



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

February 8, 2018 / KHRG # 17-65-S1

Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Doh Soh Township and K'Ser Doh Township, February to April 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Ler Doh Soh Township and K'Hser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between February and April 2017, including roads and transportation, education, healthcare, communication, logging, military activity and arbitrary land confiscation by private companies.

- *Villagers in K'Mo Thway area and Kleh Mu Hti area, Mergui-Tavoy District, faced difficulties travelling during the rainy season due to floods that damaged roads and bridges. This impacted villagers' business and health.*
 - *Education in Mergui-Tavoy District remains insufficient, as the schools lack funding. Moreover, the Karen language is not recognised as an official subject in Burma/Myanmar government schools so students have to take time on Saturday to study their own language.*
 - *Healthcare services in Mergui-Tavoy District are not up to standard, for the government-assigned healthcare workers in villages rarely meet whenever villagers need help with their health.*
 - *Logging for business purposes is happening in Mergui-Tavoy District even though logging in reserved forests is prohibited by local authorities.*
 - *Anawa Soe Moe Company arbitrarily confiscated villagers' land in Kleh Mu Hti area, K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District for a palm oil plantation project without consultation with the local villagers.*
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Situation Update | Ler Doh Soh Township and K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (February to April 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 security.¹

Introduction

This situation update took place between February and April 2017 in K'Mo Thway area, in Ler Doh Soh Township and Kleh Mu Hti area, in K'Ser Doh Township [Mergui-Tavoy District]. The information is mentioned as follows:

Transportation

Villagers in K'Mo Thway area, Ler Doh Soh Township, face difficulties travelling. The local road was quite good in the summer, however, in the rainy season, the road was ruined and flooded, so it was hard for

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.

local villagers to travel. Consequently, villagers found it difficult to trade goods/products, go to hospital, or travel for work.

Villagers in Kleh Mu Hti area also encountered problems travelling during rainy season. The situation in the area has now improved, but some places remain in bad condition. It still takes a long time to travel in Noh Pah Doh village, Kleh Mu Hti area and K'Ser Doh Township, [Mergui-Tavoy District]. Even though local village heads reported this struggle to the Burma/Myanmar government authorities, there still has not been any response from the authorities. As a result, local villagers are still facing difficulties travelling and have trouble transporting or trading goods/products, going to hospital, and other important issues.

Education

There are some difficulties with education for local people in remote areas. The Karen language is not recognised by the Burma/Myanmar government [as a mandatory subject] to teach in most schools. Karen teachers only have the opportunity to teach the Karen subject class [in the early morning] before school begins. In some schools, the Karen subject class is only allowed to be taught on Fridays. Therefore, [Karen] students have to work outside school hours and use extra time in order to learn their language.² In addition, there is a problem with not enough schools in P'Taw Hpah Doh village, Kleh Mu Hti area, K'Hser Doh Township. The only school in this village is a middle school so it is difficult for students [of different ages to access education]. Village leaders already reported this problem to the [Burma/Myanmar] government but there still has been no response. Therefore, village heads/leaders and villagers gathered and built a school with bamboo by themselves.

Healthcare

There are problems related to healthcare in remote areas. The Burma/Myanmar government recruited and assigned [mobile] health workers to work in the remote areas but villagers cannot find them when they need help. In some villages, they do not have any health workers to treat them [when they are sick]. Though in some areas, the Myanmar/Burma government has provided clinics, they have not hired healthcare workers to work in them, thus, villagers have difficulties obtaining healthcare. The KNU (Karen National Union) also has not done anything to provide healthcare services to local villagers. In case villagers suffer from sickness or any disease, they have to go get treatment in towns that are far from their village.

Communication

There are still some places where people cannot contact each other due to poor telecommunication services. In particular, the whole area of K'Mo Thway, Ler Doh Soh Township does not have cell phone reception. Villagers reported this issue to the government and said that they wanted to have phone connection in their area. Villagers raised the issue of communication because currently it is really hard for them to contact or communicate with each other or relevant authorities in case something important happens in their areas. It also delays their work. For example, if important events are planned, they are often delayed due to communication problems. Villagers do not want this to happen. However, the process [of setting up telecommunication] cannot easily be done within a short period of time.

