



Interview

November 15, 2017 / KHRG #17-46-A1-I1

Nay Pyi Taw Interview: Daw A---, February 2017

This Interview with Daw A--- describes events occurring in Pyay Ma Nar Township, Nay Pyi Taw union territory in February 2017, including land confiscation, dam construction, forced labour, Tatmadaw activities and livelihood issues.

- *The Burma/Myanmar government built a school in B--- village, Meh Pauk village tract, Pyi Ma Nar Township. Nevertheless, they did not provide food and accommodation for school teachers. Therefore, villagers were forced to do Loh Ah Pay [unpaid labour] in order to construct the building for teachers. In addition, one family were asked to pay 10,000 kyat [US \$7.32] to buy logs, zinc sheeting and other materials for the building construction.*
 - *Daw A--- stated that many villages in Pyi Ma Nar Township will be affected if the middle Paunglaung dam project is implemented. In addition, villagers are concerned that their lands and plantations will be destroyed when the dam is constructed.*
 - *When the Burma/Myanmar government built the new capital city in Nay Pyi Taw, the Tatmadaw confiscated all the lands from Sin Thaw Kyauk Than Pen village tract and they constructed their military headquarters buildings on the confiscated land. Therefore, all the villagers from that village tract had to relocate to a lower area. However, the Tatmadaw did not pay any compensation to villagers.*
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Interview | Daw A---, (female, 43 years old), B--- village, Pyay Ma Nar Township, Nay Pyi Taw union territory (February 2017)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Nay Pyi Taw union territory on February 13th 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 Nay Pyi Taw union territory, including two other interviews, 69 photographs and one video clip.²

Ethnicity: K'nyaw Wah [White Karen]³

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

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.

³ This is a sub-ethnicity of Karen.

Occupation: Hill farmer

Position: Villager

What is your name?

My name is Daw⁴ A---.

How old are you?

I am 43 years old.

What is your ethnicity?

I am White Karen.

What is your religion?

I am a Buddhist.

Do you have a family?

Yes. I have a family.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

How old is your eldest child?

My eldest child is 23 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

My youngest child is 16 years old.

Where do you work?

I work on a hill plantation and I also work on a plantation on the plains.

Can you tell me where you live?

Yes. I live in B--- village.

What Village Tract and Township?

Meh Pauk village tract and Pyay Ma Nar Township.

I would like to ask you about the situation in your village. Can I ask you about it?

Yes. You can ask.

How many households are there in your village?

There are [number censored for security] households in my village.

Are there any schools in your village?

There is a school in my village.

What kind of school is it?

It is a sub-middle school⁵.

Who built this school? The Burma/Myanmar government or the village community?

⁴ Daw is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

⁵ Sub-middle schools operate as smaller satellite units of a central middle school, usually located in a township's administrative centre.

The Burma/Myanmar government built this school. They [Burma/Myanmar government] only constructed the school building but they did not provide food or accommodation for school teachers. The number of school teachers has increased as the school became a middle school. However, villagers had to construct a building for teachers to live in. A building for teachers was constructed and funded by villagers. There are [censored] houses in the village so people from each house were asked to do *Loh Ar Pay*⁶ in order to construct the building for teachers. In addition, people from each house were asked to pay 10,000 kyat [US \$7.38]⁷ to buy logs, zinc and other materials for the building's construction.

Who asked villagers to construct the building? The Burma/Myanmar government?

We do not know about that. We do not have the right to know about it. Nobody confirmed whether the Burma/Myanmar government had ordered villagers or not⁸. Villagers were called to attend a meeting [by the village head] because the lack of accommodation for teachers was a problem. I am not sure whether he [village head] forced villagers or not. One person from each house was called to do *Loh Ar Pay* for one day [in order to construct the building] but the building construction had not finished after this day. Therefore, one person from each house was called again to do *Loh Ar Pay* but not each of the [censored] houses had to do *Loh Ar Pay* that day. We have a ten household leader⁹ in our village so each ten household leader has to manage villagers for *Loh Ar Pay*. For example, if there are three ten household leaders then it is their responsibility to ask villagers to do *Loh Ar Pay* and there will be 30 villagers who have to do *Loh Ar Pay*. So if tomorrow it is the responsibility of four ten household leaders to ask villagers to do *Loh Ar Pay*, there will be 40 villagers who have to do *Loh Ar Pay*. If villagers from [censored] houses were asked to do *Loh Ar Pay* for one time, they have to do it. After we finished *Lor Ar Pay* one time, we were asked to do *Loh Ar Pay* for a second time and third time.

Can you remember when you were first asked to do *Loh Ar Pay*?

As far as I remember, we were asked to do *Loh Ar Pay* in 2016. I cannot remember which day but I remember we had to do it [*Loh Ar Pay*] in June or July.

You just had to do *Loh Ar Pay*? What else did you have to do? As you told me before, you had to support [the construction of the building] by giving money?

