



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

December 6, 2017 / KHRG #17-5-A2-I1

Dwe Lo Interview: Saw B---, December 2016

This Interview with Saw B--- describes events occurring in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, during the period between 1992 and 2016. This interview discusses forced displacement and past abuses which occurred in 1997. The interview also covers the villager's perspectives on education, the justice system and his concerns relating to youth and community development. This interview was conducted as part of KHRG's 2017 thematic report, 'Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar'.

Interview | Saw B--- (male, 51), A--- village, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District (December 2016)

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 December 16th 2016 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 three other interviews, one situation update and 13 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

Position: Villager

What is your name, Dtee³?

People call me Saw B---.

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 *Dtee* is a familiar term of respect in S'gaw Karen attributed to an older man that translates to "uncle," but it does not necessarily signify any actual familial relationship.

How old are you?

I am 51 years old.

What is your job?

I am a farmer.

Where do you live?

I live in A--- village.

Which village tract do you live in?

Htee Th'Bluh Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District.

I would like to ask you questions regarding human rights. What is your most important human right? For example: health, education, freedom of movement, security, land and livelihoods?

Health and livelihoods are important. My paddy was destroyed [by insects], so that impacts my livelihood.

What do you know or think about the rule of law and justice system in your local area?

There were some drunk people who argued with each other. When this happens village leaders give them a warning and talk to them.

Were there human rights abuses in your area in the past?

There were no human rights abuses in 2015 and 2016.

Did you or your family ever have to flee your village? When and why did you return to your village?

Yes, my family did. We had to flee our village because an armed group [Tatmadaw] defeated us [entered our village]. [A woman says,] "*We had to run [flee] in tears and we were too tired*". When we were fleeing, my wife gave birth to my daughter. Are your questions about our experiences in the past?

Yes.

I experienced plenty of difficulties and hardships in the past. I cannot even count them all.

Have you experienced war/conflict? What do you think about it?

Yes, I have. I experienced a brutal situation. While the fighting happened [between Karen Nation Liberation Army (KNLA) and Tatmadaw], if the Burmese soldiers got injured by KNLA, then we [as porters] had to carry the injured Burmese soldiers. My friend and I [two porters] had to carry an injured Burmese soldier from the battlefield to a vehicular road throughout the day and night. That was not the only time [I had to serve as a porter]. As soon as they [Tatmadaw] entered our area, we always had to be their porters and had to carry their military supplies during the night and day.

You said you had to be a porter and you had to carry [military supplies for Tatmadaw], and carry injured soldiers and these are all human rights abuses. So have any of these human rights abuses been solved or been forgiven?

We have not dared to solve it [try to get justice] and we cannot solve it, because they all [armed groups] have horns [guns], power, and authority.

Since you cannot resolve it, what do you think about it [previous abuses]?

I cannot even dare to imagine these things because being a citizen is really hard. [A woman says,] *"I just think it depends on my luck [If I receive justice or not]"*.

Do you have any examples of human rights abusers being punished? For example, when people came into your village and beat villagers, was the perpetrator punished?

No, there was no person to take action against the enemies [Tatmadaw]. When they [Tatmadaw] beat me and all the villagers, we just had to suffer because we did not dare to respond or even to talk to them.

What do you think should be done to people who committed human rights abuses during the conflict? What do you think should be done to the people who committed the rights abuses against you that you previously mentioned?

People should punish them in some way. I do not dare to say how [they must be punished]. I want people [authorities] to take action against it [injustice] and give them punishment. If they do not take action against it, then it defeats [there is not justice for] the civilians.

What is the root cause of human rights abuses in your area?

The root cause is the Tatmadaw attacking us and the fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA. The Karen people did not fight each other and we did not make conflict amongst ourselves. We live a peaceful life.

I would like to interview you about young people and your community's future. So what do you want for the future? For example: Improved education for children, improved employment options for your children, a safer community e.g. no military, an improved Karen society or better access to land. Please explain why.

I want to improve our education. If we have better education, then we can access jobs and we can work for our livelihoods easier. I do not want our education to be left behind, because if we and our children are educated then our country can become developed. Moreover, our children will have more political knowledge. If we only work on our farms without focusing on education, then we cannot raise our standard of living. Therefore, education is the most important.

What are the biggest challenges for your community's future?

I am concerned that our enemies will come to us and fight us again. I cannot specify who the enemies are because any armed groups can attack us at any time.

What should the government [KNU or Burma/Myanmar] do to make the situation better for people your age?

I need a better government administration and leaders who will lead us to set up laws, healthcare and other development improvements.

Are young people interested in leadership roles? Can you give an example?

Yes, there are many young people going to school. Some young people become teachers. For example, the female principal in my village is from my village.