Logging

Logging is prohibited [in Mergui-Tavoy District] by the KNU authorities. However, there is no specific law developed to take action against loggers and protect the [forest] area. According to villagers, the leaders/authorities prohibited logging but they do not enforce the rules. In some villages, wood is still secretly logged by wealthy individuals. The wood that is logged in secret is not used for building houses, but [sold] for business. While some villagers want to rebuild their houses, they no longer have any wood to do so. People who are able to conduct logging are mostly village heads/leaders and other powerful actors.

Military activity

² For more information on this issue see, "Towards an inclusive education: Teaching Karen culture and language within schools," p109 in '[Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar.](#)' (available in English and Myanmar language), KHRG, October 2017.

There have not been any notable military activities in our township[s]. Nonetheless, while Tatmadaw³ conducted military training for their troops, they sometimes shoot artilleries that land near villagers' lands. Sometimes, villagers' livestock are even accidentally shot dead during military training. However, they [Tatmadaw] do not take any responsibility for this even though villagers have to suffer for it. Moreover, some Tatmadaw battalions have based their troops in villagers' lands. According to the villagers, Tatmadaw soldiers do not protect the civilians; in fact, villagers have to protect the Tatmadaw instead. Some Tatmadaw soldiers provide security guards for companies. In regards to the KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army), they do not make much trouble for civilians. However, sometimes they hang around among villages drunk [and disturb villagers] so it affects the dignity of the KNU.

Arbitrary land confiscation by companies

Anawa Soe Moe Company arbitrarily confiscated villagers' lands in Kleh Mu Hti area.⁴ The Anawa Soe Moe Company did not consult with villagers and gain consent from any villagers for their palm oil plantation project, which is now on villagers' land. They [the Anawa Soe Moe Company] once tried to organize village heads to make villagers sell their lands. Village heads tried to refuse the request, however, the village heads felt like they could not refuse the demand so they cooperated and worked with the company. In fact, villagers did not allow the company to do business on their lands, but the company has military [both Tatmadaw and KNLA] on their side so some affected villagers have had to relocate their homes. Regarding this land confiscation, some villagers have been compensated, yet, the compensation that they received was less than their losses. Some villagers accepted the offered compensation but others refused to take it. Some villagers and village heads tried to report the case to responsible persons in the Burma/Myanmar government; however, there has been no response yet.

Palm oil trees were planted on the lands that were confiscated [by Anawa Soe Moe Company]. They planted the palm oil trees along the vehicle roadside. The middle of the confiscated land is left plain with no [palm] trees. Nonetheless, the company does not allow any villagers to work on the land that is left plain. So, local villagers are being constrained by the company. The company name is Anawa Soe Moe Company and the company owner is U Kin Sein. The company [for palm-oil project] site is located in Ya Nge village, Kleh Mu Hti area, K'Ser Doh Township. The villages that have been affected by land confiscation include Tha Nyaw Hsi, Lower Th'Yeh Chaung, P'Taw Hpah Doh, Pay T'Kah, P'Taw Hpo, Peh, Hsah Ma Taw, Th'Yeh N'Kwah, and Th'Yeh Taw Gyi villages. These villages are located in Kleh Mu Hti area, K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District.

