



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, February to May 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District during the period between February and May 2017, including development projects, taxation, military activities, the suicide of a Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) soldier, land confiscation and transport rules.

- *300 brick houses for returning refugees and/or internally displaced people (IDP) in Lay Hpa Htaw/Zi Pin village, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District were constructed by Shwe Min Ta Mun Public Co LTD during the period between 2016 and 2017. The land was provided by the Karen National Union (KNU) and funded by the Nippon Foundation, but the local authority has not allowed the returning refugees and IDPs to stay in those houses yet.*
 - *The Border Guard Force (BGF), who are based in Kyeh Doe area, taxed elephants in A--- village, Noh Taw Plah village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District between March and April 2017. The elephant owners refused to pay the tax because the BGF could not provide tax receipts and they did not understand the administrative role of the BGF or the reason for the taxation.*
 - *Motorcycle taxation in A--- village, Noh Taw Plah village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District was collected by the KNU. However, the KNU does not provide a tax disc that is legally valid throughout Karen State. Therefore, the civilians do not feel safe travelling near Kyainseikgyi Town in Karen state.*
 - *On January 5th 2017, DKBA platoon commander Htee Klee, who is based in Khoh Ther Pler (Three Pagodas) area, came to B--- villager, Meh Pra village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. B--- villager, Saw Lwee Heh, signed up to be a soldier in his platoon, believing the position to be well paid. Saw Lwee Heh had been a DKBA soldier for three months without receiving any money, yet he was unable to resign from his job. Saw Lwee Heh later killed himself by drinking pesticide.*
 - *On May 10th 2017, villagers from Noh Ta Khaw village who were constructing the road between 19 Ter (19 miles) area and Noh Ta Khaw village, Noh T’Kaw township, Dooplaya District built a small dam to block the villagers’ water channel that goes into C--- village, without holding a consultation meeting or making an agreement with the land owners. Therefore, the land owners were dissatisfied with the small dam construction.*
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Situation Update | Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District (February to May 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in June 2017. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya 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 other information from Dooplaya District, including two interviews and 93 photographs.²

Introduction

The information from Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District for this Situation Update was collected [by a KHRG researcher] during the period between February 26th and May 12th 2017. The main themes of the information relate to development projects, taxation, land confiscation and military activities.

Development project

In February, I [KHRG researcher] documented 300 brick houses that had been built for IDPs and returning refugees [on land donated by the KNU] in Lay Hpa Hta/Zi Pin [Ma Tau Htoo] village, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. Those houses were constructed by Shwe Min Ta Mun Public Co. LTD, during the period between 2016 and 2017, and this project was funded by the Nippon Foundation. Construction of the houses is finished, but the local authority - the Karen National Union [KNU] - has not allowed people [returning refugees and IDPs] to stay in the houses [yet]. Villagers who live close to this area told me that they do not want to stay in those houses because they will not receive land to farm in order to provide a means of livelihood. They said it will be better if the authority leaders provide farming land for them [as well as housing]. The company which constructed the houses did not have to buy the land to build those houses because the land was provided by the KNU District level administrator.



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.

These photos were taken on February 26th 2017 in Ma Taw Htoo [Lay Hpa Htaw/Zi Pin] village, Noh T’Kaw Township [Kyainseikgyi], Dooplaya District. These photos show houses that were funded by the Nippon Foundation and constructed by Shwe Min Ta Mun Public Co. LTD between 2016 and 2017. They [local authority] said those houses are for the IDPs and returning refugees. [Photos: KHRG]

Thai villagers who live in Noh Ta Khaw village who constructed a road between 19 Ter [19 miles] area and Noh Ta Khaw village, Noh T’Kaw township, Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District built a small dam to block the villagers’ water channel that flows into C--- village on May 10th 2017. They did it because they were concerned that the water channel would flood during rainy season and destroy the bridge that was constructed for the road construction project. Villagers who rely on this water channel said *“This water channel was constructed by many villagers and the KNU government when Pa Doh³ Tha Pyu and Pa Doh Lay Ner [KNU leaders] were still alive, around 50 years ago. We have not damaged it because they constructed it so that the villagers in this area are able to access water for farming, both in the rainy [season] and in winter. We feel that the Thai people do not respect the KNU’s property [work that they had done for the civilians] so they want to disrupt Karen led development projects.”*

They built a small dam blocking the water channel, which meant that there would be flooding and the water would cause water erosion in the rainy season which would damage villagers’ betel nut and coconut tree plantations [located next to the water channel]. One affected person reported that,

“They [ethnic Thai villagers] should hold a consultation meeting to make an agreement with us before they start their project. They can do it when they get permission and they should not do it when they are not allowed to by the villagers. Yet they started the project without informing any villagers or land owners so they do not respect us.”

The villagers from C--- village, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District were unhappy with this project because the flooding for the dam will negatively affect their land and plantations.