Yes. We had to pay the cost of the construction of the building. We were asked to give money to buy logs, zinc sheets and iron in order to construct the building. That is why each house [family] had to give 10,000 kyat [US \$7.38]. We did not need to hire carpenters to construct the building but villagers, themselves, had to construct it.

As you told me before you [villagers] were forced to do *Loh Ar Pay*. I want to know who led or directed villagers to do *Loh Ar Pay*?

[It was the] hundred household leader¹⁰ and the village head.

Were there any villagers who could not pay [10,000 kyat] [US \$7.38] due to livelihood issues?

There were some villagers who could not pay [10,000 kyat] [US \$7.38] but [the village head] set up a rule for villagers who could not pay immediately. The rule was that they [villagers] had to pay later. If they [villagers] cannot pay before the deadline, they were fined and had to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] more. That is why some villagers had to pay 10,000 kyat [US \$7.38] and then another payment of 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68].

⁶ *Loh ah/ar 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 kyat in this report are based on the 08/11/2017 official market rate of 1,354 kyat to US \$1.

⁸ It is believed to have been ordered by the Burma/Myanmar government but that has not been confirmed.

⁹ In villages, one leader is elected per ten households to take responsibility for local issues.

¹⁰ In larger villages, one leader is elected per one hundred households to take responsibility for local issues.

Were there any villagers who had to pay 15,000 kyat [US \$11.06]?

I do not know about it exactly but I, myself, had to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] more because I was absent the day we had to do *Loh Ar Pay*.

So you had to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] more because of your absence on *Loh Ar Pay* day?

Yes. On that day, the ten household leader came to check our house in order to ask someone to do *Loh Ar Pay*, but nobody was there except my housekeeper. He [ten household leader] just told my housekeeper to inform me that tomorrow was *Loh Ar Pay* day but my housekeeper did not inform me when I came back home, maybe he forgot. That is why I did not know that the next day was *Loh Ar Pay* day. Then, [after *Loh Ar Pay*] the hundred household leader called me to come to him in the evening. He told me, “*Nobody from your house came to do Loh Ar Pay. That is why you get a fine, you have to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68]*”. After he told me that, I did not want to say [argue] anything with to him because he only asked for 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68]. Another reason is, I am a woman so I did not want to cause any argument. Then, I just gave him 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68]. I also had to sign a letter saying that I was absent at *Loh Ar Pay* day and was fined 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68].

He [hundred household leader] fined you because you were absent on the *Loh Ar Pay* day so you had to pay money as a fine. So what did he [hundred household leader] use that money for?

I did not have the right to know [ask him] about it.

Did he [hundred houses leader] explain anything to you? For example, will he use that money for the school budget and for other things that villagers need?

No. He did not provide any information to me.

Were there any other villagers who had to pay a fine due to their absence at *Loh Ar Pay* day, like you?

Yes. There were some villagers who were fined like me. On that day, ten household leaders also came to check their [other villagers'] houses but nobody knew that they had to do *Loh Ar Pay* because they said that they were not at home. I saw that they too were fined.

The person who fined villagers is the village head?

We had to give money to the hundred household leader when we were fined.

Can you tell me the name of the hundred household leader?

Everyone in the village knows that his name is U Maung Aye.

Each house had to pay 10,000 kyat [US \$7.38] for the cost of building construction. Was that enough?

I think it is enough because there are [censored] houses so the money from villagers is over 1,500,000 kyat [US \$1,109.15]. However, we did not need to rent carpenters. The wood is from the local area and therefore not very expensive. It just costs a lot of money to buy the zinc sheets and iron nails because we had to buy those things from another town. However, I think it [the money raised] is enough.

How big is the building [for the teachers]?

There are four rooms in the building. The width of one room is 10 feet. The walls for the rooms are made from bamboo. Some villagers in the village know how to weave the bamboo to make a wall. In the case of the villagers who cannot weave the bamboo like myself, we had to cut bamboo and we also we had to pay 1,000 kyat [US \$0.73] to rent bamboo weavers.

So the construction of the building is finished now?

Yes. It is finished now.

Can [teachers] live in the building now?

Yes. They can live in it now.

Are there any other issues in your area?

There is the upper Paunglaung dam which is 14 miles far from our village [situated on the Paunglaung river]. It [dam] does not affect our village a lot because our village is situated far below the upper Paunglaung dam but there are some problems for villagers who live in the area near the upper Paunglaung dam. [Because of the upper dam project, some land was destroyed] so villagers from the upper area might receive compensation but I do not know how much they will get. They [those whose land was destroyed], know it [how much they will get]¹¹. In addition, I heard that the middle Paunglaung dam project will be constructed soon. It [the proposed dam] might cause damage or harm to villagers but I am not sure about it because [dam constructors] are still looking for the right place to construct the [middle] dam. If [dam constructors] construct the dam above villagers' plantations and farms, it might only cause a few problems for villagers but if they construct the dam below villagers' plantations and farms, villagers' plantations and farms will be flooded. Therefore, villagers may lose a lot of their lands and plantations. However, we are not sure about what will happen but this is what we think the likely possible negative impacts of dam project are.

