



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

May 10, 2018 / KHRG 17-8-S1

Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: K'Ser Doh Township, November 2016 to January 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between November 2016 and January 2017, including arbitrary land confiscation by companies, and information about healthcare, business and drug use.

- *Pyi Phyo Htun Company arbitrarily confiscated over a thousand acres of over 40 parcels of villagers' land since 2005-2006 for rubber plantation project in C--- and D--- villages, Kleh Mu Hti village tract, K' Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District.*
 - *Tatmadaw Battalion/Unit # 53 Commander U K'tay Htay, including a Major and ten soldiers from Tatmadaw came to E--- village, K' Tah Kloh village tract, K' Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District and notified villagers that they will give treatment to patients in K' Tah Kloh sea port on January 17th 2017.*
 - *The La Baw village head and [Karen National Union (KNU)] township joint secretary cooperated and sold the river-stream which flows between La Baw Hta [La Baw river mouth] and a Mon village, to a Mon ethnic person in 2016. Villagers didn't agree with the action because some villagers were not informed of it and because it is important resource for them to secure their livelihoods by fishing in this river.*
 - *A villager reported on January 2nd 2017 that a Karen National Liberation Soldier (KNLA) soldier Saw Hkwah Hkwah from F--- village, held a knife and a M16 rifle while he quarreled with his family, threatened and expressed his aggression in front of his neighborhood after drinking a lot of alcohol.*
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Situation Update | K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (November 2016 to January 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in January 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 This report was received along with other information from Mergui-Tavoy District, including 9 photographs.²

Arbitrary Land Confiscation by the Pyi Phyo Htun Company

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.

Pyi Phyto Htun Company has been arbitrarily confiscating local villagers' land since 2005-2006 [for a rubber plantation project]. The company's owners U Hla Than and U Su Su came to the project site when all the villager's trees and plantations were being cut down to grow rubber plantations. The land that the company confiscated is located in C--- and D--- villages, Kleh Mu Hti village tract, K' Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. Land confiscation impacted over 40 villagers. The [confiscated] plantation land consisted of over 500 acres and plain lands without plantation - from over 800 and up to 1000 acres.

The land of the villagers who lived in the east part of the road was confiscated entirely and they were forcefully relocated [told to move] to the west part of the road. Some affected villagers were compensated but some were not. The compensation that the villagers received was not requested by them; instead, the Pyi Phyto Htun Company forced or/and threatened the villagers to accept the offer [because accepting compensation was seen as providing consent for the confiscation of land]. Villagers received compensation money after they signed the [agreement] papers and their photos were taken [which represents the evidence of compensation provided].

The compensation for the confiscated land was less than its estimated value. Each acre of plantation land was compensated for only 200,000 kyats (149.73 USD)³. [Though the villagers have acted against land confiscation] the company did not take any action to resolve villagers' concerns.

[Due to this rubber plantation,] here are over 40 villagers who faced landlessness and/or homelessness due to land confiscation. Prior to the land confiscations, betel nut, coconut, cashew, rubber and other plantations were cultivated by the villagers for their livelihoods. After villagers' land was confiscated, they encountered many difficulties in terms of accommodation and livelihood. They were unable to raise the livestock. If villagers' animals wandered onto company's lands, they were slaughtered and eaten. Therefore, they [the villagers] faced food insecurity and were unable to send their children to school. This is a big issue that the villagers have been facing [land grabs and livelihoods].



This photo was taken on January 20th 2017 in D---village, Kleh Mu Hti village tract, K' Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photo shows the place where Pyi Phyto Htun International Co. Ltd is located. A big signboard indicates "Pyi Phyto Htun International Co. Ltd" and "2000 acres rubber plantation project" in Burmese. [Photos: KHRG]



This photo was taken on January 20th 2017 in C---village, Kleh Mu Hti village tract, K' Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photo shows the rubber plantation project that is conducted by the Pyi Phyto Htun International Co. Ltd after the company confiscated local villagers' lands. [Photos: KHRG]

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 28/03/2018 official market rate of 1335.81 kyats to US \$1

Healthcare

On Saturday, January 13th 2017, a villager named Saw G---, from E--- village, K' Ta Klo village tract, Ta Naw Th' Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District reported that Y.A.T (53) commander U K'tay Htay, a Major, and ten soldiers of Tatmadaw came to their village and notified the villagers that they will come to treat the ill villagers in the ship that is set to arrive in K' Tah Kloh sea port on January 17th 2017. They planned to address the health needs of 15,000 villagers. The ship's name is Pin Lel Thwa Say Yone Thin Baw Than Lwin. In addition, 500 kyat (0.37 USD)⁴ was provided for each [sick] villager. Nevertheless, the interviewed subjects expressed the belief that the administered treatments were ineffective.

Water Resource Confiscation

On January 10th 2017, a villager from La Baw village, Kleh Mu Hti village tract, K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District reported that the village head and township joint secretary cooperated and sold a river-stream to a Mon ethnic person in 2016. The area of the river-stream that was sold is located between La Baw Hta [La Baw river mouth] and a Mon village. The stream was sold for 600,000 kyat (449.44 USD)⁵. Out of the 600,000 kyat, transportation costs of over 100,000 kyat (74.90 USD)⁶ and an extra 100,000 kyat were given to town joint secretary [the leftover money was kept by the village]. The villagers did not agree with this action because some the villagers were not informed of the sale. The La Baw villager said that the village head just did what he wanted to do [regarding the sale]. Consequently, the sale will have an impact on the villagers' livelihoods that depend on fishing.

