



Situation Update

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Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe Township, Paingkyon Township and Nabu Township, March to May 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Hlaingbwe Township, Paingkyon Township and Nabu Township, Hpa-an District during the period between March and May 2017, including fighting, logging, education, healthcare, and the activities of armed groups in Hpa-an District.

- *In February 2017, fighting broke out between the newly-reformed Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA splinter) and the allied Tatmadaw and Border Guard Force (BGF) in Meh Proo Hta village tract and Htee La Neh village tract, Hlaingbwe Township. Local people from that area have been displaced to Myaing Gyi Ngu, Hpapun District and Thailand.*
- *Land confiscation continues to be committed by the Tatmadaw, the KNU/KNLA P.C and the BGF in order to set up their army camps and allow the soldiers' families to farm for their livelihood.*
- *Although both the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government have forbidden further logging, the KNU/KNLA P.C leaders have not stopped logging towards the Pa Khee Mountain.*

Situation Update | Hlaingbwe Township, Paingkyon Township and Nabu Township, Hpa-an District (March to May 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in June 2017. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an 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 10 photographs from Hpa-an District.²

Introduction

This information was documented from March to May 19th in the entire Hpa-an District and covers fighting, villagers' livelihoods, healthcare, education and the activities of armed groups.

Fighting

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.

Fighting broke out in February 2017 between the Border Guard Force (BGF),³ who was cooperating with the Tatmadaw, and the [re-formed] Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA splinter)⁴ in Lu Pleh Township [Hpa-an District]. The fighting took place in Paw Taw Lay Khoh place, Ma Eh area, Htee La Neh village tract as well as in Meh Proo village and Meh Proo Hta area, Meh Proo village tract. Therefore, villagers from those areas fled to other places such as Kaw Taw Town [Myaing Gyi Ngu] area, Brigade #5 [Hpapun District], and Thailand. They do not feel safe enough to return to their villages yet.⁵

Villagers' livelihoods

It was summer in Hpa-an District during the period between March and May, 2017. During this time, some villagers were working as car and motorcycle taxi drivers and traders, buying and selling many types of materials and products [eg. foods/snacks, building materials]. Some villagers traded charcoal, planks, and wooden poles. Some planted peanuts, beans and paddy.⁶ Some people taught *Lee Kweh Kwaw* [Karen ancient language] to the children as part of a summer study [course]. Some people sold rice and curry [street food] beside the vehicle road which is close to the mountain [hill forest]. Some villagers fished and hunted wild animals.

Health

Healthcare in Hpa-an District between March and May has been provided by both the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen Nation Union (KNU) government. The Burma/Myanmar government has set up township level hospitals in every township in Hpa-an District and the KNU government has also set up clinics for civilians in Lu Pleh [Hlaingbwe] Township, Ta Kreh [Paingkyon] Township and T'Nay Hsah [Nabu] Township. Both governments provide as much healthcare [for civilians] in the community as they can. Villagers who live close to a Burma/Myanmar government hospital go to the [township level] hospitals whereas villagers who live close to a KNU clinic go to the KNU clinics.

Armed groups

³ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

⁴ 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.

⁵ For additional information on recent fighting in this area see, "[Recent fighting between newly-reformed DKBA and joint forces of BGF and Tatmadaw soldiers led more than six thousand Karen villagers to flee in Hpa-an District, September 2016](#)," KHRG, December 2016.

⁶ Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.

In the period between March and May 2017, the armed groups who have been patrolling [in Hpa-an District] are the Tatmadaw, the BGF, [the KNU/KNLA P.C]⁷ and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The goal of both the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU government is to secure their sovereign control over all the areas [in Hpa-an District]. Nevertheless, these governments are cooperating [in their administration needs] and not currently fighting.

The other armed groups [KNLA and Tatmadaw] did not conduct logging, but the [KNU/KNLA] Peace Council are still logging towards Pa Khee Mountain [which is very far from their area] in T'Nay Hsah [Nabu] Township. KNU and Burma/Myanmar government forbade logging, but [KNU/KNLA] PC leaders are continuing to sell logs to companies.

The Burma/Myanmar police want to investigate all incidents, such as motorcycle and car accidents, that are happening in the [Hpa-an District] area. However, KNU [police officers] are also investigating [any accidents] for villagers in the areas they control and they have stopped the Burma/Myanmar police from pursuing their investigations. KNU [police officers] are also helping villagers [by patrolling and taking action on incidents] in the town.

Land confiscation is still being committed by the Tatmadaw in Hpa-an District. The Tatmadaw have set up their houses [army camps and homes for soldiers' families] and are farming on the lands [that they confiscated from civilians] to get food and for the soldiers' families to farm for their livelihoods. Sometimes, they give these lands to the BGF. The KNU/KNLA P.C leaders have also confiscated villagers' land for their [soldiers' families] to farm for their livelihoods. These [land confiscation cases] are still happening in Hpa-an District. The KNU does not confiscate villagers' lands, but they have bought land from villagers for their battalion workers' [soldiers' families] to live on.

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

- "Three separate killing incidents based on witchcraft suspicion in Hpa-an District," (July 2017)
- "Hpa-an Interview: Naw A---, September 25, 2016" (July 2017)
- "Hpa-an Short Update: Hlaingbwe Township, March to October 2016," (April 2017)
- "Hpa-an Interview: Saw A--- and Saw B---, October 2016," (February 2017)
- "Recent fighting between newly-reformed DKBA and joint forces of BGF and Tatmadaw soldiers led more than six thousand Karen villagers to flee in Hpa-an District, September 2016," (December 2016)

⁷ The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Kaw Koh, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC government in 2007. The KNU/KNLA-PC subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform into a Tatmadaw Border Guard Force in 2010. The KNU/KNLA-PC signed a preliminary ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government on February 7th 2012, and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15th 2015.

Hpa-an District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)