Regarding the [proposed] dam project, did [dam constructors] hold a consultation meeting with villagers? Did they explain anything to villagers regarding the dam project?

[Dam constructors] have never held a consultation meeting with villagers regarding the dam project. We do not know whether [dam constructors] work with the Burma/Myanmar government or not.

What about the previous Paunglaung dam? How did they [Ministry of Electricity and Energy] build a dam? Did they consult with villagers?

I was not in this village when the previous dam was constructed. I have just been living in this village for four years. The upper Paunglaung dam construction project was finished a long time ago. Therefore, I do not know anything about the upper Paunglaung dam project.

Regarding the [upper] Paunglaung dam project, did [dam constructors also] construct the road when they built a dam?

Yes. You have to construct the road if you build a dam. Right?

When [the dam constructors] constructed the road, some of villagers' lands and plantations were impacted [damaged]. So did villagers receive compensation?

I have never heard that villagers received compensation.

What kinds of crops do villagers grow on their lands?

Most of the villagers in this area earn a living by working on plantations. They grow betel nut, cardamom, bananas and dog fruit in this area.

When was the [upper] Paunglaung dam constructed?

¹¹ For further information please see the report by Physicians for Human rights. This that “found that the Guiding Principles and the Basic Principles and Guidelines were not followed in the planning and construction of the Paunglaung dam, and that the flawed displacement process led to the loss of jobs and income, as well as increased food insecurity, poverty, and limits on access to water.” See “[Forced Displacements and Destroyed Lives around Upper Paunglaung Dam in Shan State, Myanmar](#),” Physicians for Human Rights, October 2015. See also, “[Drowning the Green Ghosts of Kayanland](#),” Kayan Women’s Union, 2008.

I was not here when the [upper] Paunglaung dam was constructed. I just told you about the consequences of the dam project after it was constructed.

Can you tell me about the current consequences that villagers have to face due to the [upper] dam construction project? For example, after 2012, did it flood the land? Did the land fall due to the dam? Or were lands destroyed due to natural disasters? Have you ever heard like that?

No. Currently I do not feel that it [dam project] can affect villagers a lot as the dam was reconstructed recently [after villagers had already left the flooded area].

What about the Nancho dam project¹²?

Yes. It affected the villagers in the lower Paunglaung river area. Previously, I was talking about upper Paunglaung dam project. So there is also the lower Paunglaung dam and the Nancho dam. Before I was only talking about the upper Paunglaung dam project. The lower Paunglaung dam project heavily affected the villagers.

So can you tell me about the consequences of the lower Paunglaung dam project? How did it affect villagers?

Yes. I can tell you. I have some relatives there who were affected by the lower Paunglaung dam project. Many villagers from C—and D— had land destroyed due to the dam project.

How and why?

Both of those villages were destroyed because this [lower] dam is constructed upstream from the villages so when the dam was constructed, the water flooded the villages and they sank into the river. Villagers were not informed about it in advance. When villagers slept at night, the water went into the village. Within that night, villagers quickly fled their villages like a dog and pig in order to survive [a Burmese saying which means they fled without forethought]. The water [from the river] went up slowly and villagers' houses sank into the river. The next day, the water went down and villagers came to pull their houses apart and they relocated their houses to another place. However, villagers can only move their houses and their property but they cannot move their land or plantations. Villagers had to leave a lot of their land and plantations. There is one uncle [older man], a local villager, in the village. He is from Thaton area. People from Thaton mainly work on agriculture. This uncle is really interested in working on agriculture. He bought many plots of land in the village and he used those lands for agriculture. D--- village is not very far from E--- village. This village is nearby the plain area. The road and communication infrastructure is very good, compared to the upper Paunglaung river area. That is why this uncle chose to buy lands in the lower area because it is easy to transport fruits and vegetables. He grew many different plantations. His own lands were very wide. I am just telling you about one person who owned many lands. The uncle's lands were destroyed. Therefore, you can imagine how many lands and plantations were destroyed. However, nobody from these two villages received any compensation.

There are four different dams. Right?

Yes. The construction of three dams is already finished but the construction of one dam [middle Paunglaung dam] is not finished yet. [The dam constructors] are still looking for a place to construct the last dam [middle Paunglaung dam] and they are constructing the road now. They are constructing buildings for dam construction workers to live in. The middle Paunglaung dam project has been confirmed. However, they are still looking for the best place to construct the middle Paunglaung dam.

Have they [dam constructors] finished building the accommodation for the dam construction workers?

¹² For more information on the Nancho dam project see [Burma Rivers Network](#).

No. They are still constructing buildings for workers and they are now constructing the road.

Currently?

Yes. Currently.

So did they inform villagers about it [dam project and road construction]? Did they consult with villagers?