These photos were taken on May 10th 2017 in C--- village, Noh T’Kaw Township [Kyainseikgyi], Dooplaya District. These photos show Thai villagers [from Noh Ta Khaw] who constructed the road, [from 19 miles area to Noh Ta Khaw village] a bridge and then built a dam across the C--- villagers’ water channel to block the

³ Pa Doh is a title meaning ‘governor’ or ‘minister’ within the government.

water. They said they built the dam to avoid the water from the water channel destroying the bridge in the rainy season. This causes problems for the villagers; when the water cannot flow in to the river then that water will erode [damage] the civilians' plantations which are located next to the water channel. [Photos: KHRG]

Taxation

Between March 15th and April 2017, the Border Guard Force [BGF] based in Kyeh Doe area implemented an elephant tax in A--- village, Noh Taw Plah village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. They placed an annual tax of 100,000 kyat per elephant [US \$ 73.9]⁴, but the elephant owners did not want to pay the tax as the BGF could not provide tax receipts for them and they did not understand the administrative role of the BGF [in their community]. The civilians were confused regarding the taxation [policy] because in the past, there was only the Karen National Union [KNU] who collected the taxation, but there is now one more group, the BGF, which is collecting taxation.

Another taxation issue in A--- village, Noh Taw Plah village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District is related to the motorcycle taxation collected by the KNU. They have charged an annual taxation of 2,000 kyat [US \$1.5] per motorcycle for around the last two years. Yet this taxation does not provide a license eligible for use in all of Karen State, nor is it recognised by the Burma/Myanmar Government. Therefore, the civilians do not feel safe to travel near Kyainseikgyi Town in Karen State. A KNU [worker who collected the taxation] did not inform the civilians where they can and cannot go and instead they told the civilians that *"If you go to Kyainseikgyi Town and see the [Burma/Myanmar government traffic] police, run [ride away] quickly from them."* The civilians do not know the date when their motorcycle license will expire, so they want to know the period of validity for KNU's motorcycle license.

The suicide of one DKBA soldier, and military activities

On January 5th 2017, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army [DKBA] platoon Commander Htee Klee from the DKBA, led by Officer Bo⁵ 'A1', Commander of Battalion #9003, based in Khoh Ther Pler [Three Pagodas] area, came to B--- village, Meh Pra village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The DKBA platoon Commander Htee Klee induced [B--- villager] Saw Lwee Heh to be a soldier and he told to him that he would be paid 100,000 kyat [US \$73.9] per month. Saw Lwee Heh signed up and followed him [to the army camp]. Saw Lwee Heh was 39 years old. He was married and he had four children; one daughter and three sons. He had been a [DKBA] soldier for three months, but he had not received any money and then he told

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the September 11, 2017 official market rate of 1,353 kyat to US \$1.

⁵ *Bo* is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

his platoon commander Htee Klee to take him back to his village and he would no longer be a soldier. Platoon commander Htee Klee told him *"If you resign from [serving as a] soldier, you must pay 1,500,000 kyat [US \$1110] [compensation to DKBA]."* Saw Lwee Heh was fearful and he killed himself by drinking pesticide. Saw Lwee Heh's family is poor and after he passed away his wife and children had no job options with which to earn their livelihood. When I asked them [villagers about Saw Lwee Heh's suicide], they did not feel safe to provide detailed information [because they are afraid of the retribution from armed groups] to me, so I can only report some of the information that I received from them.

On February 4th 2017, the BGF broke rules that they themselves implemented by fishing in a protected area in Ya Klo River, A--- village, Noh Taw Pla village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The BGF had forbidden anyone to fish in the Ya Klo River for a period of three years. Before the BGF forbade fishing in the river, they had held a consultation meeting with villagers from T'Poh Poe Hta area and Noh Ta Khaw area about this process. Therefore, villagers had to obey and could not fish in the river, but they [BGF] were fishing in the protected river [on February 4th 2017] without informing villagers. Villagers were dissatisfied with it [this activity], but they were afraid to tell [complain] about this case [due to concerns over their security].

Land confiscation

On March 17th 2017, a case of land confiscation occurred amongst the villagers in Hpa Wah Klo village, Htee Moo Khee village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. Saw Hpa Naw Wee's uncle tried to confiscate his [Saw Hpa Naw Wee's] land which is situated nearby to his uncle's land. They both inherited land from their great-grandparents. Fortunately, he has a land grant and his land was measured by the KNU government's land title administration workers. Nevertheless, his uncle dug a water pool on his land without asking permission from him. If even civilians have tried to confiscate each other's land and [do not respect the rule of law] then the Burma/Myanmar government will [also] continue to confiscate [civilians'] land.



These photos were taken on April 17th 2017 in Hpah Wah Klo village, Htee Moo Khee village tract, Noh T'Kaw

Township [Kyainseikgyi], Dooplaya District. The left photo shows land which has been confiscated. The right photo shows the KNU land title. The paper shows the land owner's name, age and size of land. [Photos: KHRG]

Quality of driving

There has been a poor implementation of road traffic policies and road traffic rules should be efficiently applied and understood by the people who travel by vehicle in the whole of Dooplaya District. They [some drivers] do not know the traffic rules so they drive in a careless manner and injure people, but they did not look after the injured people. There are many authority groups in Dooplaya District so they should develop rules of transport and declare these rules on paper and then display them besides the road.

Conclusion

The above information relating to the past three months were all collected in detail by the researcher and are all true. Regarding the information from this report, [government authorities] should improve administration on such issues as taxation, development projects and military activities in a positive way.

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

- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, September 2016," (May 2017)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Noh T'Kaw Township, April to May 2016," (March 2017)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, June to July 2015," (March 2017)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, August 2015," (February 2017)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, April 2016 to July 2016," (February 2017)

Dooplaya District



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