



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

July 24, 2017 / KHRG # 17-62-S1

Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District in the early months of 2017, including land confiscation, villager situation, villager livelihood, education, healthcare, road construction, communication and travel.

- *325 acres of A--- villagers' lands have been confiscated by the CKB Company in Ta Kel area, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township since 2002. The villagers were not consulted regarding these cases of land confiscation. Therefore, affected land owners reported it to the Myanmar forestry department in order receive help. However, they have not received any reply.*
 - *A road construction project was conducted by an organisation/group in B--- village, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. Villagers' plantation and garden were damaged due to the road construction. Therefore it impacted upon the villagers' livelihood.*
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Situation Update | Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in June 2017. It was written by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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 security¹. This report was received along with other information from Mergui-Tavoy District, including one interview and 45 photographs².

Villagers' situation

The majority of the people from villages in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township are Karen people. Nevertheless, there are a few villages where Burmese people and Karen people live together. There are not only Karen villages, Burmese villages and Muslim villages in [Ta Naw Th'Ree] Township but also villages containing Salon people,³ who live on islands and alongside the sea.

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.

³ The Moken people, also known as Salon are an Austronesian ethnic group living a semi-nomadic existence on the waters of southern Burma and Thailand. As a group they face growing poverty, marginalisation and discrimination,

There are many religions present such as Baptist, Roman Catholic, Buddhism, Muslim and Hindu [in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township].

Villagers' livelihood

Most of the people in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township earn a living by farming [both on the plains and hills]. Some villagers transport their animals to Thailand in order to sell them. There are some villagers who work in the morning and eat in the evening [live and work hand to mouth]. There are some people who earn a living by hunting and logging in the jungle, especially Burmese and Muslim villagers. The Karen people who live on the bay find their food in the sea, specifically, they go fishing on a boat.

Education

Regarding the situation of education in the rural area of Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, there is one middle school in Ta Kel area, one school in Plaw Thaw village, one primary school in Paw Mu Ghar village, one middle school in Kit village, one middle school in Meh Wah village and one middle school in Thoo Lay Plaw village. These schools are situated in the Karen National Union (KNU) controlled area. Karen language is taught in these schools but it is not taught for the whole day. It is only taught for one period [one hour] per day. There are Burmese teachers and also Karen teachers. The person who is in charge of the [local] Karen Education and Culture Department is P'doh⁴ Saw⁵ Sel Khae who runs Thoo Lay Plaw school. If local students finish their schooling [in rural areas], they have to continue their study in towns. Some students can continue their studies in towns but some students cannot continue their studies because their parents are poor.

Healthcare

There are clinics in some Karen villages but there is not enough medicine nor are there enough healthcare workers. If villagers are seriously sick, they have to go to a hospital in town [in order to get medical treatment]. However, the problem is that villagers do not have enough money to pay for the medical fees. Mostly, there are diseases such as anaemia and malaria. Most of the people who suffer from these diseases are mothers who have young babies and elderly people. [The Burma/Myanmar government] provides access to vaccinations in villages one time per month, however, only children can get vaccinated. There is no [free] healthcare service for old people.

Due to health issues, some villagers have to pay a healthcare service fee and medical fee [which they cannot afford] so they have to take out a loan. Therefore, they are in debt. Then, they have to pay back the loan.

Land confiscation

A--- villagers in Ta Kel area reported that the CKB Company⁶ came to the village together with Tatmadaw soldiers and *Pyithu sit*⁷ and they have confiscated 325 acres of villagers' land since 2002. Regarding [these cases of] land confiscation, villagers and the village head report that they have not consulted and that [the CKB Company] forced villagers to leave their houses.

and many are stateless. There are issues relating to access to medical care, education and employment and recent immigration restrictions have also infringed upon their traditional livelihood.

⁴ *P'doh* is a title meaning 'governor' or 'minister' within the government or military.