As I told you before, they never consulted with villagers. They just negotiated with the Burma/Myanmar government. Villagers did not know anything.

If this middle Paunglaung dam project is implemented, how many villages will be affected? Can you give me your opinion?

If the middle Paunglaung dam project is constructed above villages, it may not cause a lot of destruction immediately but it can cause damage to the villages [as it will stop the water supply]. However, I do not understand how and where they [dam constructors] will construct the dam and I do not know exactly how many villages will be destroyed. For example if they [dam constructors] construct the dam at Paunglaung river nearby F--- village, it would cause great destruction to the village because many people from G--- village have their farmlands and betel nut plantations in F--- village.

Will this proposed dam be constructed on the Paunglaung upper river?

No. This proposed dam will be constructed between the upper Paunglaung dam and the lower Paunglaung dam.

So they [dam constructors] are still looking for a place to construct the dam and they have not implemented it yet. Right?

This proposed dam will be implemented for certain. The dam project is already drawn but they are just looking for a suitable location in order that the dam should be built or not.

Why did they [dam constructors] construct the dam? What did they use it for?

As far as I know, they would produce the electricity by using a dam¹³ However, villagers who live in an area between the upper Paunglaung dam and the lower Paunglaung dam do not get the electricity. Villagers cannot live in D--- village and villagers had to leave that village. Then, villagers found a new village which is called H--- village. There are H--- village, I--- village, J--- village, K--- village, A--- village and L--- village in an area between the upper Paunglaung dam and the lower Paunglaung dam.

Why did villagers leave their village?

They had to leave their villages because of the flood which came as a result of the [lower Paunglaung] dam. Two villages, D--- village and C--- village, were flooded. C--- village was completely destroyed and villagers cannot live there anymore [D---village was damaged but not destroyed]. Therefore, villagers from C--- village had to come to live together with villagers from D--- village in a new village.

Now they [dam constructors] are producing the electricity by using the [upper and lower] dams?

Yes. They produce the electricity but none of the local villagers get electricity.

Do they [dam constructors] transfer the electricity to Nay Pyi Taw¹⁴ as these dams are near Nay Pyi Taw?

¹³The upper and lower Paunglaung Dams send their electricity to Nay Pyi Taw, for more information see [Burma Rivers Network](#).

¹⁴ *Naypyidaw* (also spelled *Nay Pyi Taw*) is the capital city of Burma/Myanmar. This is commonly by villages to refer to the Burma/Myanmar government. In 2005 the military regime moved the capital from Rangoon to a

We do not know whether they transfer the electricity to Nay Pyi Taw or not because nobody told us about the truth.

Before they [dam constructors] constructed the dams, were there any forests nearby the dams?

Yes. There were many forests but the forests were destroyed due to the dams. The forests sank into the reservoir. When I was young, there was no motorable road to go from village to village so we had to walk if we wanted to go from one village to another village. Also, we had to climb hills to arrive at another village. Now those hills that I climbed when I was younger had disappeared as those hills sank into the water due to the dam construction.

Were there any valuable trees in the forest?

Yes.

So were those valuable trees cut by business men, wealthy individuals or local authorities? I mean before the dams were constructed or before Nay Pyi Taw became the capital of Myanmar.

At first the Burma/Myanmar government conducted logging but later on business companies came to do the logging. I heard some news like that. If I tell you honestly, we, local villagers, normally only cared about our own properties. We were not a type of people who cared what happens to our environment. Nowadays villagers are open-minded and knowledgeable but we did not know what other people were doing to the environment in the past.

OK. Can I ask you more questions?

Yes. You can.

When the Burma/Myanmar government built Nay Pyi Taw, did they confiscate local villagers' lands? If they confiscated villagers' lands, did they also pay compensation to villagers?

Yes. They [Tatmadaw] confiscated villagers' lands. When they constructed military offices in Sin Thaw Kyauk Than Pen village tract, they confiscated all the land from that village tract. Then, villagers from that village tract had to relocate to a lower area. They [Tatmadaw] constructed small houses for villagers to live in but the houses had bamboo walls and there were no roofs. Think about it. How can villagers stay in the houses without roofs? In addition, they did not pay any compensation [in cash] to villagers. They just compensated with one small house for each family. Also, they relocated villagers' houses from the mountain to an area lower down. They also rented vehicles to relocate villagers' houses. However, villagers had to leave their lands and plantations but villagers did not get any compensation for losing their lands and plantations. We are White Karen people but we are in the minority in this area. All White Karen people from Sin Thaw Kyauk Than Pen village tract were forced to displace their villages.

How many villages were there in Sin Thaw Kyauk Than Pen village tract?

There was Sin Thaw village, Kyauk Than Pen village, Pone Htoe Pin village, Pyay Pin Aite village, Kyauk T'one village and Yay Pyaung Pyan village, six in that village tract. The other villages which are Gyouné village and Nyaung Pin Aite village were also included [in the land confiscation].

