreover, this had a detrimental effect on [vegetable] plants and trees which were planted by the local inhabitants. The affected land owners told the company workers [not to do it] but they did not listen to the land owners and they do not follow the rule of the area [village tract]. Therefore, it impacts [negatively upon] the native villagers.²

Education

On my [KHRG researcher] way to Dooplaya District, I met with villagers from K'Ma Mo, K'Ter Tee, Noh Paw Htee, Htee Law Thee Hta, Htee Ther Lay and Baw Tho Hta, and discussed with them [about education]. They reported [about the education issue in their area] that, their school teachers are from the Burma/Myanmar government and they do not allow students to study Karen language and that they teach [subjects] translated [from other languages and curriculums] into Burmese language. Some students' parents understand that this school curriculum does not match with the Karen Education

² For more reports on gold mining in Hpapun District, see Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, ["January to May 2016,"](#) September 2016, and ["Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, May to August 2016,"](#) January 2017.

Department [KED's curriculum] so they do not let their children go to school. Therefore, this impacts on the children [and their education].

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

- "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)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to August 2016," (November 2016)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District

