



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

December 5, 2017/ KHRG #17-9-A5-I1

Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, December 2016

This Interview with Saw B--- describes events occurring in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, during the period between 1997 and 2016. This interview discusses forced displacement and past abuses in 1997. The interview also covers the villager's perspectives on education, the justice system and his concerns relating to youth and community development. This interview was conducted as part of KHRG's research for 'Foundation of Fear: 25 years of villagers voices from southeast Myanmar,'.

Interview | Saw B--- (Male, 45), C--- village, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District (December 2016)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Hpapun District on December 25th 2016 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including five other interviews, five incident reports, 40 photographs and 14 video clips.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeastern 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

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.

Occupation: Hill farmer

Position: Teacher

What is your name Poh Doh³ [nephew]?

My name is Saw B---

Which area do you live in now?

I live in Doo Doh Hta area.

Which village are you from?

I am from C--- village.

Which village tract do you live in?

Hsaw Mu Plaw village tract.

Township?

Lu Thaw.

District?

Mu Traw [Hpapun].

Brigade?

Brigade #5 [Hpapun].

What is your ethnicity?



This photo was taken by a KHRG community member in Law Doo area, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District on December 25th 2016 of local farmer Saw B---. Saw B--- described his experiences of human rights violations committed by Tatmadaw and his perspective on education, the justice system and his concerns relating to youth and community development. *[Photo: KHRG]*

³ Poh Doh is a S'gaw Karen term for nephew, but it does not necessarily signify any actual familial relationship.

I am S'Gaw Karen.

What is your religion?

I am a Christian.

What is your job?

I am a hill farmer.

What is your other job?

I am a teacher and I am working to [solve] social issues at the village tract level [village committee member].

Do you have a family?

Yes.

How many children do you have?

I have 3 children.

How old is your eldest child?

My eldest child is 7 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

My youngest child is 3 years old.

How many villages are in Hsaw Mu Plaw village tract?

There are 12 villages in Hsaw Mu Plaw village tract.

How many households?

I am guessing there are more than 100 households.

So what about the number of people?

I think there are more than 1,000 villagers.

What do villagers in your village do to work for their livelihoods?

They work on hill farms and plain farms for their livelihoods because there are no other jobs available for us.

Do villagers have enough paddy [for the upcoming year]?

Villagers are IDPs⁴ and they cannot return to their villages yet. Therefore, villagers do not have enough paddy [for the upcoming year]. Some villagers have to search throughout the year to have enough food for their daily needs.

When did the [people from Hsaw Mu Plaw] village tract flee from their villages?

They fled from their villages in 1997 and they still cannot return to their villages.

Are there any Tatmadaw army camps in Hsaw Mu Plaw village tract?

There are 3 Tatmadaw army camps based in Hsaw Mu Plaw village tract.

Which areas are they based?

They are based in Der Kyoo area, Paw Khay Hkoh area and Wah Klay Toe area.

What is your most important human right?

⁴ IDP refers to an internally displaced person.

My most important human right is that each nation should have the right to self-determination, and people should be able to return to their own village/area. This is my opinion and my feelings regarding human rights.

Did human rights abuses happen in your area in the past?

Yes, there were too many kinds of human rights abuses that happened in my area in the past. I will tell you about those human rights abuses. The Burma/Myanmar government military [Tatmadaw] attacked civilians so they [villagers] had to flee for their lives and they could not return to their own villages. This was one type of human rights abuse. The Tatmadaw attacked villagers and destroyed civilians' farms so they could not work for their livelihoods. This was another human rights abuse. They attacked [killed] civilians' animals that civilians relied on for their livelihoods [livestock rearing and selling], so that was another human rights abuse. There are also a lot of other human rights abuses that I did not mention. This my opinion and my feelings regarding the human rights abuses of the past.

Have any of these human rights abuses been resolved within the justice system?

I do not know if any justice has been granted for the human rights abuses that happened in the past. I do not know if those human rights abuses that happened in the past will ever be resolved [appropriately addressed within the judicial system]. I have not seen any human rights abuses resolved.

Have you studied and discussed issues about human rights?

Yes, I have studied and discussed about human rights issues. Karen Human Rights Group [KHRG] also conducts workshops about human rights with the community, so I think KHRG will solve those human rights abuses. We [civilians] do not know how to solve [access justice for human rights abuses], so we understand that KHRG will resolve these [human rights abuses].

Do you think there is justice for the victims of human rights abuses that happened in the past, within the judicial system?

In my opinion, I think there is no justice for them [the victims of human rights abuses].

Why do you think there is no justice for the victims who experienced human rights abuses in the past?