So there were around ten villages [figure of speech meaning roughly ten villages]?

Yes.

So you do not know the exact number of villages?

greenfield at its present location, 320 kilometres (200 miles) north of the city. See "[Nay Pyi Taw now less of a ghost town](#)," *Bangkok Post*, December 11th 2013.

No. I do not know exactly. I just know villages from Sin Thaw Kyauk Than Pen village tract. I do not know villages from another village tract. Other people from other villages such as Gyoune village and Nyaung Pin Aite village were also displaced from their villages due to the construction of [Tatmadaw] military offices.

So you are sure six villages from Sin Thaw Kyauk Than Pen village tract were displaced?

Yes. I am sure there were six villages.

Can villagers go back to work on their plantations after they were forced to leave?

No they cannot. At first villagers were allowed to go back to pick fruit from their plantations but they had to register their names and ID cards if they went back. However, later on villagers were not allowed to go back or cross those confiscated lands due to construction by the military.

Did they [Tatmadaw] construct military offices or military buildings?

They constructed their military headquarters¹⁵.

Are there any motorable roads from Meh Pauk village tract to other villages? If yes, are the Tatmadaw based along these roads?

Yes. Tatmadaw are active along the vehicle road.

How are they active?

Tatmadaw Battalion #66 is based at Tan Tar Chaung army camp but they come to stay in A---village and act as a frontline army camp there. There is a village community's firewood plantation in K'mone Taung. I do not know the Tatmadaw officer's name but he owns [seized] that firewood plantation [from the villager]. We did not know how he [Tatmadaw officer] got [ownership of] the firewood plantation. We just know that he applied for land form #7¹⁶ and he can now own it. In our remote mountainous area, none of the farmers can apply and own land with a form #7. However, he can get land form #7.

What about villagers? Can they apply and own it [land]?

We tried to apply for land form #7 but we did not receive any document [to confirm land ownership].

Before the Tatmadaw officer from Battalion #66 got land form #7, did he try to get land form #1?¹⁷

I do not know about land form #7 or land form #1. I have just heard about land form #1. I am telling you why I started to know about land form #7. Some buffalos from the village escaped and ran into his [Tatmadaw officer's] land. He saw that buffalos were running in his land and he reported it to the village head. He told the village head, "*Some buffalos from your village entered my land. I have land form #7. Now you have to build a fence for my land. If buffalos from your village enter my land next time, do not tell me that I am bad [he will take action against their owner].*" Regarding his report, all the people from the village were called to attend a meeting organised by the village head. Therefore, I just knew about it [land form #7] from the meeting.

The person who reported it to the village head is from Tatmadaw?

Yes. He is one of the captains from the frontline in K'mone Taung army camp but we do not know his name.

How many acres are there in the village community's firewood plantation?

¹⁵ For more information about LIB #66's expansion to their military bases and of their military activities see, "[Bullets and Bulldozers: The SPDC offensive continues in Toungoo District](#)," KHRG, February 1997.

¹⁶ Land form #7 is the land grant required to work on a particular area of land. In Burma/Myanmar, all land is ultimately owned by the government.

¹⁷ Land form #1 is a legal document relating to land ownership.

I guess there are three acres or five acres. I do not know it exactly because I do not understand how it is measured.

The person who owns [land registered via] land form #7 is a captain or a major general of Tatmadaw?

We do not know how to identify him. He is like the deputy headquarters commander. However, he is serving at Battalion #66. He is one member of the Tatmadaw who has a high position at Battalion #66.

As you said, some of the buffalos entered his [Tatmadaw officer's] lands. After his report to the village head, did villagers have to make fence around his lands?

The owner of the buffalos built fences around his lands.

How many buffalo owners were there?

Only one.

For how many days did he [buffalo owner] have to build fences?

I do not know about that.

Did he [buffalo owner] construct the fences?

As I saw, he constructed it until it [the fence] was finished.

I heard that one village was forced to relocate because the Tatmadaw confiscated that village? Which village is that? Which battalion?

That village is G--- village.

Did this land confiscation relate to the dam project?

We are not sure whether this land confiscation is related to the dam project or not. Maybe it happened because of Nay Pyi Taw's security¹⁸ [concerns].

So can you tell me why they [Tatmadaw] confiscated that village?

There are many Christians and churches in G--- village. However, Tatmadaw Battalion #122 wanted to build their army camp in that village and then they [Tatmadaw] forced all of the people from the village to leave. Every villager had to leave but they did not receive any compensation. When they [Tatmadaw] confiscated lands in that village, my land was also included there.

Every plantation and garden plots of land in the village were confiscated?

Yes.

So where did villagers go to stay? How did Tatmadaw arrange accommodation for villagers?

Tatmadaw did not arrange anything for villagers. Villagers just had to find their own solutions. Some villagers just went to stay with their relatives who live in other villages.

