



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

October 3, 2017 / KHRG #17-4-S1

Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, November 2016 to January, 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District between November 2016 and January 12th, 2017, including military activity, education, business development, livelihoods, healthcare, natural conservation, drug use and the return to Myanmar of refugees from Nu Poe refugee camp on the Thailand border.

- *On January 8th and 9th 2017, Tatmadaw sent more troops to the area between Kyeikdon Town and Per Kler village after on-going clashes with DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) Bo San Aung's splinter group. They also made local people porter to carry food for them.*
 - *On November 16th 2016, local villager Saw Hpa Bee disappeared after a landmine exploded. He was on his way to farmland and has been presumed dead. Following the explosion, more landmines were found around that area, and it was believed that they were planted by the DKBA Bo San Aung's splinter group which has been active in the region.*
 - *Six drug-dealers were arrested by local authorities in Kyaikdon Town, Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District and the effort of fighting against drugs was said to be scaled up by local armed actors.*
-

Situation Update | Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (November 2016 to January 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in January 2017. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya 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 Dooplaya District, including, four interviews and 80 photographs.²

Military Activities

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.

Between November 11th [2016] and January 12th [2017], there were more military activities than in 2014-2015 and in the previous month, October 2016. Many armed groups exist because their views do not overlap. There were, at times, conflicts which cropped up between them as they [each armed group] have their own ideas about what they are doing. Especially [Tactical Commander General] Bo³ San Aung⁴ of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army [DKBA splinter group]⁵, who undertook military activities on November 11th 2016 and this initiated conflict which has been prolonged to become a constant conflict until now. Tatmadaw sent more troops to the area between Kyeikdon Town and Per Kler village. During this time, they not only sent more rations but sometimes they asked for *Loh Ah Pay*⁶ from the villagers [to carry these rations]. On January 8th and 9th 2017, Tatmadaw Battalions #283 and #32 sent food/rations such as rice, oil, fish cans, and beef cans. They asked for help from villagers who are from nearby villages, particularly Kwee Kler, Kwee Lay, Htoe Lwee Wah, and Mae T' Raw Hta. One person from each household had to carry the ration packages to the military base camp. Village leader U Maung assembled and announced to the villagers that they must volunteer [to do *Loh Ah Pay*] and go to the army camp; otherwise, they would be charged [fined] 200 Baht [US\$5.97]⁷ per household by the village head. Some people tried to come but some were busy so they just paid the fine.

³ *Bo* is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

⁴ Tactical Commander General Saw San Aung, commonly known as Bo San Aung, from DKBA Battalion #907, was relieved of his position in the beginning of 2015 after fighting broke out between his battalion and Tatmadaw troops. Acting independently, he formed his own armed group with approximately 70-80 soldiers. In April 2015, Bo San Aung was accepted back into the DKBA after discussions with the DKBA's top leaders. Following the most recent bout of fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA along the Asian Highway, in which Bo San Aung and his company "deaf ear" (Na Ma Kya) were involved, Bo San Aung was again dismissed from the DKBA as a result of his conduct. For recent information on Bo San Aung, see ["Two separate clashes between armed actors in Kawkaeik Township, Dooplaya District, February 2015."](#) KHRG, May 2015 and ["DKBA sacks Brigadier General Saw Kyaw Thet and Colonel Saw San Aung."](#) Mizzima, July 2015.

⁵ 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.

⁶ *Loh ah pay* is a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

⁷ All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the July 21st 2017 official market rate of 33 baht to US \$1.

From January 5th to 7th 2017, Tatmadaw Army, DKBA (Democratic Karen Benevolent Army), KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army), and BGF (Border Guard Force) collaboratively investigated [about the areas thought to be contaminated by] landmines along the [Thai/Myanmar] border areas. [This was] in order to free villagers from landmine injuries [in the future], [and to ensure] easier travelling and transportation around those areas.

On November 16th 2016, when a villager named Saw Hpa Bee went to his hill farmland, a landmine exploded and he has not been seen since [presumed dead]. Saw Hpa Bee has three family members. About ten days after this landmine explosion and Saw Hpa Bee's disappearance, another landmine exploded again in the same area where Saw Hpa Bee had disappeared. Following this, in the area where Saw Hpa Bee used to go, a third landmine was found. According to authorised persons [leaders], it is understood these were planted by Bo San Aung [DKBA splinter group under the command of Bo San Aung]. The place where Saw Hpa Bee disappeared is called Baw Ner Hta hill. [Moreover] Thai soldiers found additional [non-active] landmines among pumpkin plants in Per Kler, on the Thai side [of the border], on December 8th 2016. They were found in one white bag which was half-full with landmines. The landmines were assumed to be from Bo San Aung [DKBA splinter group]. This situation created risks for local villagers who live along the border and work among this area. Therefore, the soldiers who have been assigned to oversee the security along the border area, who include BGF [Border Guard Forces], KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], and DKBA (Benevolent), have had to increase their military activities [e.g. patrolling], like before [the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement⁸ was signed].

Education

We see that the education situation has improved. Despite the system not being the best, the education situation has not returned [regressed] to its old circumstances [which were poor].