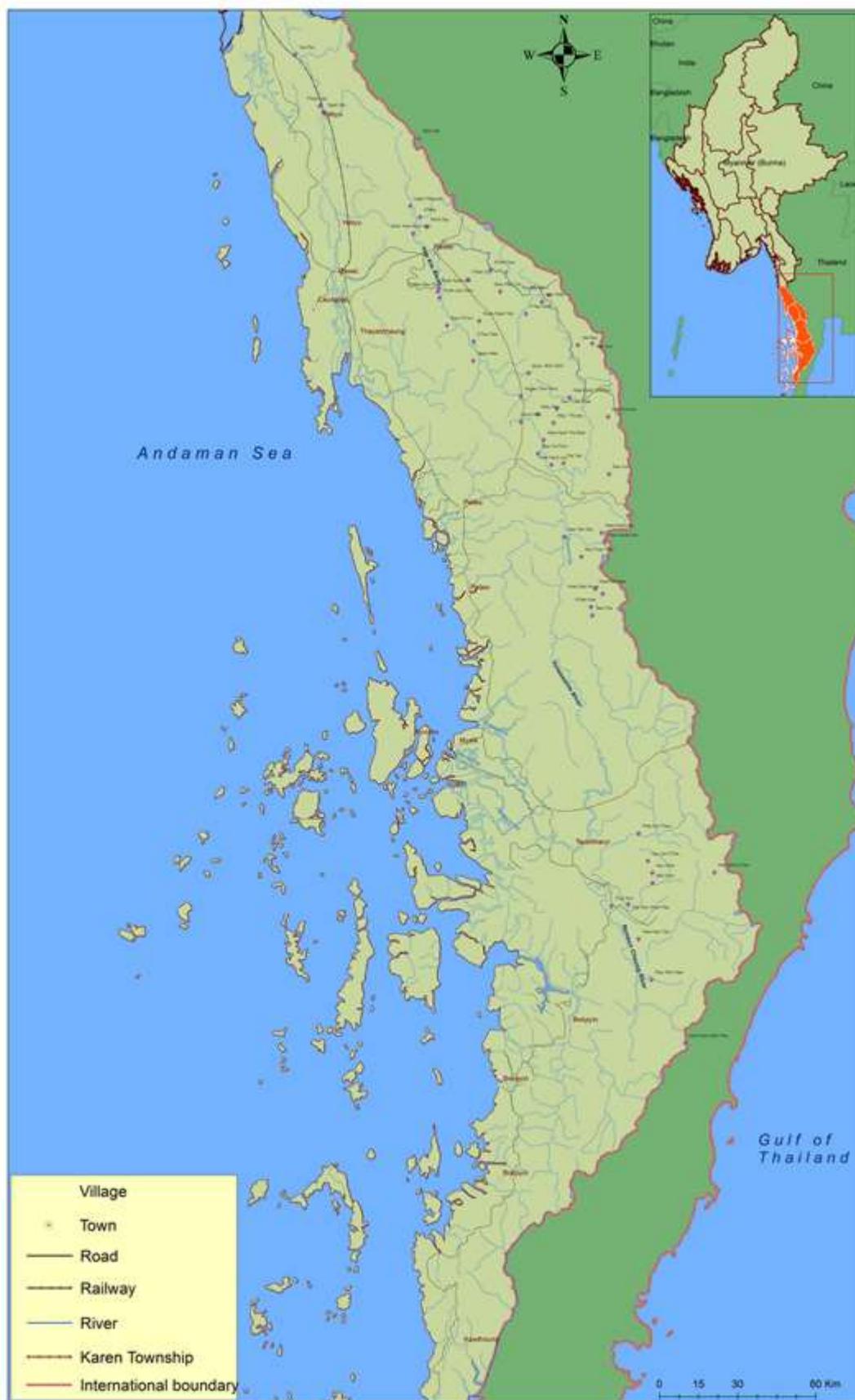
Further background reading on the situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, 2017," (July 2017)
- "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)
- "Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers' voices from southeast Myanmar," (October 2017)

³ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military throughout KHRG's 25 year reporting period. The Myanmar military were commonly referred to by villagers in KHRG research areas as SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) from 1988 to 1997 and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011, which were the Tatmadaw-proclaimed names of the military government of Burma. Villagers also refer to Tatmadaw in some cases as simply "Burmese" or "Burmese soldiers".

⁴ Anawa Soe Moe Company Ltd. has been present in Mergui-Tavoy District since at least 2004. At the time, the company was encouraged to expand the company's 5,000 acre palm oil plantation by the SPDC, according to the Myanmar government paper "[New Light of Myanmar](#)," Page 8, Volume XIV, Number 53, June 8, 2006.

Mergui/Tavoy (Thanintharyi) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)