When did they [Tatmadaw] confiscate the land of that village?

I think in 2000.

So it happened a long time ago?

Yes.

What other human rights abuses did you come across? Can you tell me as much as you know?

¹⁸ As the capital city and the location of the headquarters of the Tatmadaw, Nay Pyi Taw has a high presence of the military and security forces.

Human rights abuses?

Yes. Human rights abuses like land confiscation. You have told me about forced displacement as a result of the Paunglaung dam projects. You can tell me now about human rights abuses that you have missed. Another thing is the proposed middle Paunglaung project dam. Do you think much land will be confiscated or destroyed if the middle Paunglaung dam project is implemented? Regarding the proposed middle Paunglaung dam project, what concerns do you have?

M--- village is the village which could possibly be destroyed if the dam is implemented. Further, I worry that many villagers' plantations and farms will be destroyed. However, I cannot say exactly which village will be destroyed because we do not know where they [dam constructors] will construct the dam. Now they are constructing the road on the mountain. There is no plain area on the mountain [for farming]. It can affect the betel nut plantation because betel nut trees can only be planted in the cold area. They thought it [the road construction] could not affect it. Think about it. If the road is constructed on the mountain, the soil will fall from the mountain [onto plantations]. So this can impact the betel nut plantation. Even though I live in A--- village, my mother lives in G--- village. Now they [constructors] have to dig holes for electricity poles. That is why they cut down every tree that is where they want to dig holes. They cut trees on the mountain side nearby my betel nut plantation. They said they did not cut any betel nut tree. However, a type of plant like betel nut cannot survive in the sun [it can only grow in the shadow]. Why do we grow betel nut plants under the shadow of big trees and bamboos on the mountain side? Because we want to use the shade from these trees so the sunlight cannot shine directly to our plantations. Now they cut these trees but they said it would not impact on our betel nut plantations. After they cut these trees, there is no shade left and the sun shines directly onto our plantations. As a result, many of our betel nut plants died. That is why we made a list of how many betel nut plants died and we submitted it to them [constructors] in order to get compensation. However, we did not know whether they received our list or not.

Did they build electricity poles?

Yes.

So where do they transfer electricity to?

I think they send it to Pin Laung [unknown location]. I do not know. How can we know about their plan?

In order to produce the electricity, many of villagers' lands here were destroyed. They may transfer the electricity from Nay Pyi Taw to Pin Laung. There are many villages between Pin Laung and Nay Pyi Taw. So do you think many villagers who live between Nay Pyi Taw and Pin Laung are upset about their plan?

Yes. Many villagers are upset about it.

So do you think many villagers' lands can be destroyed between Nay Pyi Taw and Pin Laung?

Yes. I think so. In reality, we also suffered from land confiscation and I think other people did as well. Maybe, I do not know for sure because there are many villages along the route.

When the Burma/Myanmar government built Nay Pyi Taw, I heard that almost all of the trees [around Nay Pyi Taw city] were gone [cut down]. Is that right?

Yes. The mountains became almost bald mountains. In D--- village, villagers were very unlucky. Their lands were flooded due to dam project. Also, trees on their lands were confiscated and cut by the Burma/Myanmar government. Villagers did not have any land left to work on. They [Burma/Myanmar government] confiscated almost all their [villagers'] lands. Where will these villagers in C--- village work in the future? Currently, villagers can deal with their livelihood issues because they are able to still work on those plots of lands but they [villagers] do not know if they have to serve [give money to] the Burma/Myanmar government. Villagers said that they

get 40,000 kyat [US \$29.57] from the Burma/Myanmar government if they work on the confiscated land per acre. The Burma/Myanmar government also asked villagers to sign an agreement letter confirming that villagers receive 40,000 kyat [US \$29.57] for working on their lands per acre. This one acre of land will be owned by villagers if they work on it. In this case, villagers are not aware that they were tricked by the Burma/Myanmar government. Actually, the amount of money that the Burma/Myanmar government gave is just an incentive. Villagers did not know about it. In fact, it will cost a lot of money if the Burma/Myanmar government rent daily workers to clear the thick bushes on the confiscated lands. So they just used villagers by paying them a little money to work on the lands including clearing the thick bushes. However, villagers thought they were happy that they can work on their lands. What can I say? Villagers in the remote areas have a lack of knowledge.

How many villages are there where villagers were asked to work on the confiscated lands?

Mainly, villagers in D--- village were asked to work on the confiscated lands. They [government] also bought lands from other villages for little money. As you know, villagers here think that 1,000,000 kyat [US \$739.43] is a lot of money for them but they do not know that it is not worthwhile to sell their lands for that amount of money. They do not understand how valuable their land is. They only want the amount of money that the Burma/Myanmar government gave. If things continue like this, villagers will be facing problems.

When did business people or a company hire villagers to clear bushes on the plots of land?

In 2010.

Are there any security guards in this area to defend wealthy people or companies?