What do you hope to be doing in five years' time?

In 2017 and 2018 I hope I can work for my family's livelihood and support my children to go to school as well as I can. I will soon get older and weaker, so I will only be able to do these things [for a short time].

Are you hopeful or worried for the future of your community and your people?

I am worried for my health. Health is important for me because if I am healthy then I will be able to look after my children. If I do not have good health, then I cannot look after young people.

What do you want to say to the Karen youth to improve their community in the future?

I want to encourage the Karen youth to look for education and try hard in their studies. The Karen youth should not lose education; in fact they should try to get more education.

I would like to know more generally about the situation in your community, so what do you know about the ceasefire [NCA]⁴ in 2015? What do you think about it?

I know my leaders [KNU] met with the [Burma/Myanmar] government. As I am a citizen, I think the ceasefire will provide some benefit for us. I think if there are no benefits for us, then my leaders would not do it.

How is the ceasefire relevant to you?

It is not relevant to me because I am just a simple citizen, but it does create some benefits for me. I think the ceasefire will become more relevant for us [citizens] and we will also cooperate with it as much as we can.

What is your perspective and feeling about the peace process that the Myanmar government and ethnic armed organisations are involved with?

After the ceasefire, we [villagers] can sleep and live peacefully without worrying [about being attacked like the past]. We can work freely on our farms and plantations. Therefore, we have faith in the KNU and believe that we can live under their protection.

⁴ 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.

What do you think about economic migration to other countries or cities for finding jobs?

There are not many young people who have migrated to other countries to find a job. I do not know how they live in other countries. I have met with them [the people who have migrated] sometimes when they have come back to the village.

Do you think your community is developed in terms of; health and education, communication, transportation or living standards?

There have been a few developments, but they have not achieved what we had expected.

What years do you think there were the most human rights abuses regarding access to education, militarisation? For example: did you suffer the most human rights abuses when the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) emerged in [1994/]1995 or another time?

We [villagers] had suffered a lot of human rights abuses in many years during that period [emergence of the DKBA].

What kind of human rights abuses did you experience? For example: militarisation or education?

It concerned militarisation.

So how did the militarisation [impact you]?

They [Tatmadaw] oppressed citizens.

How did they oppress you?

We could not bear to go [be porters] but they forced us. We could not bear to carry [their military supplies] but we had to carry them.

Did they burn your houses and village?

Yes, they burnt plenty of houses, our belongings, pots, plates and spoons in our village.

Do you know of any development projects happening in your village/community areas?

No, I do not know of any development projects in my village.

What kind of developments do you want to see in your community? How do you want them to be carried out?

I want development projects focused on education, animal husbandry and other development projects for improving our livelihoods.

How do you want them to be carried out? For example do you want government to support the schools?

It would be good if the government would support our school. Therefore, we want the government to support our school, but we want our government [the KNU government] to support us, not the Burma/Myanmar government. We really want to see education development projects [in my community].

What do you think the government [KNU or the Burma/Myanmar government] should do for security in your area and for civilians' livelihoods? For example, no Tatmadaw army camps in your area.

I do not want the Tatmadaw army camps to be based in our area. [A woman in the interview interjects], *"I don't even want to see them [Tatmadaw] and do not want their army camps to be in our area"*. [Another man says,] *"We want them to withdraw all of their army camps and go back to their place"*. [The woman in the interview says] *"Yes, we want that to happen"*.

What do you think the government [KNU or Burma/Myanmar] should do in terms of development for your community?

Education is important, so I want the government to work on education development projects in my area.

Which organisations [CBO and NGOs] do you prefer to do projects in your area? What should they do?

We are happy and will support any good organisation's projects that will work for our community's development and do a good thing for us. We are only concerned that bad projects will come to our village and will do evil things to us. We want construction projects to build hospitals.

Do you want to say anything else to us, KHRG?

I have concern for my fellow villagers. I am not a village head, but I stand as a parent of villagers. Therefore, I want all villagers to live in harmony whenever our government asks us to do something for them. Some villagers face the problem of food shortages. Sometimes the government⁵ who controls us has meetings with villagers and forces villagers to give [pay taxes]. They [should] let old people, like me, work freely on farms [without paying tax].

What do you feel about this interview?

I think it is a good for future development. I want you [KHRG] to keep doing this in the future.

Dtee [uncle] can we [KHRG] publish the information that you provided us?

Yes, you can use it.

Can we take your picture?

Yes.

Thank you so much for providing us [KHRG] with information.

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 Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, September to November 2016" (June 2017)

⁵ It is unknown whether the government discussed was the KNU or Burma/Myanmar Government

- “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



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