⁵ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁶ CKB Company states on its website that it has 20,000 acres of palm oil plantation and an additional 3,500 acres for further planting in Mergui-Tavoy District. According to additional research, it is under Green Dragon Myanmar Company. See <https://www.greenmyanmardragon.com/about1-c221j>

⁷ *Pyithu sit* translates to 'people's militia,' which is a militia structure into which local civilians are conscripted to serve in village or town militia groups. For further reading on the *pyithu sit*, see "[Enduring Hunger and Repression: Food Scarcity, Internal Displacement, and the Continued Use of Forced Labor in Toungoo District](#)," KHRG, September 2004.

They [CKB Company] cut all of the villagers' trees [after they confiscated the land] and they planted a palm oil plantation instead. They are still planting palm oil trees. Villagers reported it [land confiscation case] to the forestry department of the Burma/Myanmar government but they have not received any reply. On April 4th 2017 staff from the Land Measurement Department [Myanmar government] came to measure the confiscated land. In 2014 the KNU had also measured the confiscated land.

The owner of the CKB Company is U⁸ Bo Sein and he lives in Yangon. However, he did not come to confiscate the land in person but he asked his manager, U Kalar Gyi or U San Win, and the leader of *Pyithu sit*, U Htay Oo [to confiscate the villagers' lands]. Villagers really want their ancestral land back to use for their livelihood and the new generation. Villagers will be satisfied if they get 50,000 kyat⁹ [US\$36.64] per acre as compensation. However, villagers really want their legacy [ancestral land].



The photo was taken on April 16th 2017 in A-- village, in Ta Kel area, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township. It shows some of the villagers whose lands were confiscated by the CKB Company. The CKB Company planted palm oil plantations on the confiscated lands. Therefore, villagers gathered and went to check and ask about the situation from the CKB Company. Also, the Myanmar government's authority that is in charge of forestry of department came to check the situation and measure the land. [Photo-KHRG]

Road construction

A community development [group/company]¹⁰ came to conduct road construction in B--- village. The road construction destroyed Saw C---'s garden including rubber trees, cashew nut trees, betel nut trees and other trees. The community development [group/company] did not consult with local villagers when they came to conduct the road construction. They said that they got permission from the Burma/Myanmar government to conduct road construction [although] this place is reserved forest.

The issue that villagers now face is that their lands have been covered in gravel [due to the road construction]. During the road construction, stones were thrown into the villagers' rubber plantations which damaged the plantations. Therefore, villagers cannot tap rubber trees to make the rubber [as the rubber trees have been damaged]. In addition, mud from the road flows into the river near the village during the rainy season. Thus, villagers cannot drink the water from the river anymore and they are only able to use rain water [for drinking]. There are about [censored] houses in B--- village, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The village head of B--- village is Saw D---.

Communication and travel

The communication system has improved in rural areas and now villagers can contact each other via phones. The travel system has also improved because villagers can use motorbikes

⁸ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

⁹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 18 2017 official market rate of 1366 kyat to US \$1.

¹⁰ More information is currently unavailable. KHRG is currently is undergoing a process of clarification however it is highly likely in this context the term community development term to a company.

and cars in order to travel [in rural areas]. However, the [condition of the] roads are not good in every village. The roads in towns are constructed to a better [quality] than before.

Ta Naw Th'Ree Township situation

Ta Naw Th'Ree Township is located in the southern part of Mergui-Tavoy District. The [Ta Naw Th'Ree] Township's office [KNU] is built in E--- village and established in 2012 after the preliminary ceasefire was signed. The Township leader is P'doh Saw Nya Wah. The secretary of the Township is P'doh Saw Htee Wah. The vice secretary of the Township is P'doh Saw Baw Nay who also works for the forestry department.