Business

⁸ 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) 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. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see "[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement](#)," *UN News Centre*, October 15th 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe's decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see "[Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#)," *Karen News*, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

Regarding the business situation in Dooplaya District, there has not been any notable change because the sale price of stone has reduced and the situation [market for selling stone] is even worse than in the past. Thus, work opportunities have decreased instead of increased.

Development

We [KHRG community member and villagers] have not seen any notable increase in development activities being conducted yet. However, there was minor development activity in terms of road construction, modifying and extending one road [from P' Loo to Lay Kay Kaw]. There will be another development project concerning the building [renovation] of houses for IDPs [internally displaced persons]/refugees however, it has not started yet. The buildings exist but there are plans to make them better.



These photos show P' Loo villagers' farms which are on land designated as reserved forest. [These photos also show] the road that is being constructed [from P' Loo] to Lay Kay Kaw [through the reserved forest]. [Photos: KHRG]

Livelihoods

The villagers developed fewer plantations this year because [they knew that] the price of vegetables was low; as a result, the villagers encountered financial problems. Corn plantation owners could not afford to hire workers to pick the corn like they could in the past. By January 12th 2017, the corn harvest had not been completed. The paddy plants also were not fruitful due to paddy destruction [by insects or mice]. This is the current livelihood situation in Dooplaya District.

Healthcare

The situation for healthcare is good. Despite the inefficiency of [some parts of the] healthcare [services that are provided], the situation was not as bad as in the past. There were no serious diseases that the villagers suffered, only common sickness.

Conservation of Nature

A training on conservation of nature was given in Nu Poe Refugee Camp. A project on forestry and conservation of nature will be conducted through awareness training in Dooplaya District,

along the Thai-Myanmar border. It is planned to be conducted on March 3rd, 2017. In order to do this, there will be consultations with local leaders and authorities. In particular, the authorities include Forestry Department Officers and district leaders of Dooplaya District. In fact, they had not met with district leaders but planned to approach them [to discuss] whether they would give the permission to start the project. The ones that will meet them include [a] Thailand/Nu Poe [Refugee] Camp leader, one responsible person from Nu Poe Camp, along with other project-related colleagues, to consult with them about contributing to this awareness training regarding the conservation of nature.

Drugs

With regard to the drug situation in Dooplaya District, since November 2016, local authorities and local leaders have been trying to take responsibility to protect [civilians] against drug use. Despite the fact that they were not able to eradicate all drugs, six drug sellers were arrested. Thus, the situation regarding drug dealing became stable in Kyainseikgyi Township, west part of Kawkareik Township, Kyaikdon Town. [However] there is still more or less the same level of drug use existing in other places. The armed soldiers [from unspecified armed groups] who control [the drug eradication process] have spread more in Kawkareik Township and Kyainseikgyi Township near where the border is.

Nu Poe Refugee Return

On October 16th 2016, the refugees of Nu Poe Refugee Camp started returning to their [designated return] places. One household with two family members had received 16,000 baht [US\$478.32] in financial aid from UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] and they were sent to Myawaddy [Thai/Myanmar border crossing] [by the UNHCR]. When they arrived to Burma/Myanmar, they received an additional 300,000 kyat [US\$219.80]⁹ from Burma/Myanmar government and 100,000 kyat [US\$73.29] from an emergency relief group [International Committee of the Red Cross]. They were then sent to the place where they proposed [to UNHCR] that they would return to. According to one family that went back to A---village [in Dooplaya District] on October 18th 2016, they had received support including seven chickens, one pig, three goats, and also including some chicken feed and pig feed. This is all the support that they have accessed. They have not received any other support yet. They are also not sure whether they will be provided with more support in the future or not. Each refugee family has not received the same support; the more family members there are in their family, the more aid they received.

⁹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 16 August 2017 official market rate of 1364 kyat to US \$1



These photos were taken on January 18th 2017 in A--- village, Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District. The photo on the left shows a returnee from Nu Poe refugee camp, with the three goats and two bags of livestock feed that were given to returnees as support. The photo on the right shows a letter, written in Karen language, listing the support that the returnees will receive for their livelihood and accommodation. In addition, it includes information about the important documents that the returnees have to make sure to bring with them when they leave the refugee camp. [Photos: KHRG]

Returnees expressed that they were willing to receive any job opportunities with the help of UNHCR [who could potentially provide information on job opportunities]. Saw B---, one of the family members of a returnee family, reported that he does not have any job to [support] his livelihood. Therefore, if there are any job vacancies that are provided by the government or an NGO [non-governmental organisation], he is interested to apply for any position. He additionally stated that he wants all refugees who have returned to Burma/Myanmar to get the same rights as local people and to be able to cooperate and participate in any role equally. According to Saw B---, “I want any [organisation with] vacancies in Burma/Myanmar to accept [employ] the refugees who have returned”. Therefore, Saw B--- requested the Burma/Myanmar government to provide any job opportunities to the refugees who have returned with the arrangement of UNHCR.

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

- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, September 2016,” (May 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Noh T’Kaw Township, April to May 2016,” (March 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, June to July 2015,” (March 2017)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, August 2015,” (February 2017)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, April 2016 to July 2016,” (February 2017)