Drug use

There are many drugs users in Mergui-Tavoy District. The increase in alcohol use is causing annoyance in the neighborhood. On January 2nd 2017 a villager called Saw H--- from I--- village, Kleh Mu Hti village tract, K' Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District reported that Tee Saw Hkwah Hkwah, from E--- village, was drunk and quarreled with his family and expressed his aggression in front of his neighborhood. When a neighbor confronted him about his behavior, he responded "I am not afraid of anyone because I have [KNU] leaders [as my friends who will protect me] and I am a Kaw Thoo Lei⁷ soldier (KNLA soldier)". He brought a M16 [assault rifle] and over 10 bullets with him, which was given by a [KNLA] Company Commander. After he got drunk, he told to people that he would "give a drink of bullets to them".

At the night of January 3rd 2017, Saw Hkwah Hkwah got drunk and quarreled with his wife and children. While arguing, he held a knife with the intention of stabbing his son. His son panicked when Saw Hkwah Hkwah was about to throw his knife at him [he ultimately did not do it]. After that, he stabbed his knife into the table in front of someone's house. Meanwhile, a ten-months-old baby was playing on that table. After he was done quarreling with his son, he then tried to quarrel his wife who fled away and slept in a betel nut plantation. The heavy alcohol use bothered neighborhoods and created problems in his [Hkwah Hkwah] family as well.

Conclusion

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

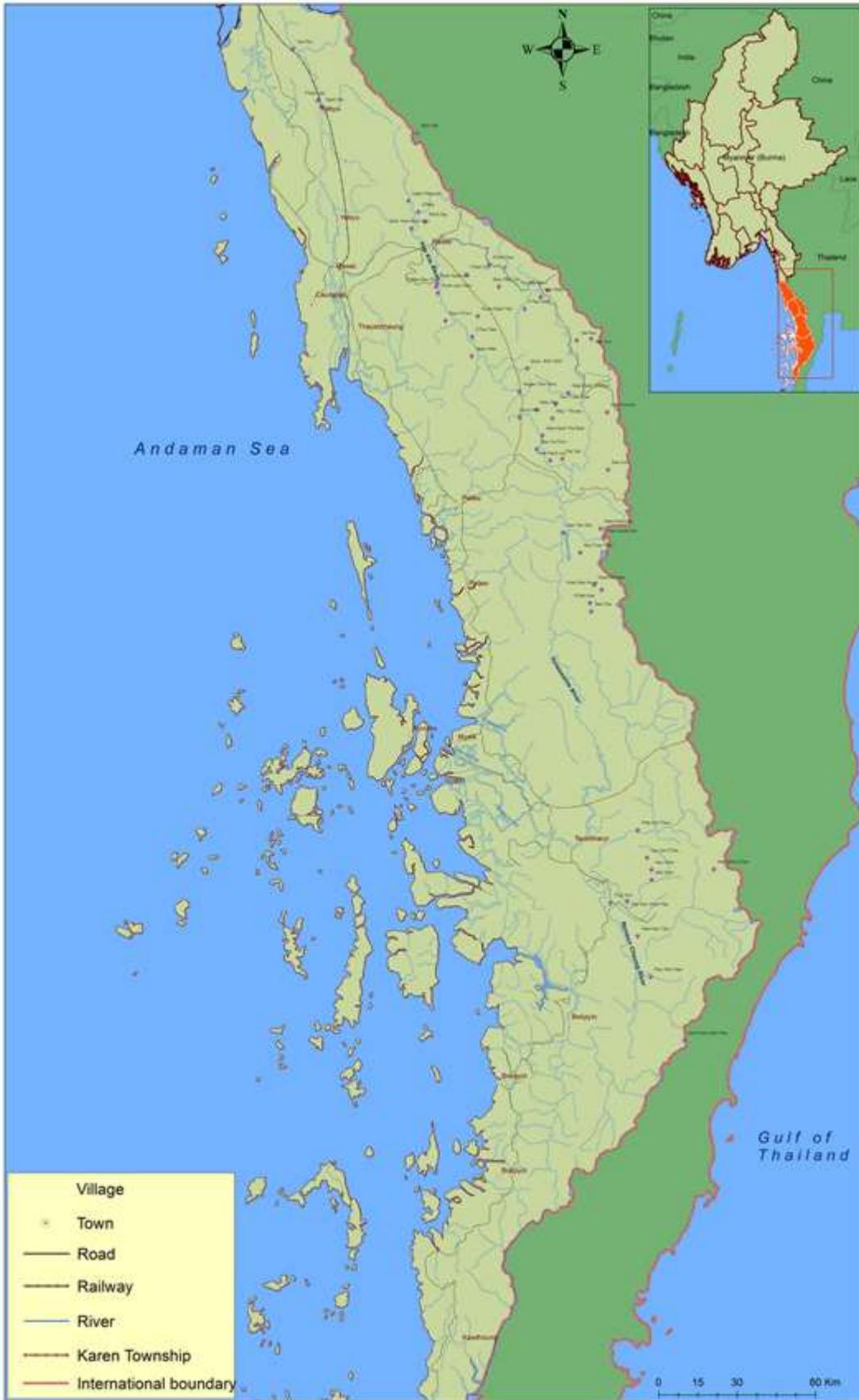
⁷ The term *Kaw Thoo Lei* refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU), but the exact meaning and etymology is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. *True Love and Bartholomew: Rebels on the Burmese Border*, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

The aforementioned events happened in Mergui-Tavoy District. According to our researchers present in this district, compared to the previous reporting period, there were some improvements in the life conditions of the villagers, yet some have worsened. Land and other resource confiscations continue in Mergui-Tavoy district. Substance abuse and violence remain prevalent. The described events created difficulties to Karen people and contributed to poverty rates.

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

- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Doh Soh Township and K’Ser Doh Township, February to April 2017,” (February 2018)
- “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)

Mergui/Tavoy (Thanintharyi) District



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