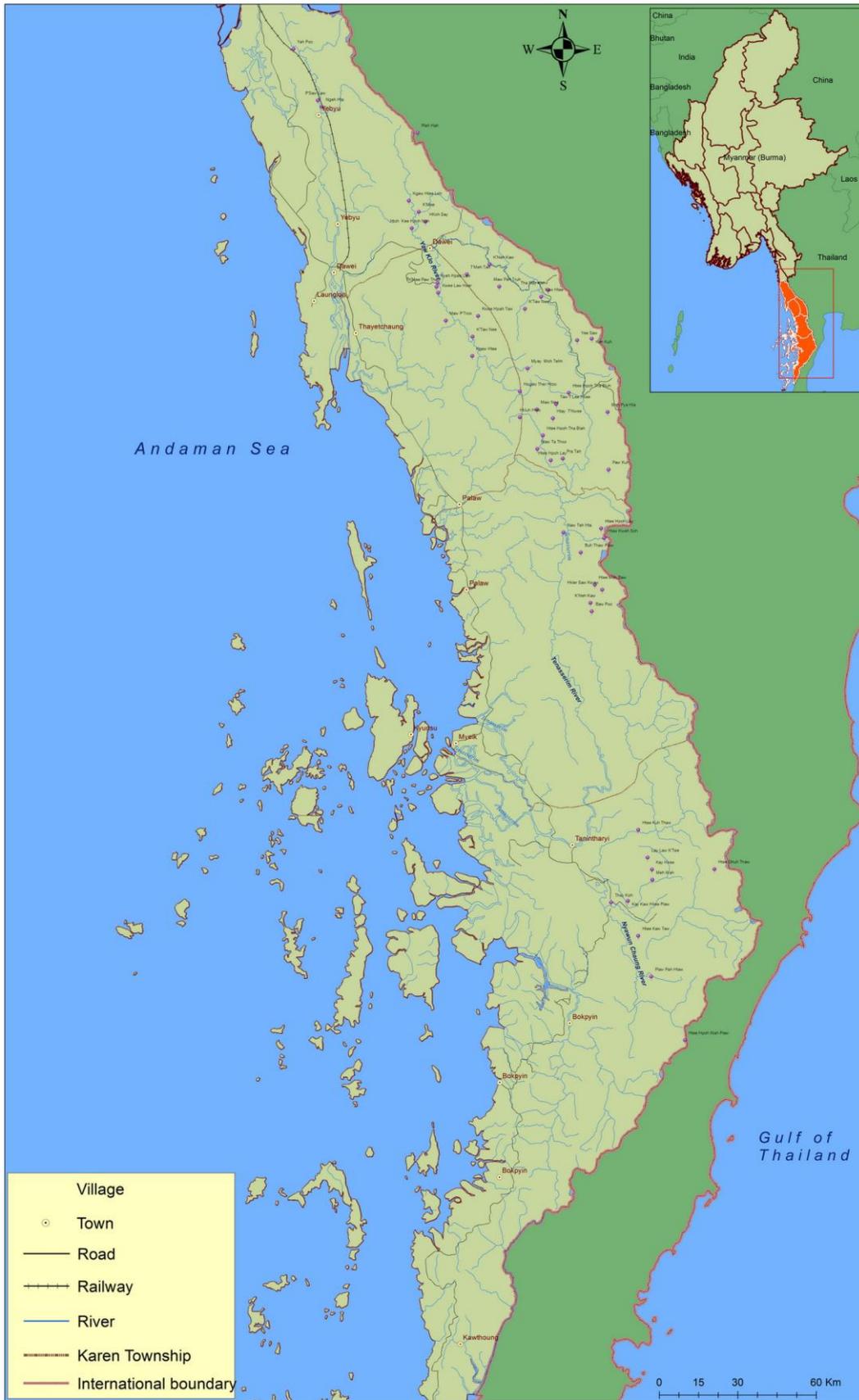
Conclusion

This report is about the overall situation in Ta Naw Th'Ree Township and the information was collected in 2017.

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

- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Dawei Township, February to May 2015," (June 2017)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Naw M---, October 2015," (October 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Muh Lah Township, November 2015 to January 2016," (August 2016)
- "Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women's testimonies from southeast Myanmar," (August 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Doh Soh Township, June to November 2015," (July 2016)

Mergui/Tavoy (Thanintharyi) District



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