I do not know about security guards but there are police checkpoints and Tatmadaw checkpoints here. The villagers in this area usually go to sell betel leaves on their motorbikes. If they pick up betel leaves today, they have to go to sell betel leaves the same day as the buyers [whole seller] prefer fresh betel leaves. Otherwise, if they keep betel leaves for one night, the buyers will not like it a lot because it is no longer fresh. Sometimes they come back late to their villages. When they come back, they have to cross the Tatmadaw soldier's checkpoint on their way home. They said that they can get in trouble if they cross the checkpoints because soldiers are very rude and disrespectful to villagers. They [soldiers] disturb the villagers if they [Tatmadaw] get drunk. One of the villagers besides my house told me that he did not want to cross the soldiers' checkpoint. He complained that he did not know what to do. It was very cold in the winter on the mountain but local villagers did not have time to worry about the cold weather. They had to transport their betel leaves by motorbike in order to sell it regardless of the weather. However, villagers said that if they bring alcohol or gifts for Tatmadaw soldiers when they cross the checkpoint, Tatmadaw soldiers will not disturb them. How can villagers buy gifts or alcohol for Tatmadaw soldiers? They just get 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] as transportation fee if they go to sell betel leaves. Sometimes it is very dangerous to transport betel leaves in the cold season. In addition, their motorbikes might get damaged while transporting.

Did they [villagers] face any other problem such as [the Tatmadaw] demanding taxes from them when they transported betel leaves?

I do not remember whether they [villagers] told me whether they were asked to pay taxes or not. Yet, they told me that they were disturbed [by Tatmadaw soldiers].

How did they [Tatmadaw soldiers] disturb villagers?

They [villagers] told me that Tatmadaw soldiers disturbed them in many different ways. I, myself, used to experience that too. One afternoon, I went to cross their [Tatmadaw] bamboo checkpoint and they blocked the path with one [piece of] bamboo. At that time, I had put a bunch of bananas in my basket and I carried and kept it in front of me when I was driving. Therefore, it was not comfortable to get off the motorbike and push my motorbike. There is a

narrow path nearby the checkpoint and I drove my motorbike on that narrow path. They saw me and shouted me “*Hey get off the motorbike and push your motorbike. What are you doing? We block the way so that motorbike drivers have to push their motorbikes when they cross*”. I just replied them “*Yes. I am sorry,*” because I did not want to argue with them. Then, I got off the motorbike and pushed my motorbike in front of the checkpoint. Actually, they should not block the way with the bamboo when motorbike drivers are coming.

Which battalion take responsibility to look after the checkpoint?

This checkpoint is a police checkpoint. People call it ‘One checkpoint’. The policemen are from Yay Hsee area but I am not sure [who has responsibility] Also, there is a police checkpoint in Nancho. Yet, there are police men and Tatmadaw soldiers who stay at the ‘One checkpoint’.

Mostly what did they [One checkpoint authorities] check? I mean what do they inquire about?

Sometimes they check our ID cards when we travel by car. Once there was a bomb explosion in Nay Pyi Taw and they thoroughly checked people who crossed their checkpoint.

Regarding the land confiscation case that we talked about before. What do you think villagers should do to prevent their land from being confiscated?

We do not want our land to be confiscated. However, we do not know ways how to prevent it because I think we do not have land form #7. Land form #7 is something that we can never get whenever we try to apply for it, but I do not know how they [holders of land form #7] apply and how they get the land form #7. In our area, we have no idea of what to do.

Were there any awareness workshops or discussions about how villagers can get land form #7?

No.

What local development projects are in your area?

During the 2015 election campaign, there were development projects in our area such as developing access to a water source and access to the electricity which is produced by hydropower. They [USDP¹⁹] just provided the funds for those development projects but villagers had to do their own projects in order to get access to water and electricity. They just conducted the local development projects during the 2015 election campaign. After the 2015 election, there were no more local development projects in our area.

Which political party mostly did election campaign in your area?

The Union Solidarity and Development Party [USDP].

So the USDP conducted these development projects in your area. Right?

Yes.

What about other development projects?

No. There are no other development projects in our area.

¹⁹ The Union Solidarity and Development Party (*Pyi Khaing Pyo* in Burmese, *Pa Ka Hpa* in Karen) is the successor of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It was officially registered as a political party on June 2nd 2010 and is headed by Burmese politician Than Htay who is the current chairman and retired Brigadier General in the Tatmadaw. Previously the party was run by former Burmese President and Prime Minister, Thein Sein who was in charge until 2015. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) ousted the USDP in a landslide election, winning a majority of seats in parliament.

OK. I might ask you something that I forgot. As you told me about Tatmadaw soldiers [at the checkpoint] before, they disturbed the local villagers. So did you report it to their leader?