Because the Burma/Myanmar government are hypocrites and they are dishonest. They are not honest with Karen people when the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen people [leaders] have made agreements. When [Karen leaders] have reported any violations [of the agreements] to them [Burma/Myanmar government] they [the Burma/Myanmar government] did not take any action to [resolve] the human rights abuses in Karen State and they still commit human right abuses. For example in regards to the ceasefire⁵, the Karen people follow the rules of the ceasefire, but the Tatmadaw broke the ceasefire agreement and their promise. The Karen people are honest with them [Burma/Myanmar government], but they are not honest back.

Do you mean that the Tatmadaw shot innocent villagers on sight and they destroyed their paddy, lands, houses, plantations, gardens, and then they ate the animals and paddy [food] of the villagers who have not done anything wrong?

Yes, it is.

What do you think should be done to support people who were victims of human rights abuses during the conflict?

⁵ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see "[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#)," Reuters, October 15th 2015. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see "[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement](#)," *UN News Centre*, October 15th 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe's decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see "[Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#)," *Karen News*, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

We should talk with them and encourage them. We should collect [food] together to help people facing food shortages. We should also collect their information [about the human rights abuses they experienced] and report it to Karen Nation Union (KNU) step by step. These are the ways we can solve them [human rights issues].

What is the root cause of human rights abuses in your area?

I think the root cause of human rights abuses is the Burma/Myanmar government military attacking civilians and oppressing them. This is the real cause of human rights abuses [in my community].

What future do you want for young people and your community?

I want young people to have the freedom to access education. I want them to be able to access more support [assistance with school fees and materials] for their education in the future. I want young people to have higher standards of living and more knowledge. Therefore, people [from the Karen Education Department and other organisations] should come to my area and they should encourage, educate and organise the young people in my area.

Do you want a Karen society and Karen people to control Karen state?

For my community, I want all villagers who have been displaced to other areas [IDPs and refugees] to be able to return to their own villages. I want the Burma/Myanmar government military to withdraw their army camps from villages, village tracts and areas [in Karen state]. I hope they [Burma/Myanmar government] will give rights to Karen people. I hope the Karen people will have self-determination and will be able to access land to rebuild their country. I hope villagers get back their ancestral lands that date back to the generations of their forefathers. These are the things I want for young people and for my community in the future.

Why do you want these things?

We all understand that if we have rights then we can have self-determination and can rebuild our country. If our rights are in our hands then we can improve our education and we can work

any job freely for our livelihoods. If we have rights to access our own lands, wherever we are, then we will be successful in any job for our livelihoods.

Are young people interested in leadership roles?

Young people in my area have suffered many things [human rights abuses by Tatmadaw] so most of them are interested in leadership roles and they want to lead their Karen people. They know that if the Burma/Myanmar government leads them, they will have fewer rights and opportunities. Therefore, they are eager to have leadership roles because they have struggled in order to lead their own nation.

What are you most worried about for your own future?

I experienced fighting [between Tatmadaw and armed groups] for ages and then it was the time of the ceasefire agreement, but the ceasefire agreement [between KNU and Burma/Myanmar government] does not satisfy us, and it is not reliable for the peace process. There are a lot of civilians in my area who cannot stay in [return to] their own villages and areas yet. My biggest concern is that fighting will break out again if the ceasefire agreement is not followed properly and if any disagreements occur between the two sides [KNU and Burma/Myanmar government]. Now we cannot stay in our own villages yet, and we will have to flee from our village again if the fighting happens again. Then we will be in a very dangerous [situation].

What do you want to say to the Karen youth for them to improve their community in the future?

I would like to say the Karen youth should look for more education, [learn more] languages and [gain] leadership knowledge, so they have more skills in many different areas to improve their community in the future. Then the Karen youth will have their rights and self-determination in their own hands. The Karen youth will be future leaders for the next generation. This is my opinion and what I want to say to the Karen youth for the future.

**What do you know about the ceasefire in October 2015?⁶ What do you think about it?
How is the ceasefire relevant to you?**

I understand that the October 2015 ceasefire agreement is just a pre-ceasefire and it is not a genuine ceasefire yet. I know that the Burma/Myanmar government military are sending more rations, more ammunitions [military supplies] and are upgrading their army camps. Therefore, the ceasefire agreement does not satisfy me and I do not trust that it will stop the fighting. I do not understand what the Burma/Myanmar government is planning during this ceasefire period. I think the Burma/Myanmar government should be honest with their agreements in the ceasefire and they should not upgrade their army camps and should not send more ammunition. Therefore, I don't really understand [trust] this ceasefire period.

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

- “Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, July 2015,” (April 2017)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, October 2016,” (March 2017)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, March 2016,” (January 2017)
- “Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2015,” (December 2016)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to August 2016,” (November 2016)

⁶ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see “[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#),” Reuters, October 15th 2015. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see “[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes ‘milestone’ signing of ceasefire agreement](#),” *UN News Centre*, October 15th 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe’s decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see “[Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#),” *Karen News*, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG’s analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District