We tried to report it to their leader but their leader did not want to communicate with us. I will tell you about one incident that I experienced. I also told you before, I went to forage for bamboo shoots in the forest in the rainy season. The village head told us that we cannot cut the bamboo shoots. However, some villagers earn a living by cutting and selling bamboo shoots. Therefore, I wanted to apply for the license [to harvest bamboo shoots] in order to pay tax to the Burma/Myanmar government. I went to the forestry office. The person who is in charge of the forestry office told me, *“You are the first person who has applied for a bamboo shoots license in Myanmar”*. However, he tried to make the bamboo shoot license for me. As you know about the office structure, you cannot get something you want immediately even if you apply it immediately [when you require it]. When I was applying for the bamboo shoot license, that season was bamboo shoot season. Therefore, at that time, I went to ask the forestry office head to make a recommendation letter for me to be able to forage for bamboo shoots [that season]. He [forestry office head] told me that he could make a travel document for me but he cannot make a recommendation letter. He asked me to take a picture for the travel document. I took a picture with my phone and I printed it [the travel document] out. After a while, the village head said that anyone is allowed to go to forage for bamboo shoots if they donate 100,000 kyat [US \$ 73.94] for village fundraising. As for me, I had already applied for the official license from the office but I did not receive the license yet [so I could not forage for bamboo shoots].

In the meanwhile, another [separate] issue emerged. If one car crossed the [Tatmadaw] checkpoint, the car driver had to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] to the Tatmadaw. If I tell you honestly, I was not satisfied with this.

Although I had already applied for the [bamboo shoot] license in order to pay tax to the Burma/Myanmar government and I had already given the license fee, I can only show the evidence that I took a picture with my phone [to prove I have applied for the license]. I want to say that they should not compare me with other people who do not have licenses. I think it is not good if they demand the tax from both the people who have a license and those who do not have license. Then, [at the checkpoint] I showed my evidence letter, which is signed by the district administrator, to their [Tatmadaw] leader. He said,

“We do not want your evidence letter. You have to give 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] for one car”.

I was a little bit unhappy about that. Then, he asked me again,

“Why? Do you think 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] for one car is too much for you?”

I replied to him,

“Bo Gyi²⁰, we have to earn 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] from working. If this amount of money is for social purpose, I can pay you but I am not happy that people who work legally have to give you 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68] and also people who do not work legally have to give you 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68]”.

However, finally I had to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$3.68].

Did it happen in this rainy season?

Yes.

²⁰ Burmese prefix meaning ‘officer’

In 2016?

Yes.

So which battalion demanded the tax like that?

At that time, they were from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion [LIB] #606 during their rotation. Another battalion [who were replaced by LIB #606] are from Bel Kone battalion. The number of the Bel Kone Battalion is #413 or #412. I am not sure about the battalion number of the Bel Kone Battalion. However, I am sure they are from Bel Kone Battalion.

Bel Kone Battalion?

Yes. Pyi Ma Nar, Bel Kone Battalion.

OK. Do you have anything else to say?

We are just local villagers. We do not want our land to be confiscated. To be able to protect our land, every suggestion and piece of advice is welcome. Our ancestral fathers lived in this land a long time ago but we are afraid that other people outside the village will come to confiscate our land and expand their confiscated land. Also, they [land confiscators] constructed the road. This [environmental situation] looks very bad. Due to road construction, the area was deforested so the weather has changed. Recently, it was a time for harvesting but it suddenly rained heavily. Because of heavy rain, the paddy fields were destroyed. How do I explain? This is the consequence [of their actions]. If the forest is maintained or protected, it is good for local villagers.

What else do you want to say? What other suggestions do you want to tell the Burma/Myanmar government? For example, regarding the Tatmadaw leader that you told me about before, and their activities such as demanding unfair taxation. So what do you want to say to the Burma/Myanmar government about how the lower Tatmadaw officials should behave?

They [Tatmadaw] should not act like that [demanding tax]. Every villager is struggling with their lives and livelihood, especially those who live on the mountain. The way they [Tatmadaw] ask for money from villagers looks like they exploit the villagers. We can say that it is similar to extortion. They demanded money from villagers due to the bamboo shoot business. As for me, I have legal permission letter to do bamboo shoot business. It is just a small business for villagers. What about logging? The logging is conducted very often. Do they close their eyes? If you do not believe me, you can come and look at the situation. Many trucks that carry logs cross their checkpoint. Do they [Tatmadaw] accept the logging business? I do not know how they [loggers] can do logging or how they deal with Tatmadaw. However, my house is near to that road [which is close to the checkpoint]. When I am about to go to bed at night, I hear the trucks which carry logs traveling on that road. One truck can carry ten tons of trees. It wakes me up.

Do you have anything else to say?

No.

OK. Thank you so much for your answers.

Yes.

Do you allow KHRG to use the information that you shared?

Yes. I allow. KHRG can use the information that I shared. What I explained to you before is the truth.

Another thing I want to know. What do we call the place where we are now?

J--- village. This village is [censored for security] miles far from the village that I live. I am very happy to answer your questions. Thank you so much too.