



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Nyaunglebin Short Update: Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District during the period between November 2016 and February 2018, including information about stone mining, logging and Tatmadaw road construction.

This Short Update describes events occurring in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District during the period between November 2016 and February 2018, including information about stone mining, logging and Tatmadaw road construction.

- *On November 15th 2016, soldiers from K'Pel Tatmadaw camp and Bin Pyeh Tatmadaw camp constructed a road to enhance military operations in Hsaw Mee Lu village, Mone Township.*
 - *On November 6th 2017, people from Mi Taing Taw village demonstrated against stone mining in the Mone River. The journalist Ko Yan Naing Aung took advantage of this situation to collect bribes from company workers.*
 - *On February 25th 2018, Tatmadaw and Burma/Myanmar government authorities stopped villagers from logging wood in Hsaw Mee Loo village, Mone Township. Local community members had been given permission to use wood from the forest to build their houses by the Karen National Union (KNU) authorities.*
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Short Update | Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District (November 2016 to February 2018)

The following Short Update was received by KHRG in April 2018. It was written by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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 Nyaunglebin District, including two other incident reports and 142 photographs.²

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.

Tatmadaw road construction

On November 15th 2016, Saw W--- and Saw M---, two villagers from Hsaw Mee Loo village, shared their perspectives about the construction of a road by the Tatmadaw in Hsaw Mee Loo village, Mone Township.

The Tatmadaw Battalion Commander Tin Maung Kyaw from Infantry Battalion #57 negotiated with the Mu Theh village tract leader Khin Than Mu before the road construction and asked him to sign an agreement paper. This agreement was then reported to the Township Administrator, the Minister of Bago Division and village tract leaders.

Tatmadaw forces settled into a military base in the local area. They wanted to widen an existing military operation road that was about 50 feet wide. First, the road was constructed in Mu Theh village, Ken Doe village tract, Kyaukkyi Township. It was then expanded to Mone Township area.

Local villagers were not informed of the details of this road construction. They were not able to negotiate the time, the process, and the consequences of the road construction. Because of this, the road damaged [the land of the local community, including] numerous farms and plantations. Local villagers reported the case to the Tatmadaw and the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) by submitting a complaint letter. They also gave speeches [voicing their opposition to the land confiscations], but no actions were taken for the villagers [impacted by the road construction]. Therefore, villagers had no choice but to pray. The villagers did not dare to continue their confrontation because they are afraid of the Tatmadaw.



The first two photos were taken on February 17th 2018 in Hee Doh Hkee village, Khoh Poo village tract, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. These photos show the road constructed by the Tatmadaw between Than Bo and Mu Theh villages. This road was built to enhance the existing military operation road. The construction of this road started on November 15th 2016. The Tatmadaw responsible for building this road is Battlefield Engineer (BE) Battalion #911. This road construction damaged the land of local villagers.

The photo on the lower left was taken on March 9th 2018 in Htee Ya Hkee forest, Hsaw Mee Loo village tract, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. It shows how villagers gathered and

	<p>prayed beside the Theh Kloh stream. This group is praying for the damaged plantations, water channels and rivers caused by the Tatmadaw road construction. [Photos: KHRG]</p>
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Stone mining

Ko Naing, a 36-year-old villager from Mi Taing Taw village, Mone Township expressed [his feelings] about the stone mining operation developed by private companies in Mone Township. [He described how every year,] 14 companies operated the stone mine in the Mone River. The stone mining workers did not have any permission letters to operate the mine from the Burma/Myanmar government. Instead, they received permission from the Mone Township Administrator U Tin Myo Aung. This permission was obtained by paying a bribe.

The amount of stone mining has gradually increased since 2016. This has a negative impact on the environment, by causing landslides and damaging plantations owned by local villagers. Despite this grave situation, the local community is afraid of confronting Tatmadaw forces [to voice their opposition to the stone mine].

[The incident described below shows how these communities can be taken advantage of by different actors with diverse interests.] Yan Naing, a local journalist encouraged villagers to protest against the stone mine. Local community members demonstrated on November 6th 2017. Although Yan Naing Aung encouraged local people to protest, he did not take any actions to help the villagers until the end of their protest. [Instead of helping the local community, Yan Naing Aung used this opportunity for personal gain, asking the company workers for bribes in exchange for stopping the protest.] He left the village [Mi Taing Taw village] after he collected 50,000 Kyat [US \$37] from each stone mining worker as a bribe.³ On December 31st 2018, local villagers held another protest. Despite these repeated protests, the workers continued mining the stone.

	
	<p>The first two photos were taken on November 6th 2018 in front of the Township Administrator’s office, in Ler Doh Town. These photos show local people demonstrating against the stone mining in the Mone River, Mi Taing Taw village, Mone Township. This stone mining project was illegal because it did not have the permission of national authorities. It was linked to a corruption case involving the Township Administrator U Tin Myo Aung.</p> <p>The photo below was taken on November 6th 2018. It shows villagers demonstrating against</p>

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 11 June 2018 official market rate of 1,351 kyats to US \$1.

	the stone mining. In this case, representatives of the Parliament, the Governor, the Township police commander and municipal authorities resolved this issue based on the demands put forward during protests. <i>[Photos: KHRG]</i>
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Logging

On February 2nd 2018, the Hkoh Poo village tract leader, Saw K’Paw Htoo said that the Tatmadaw and Burma/Myanmar authorities in Mone Township were stopping local villagers from logging wood. [He held a number of authorities responsible for this situation, including] the Tatmadaw military camps, Tatmadaw personnel from checkpoints, media groups, the police force, officials from the Forestry Department, representatives of Sittaung Thanzin JMC and officials from Tatmadaw Military Security Affairs.

Villagers had received permission from the KNU authorities in Mone Township to use wood from the local forest to build their houses. When the KNU gave permission to the villagers, local community members logged the forest and brought back wood to their villages. The Tatmadaw and Burma/Myanmar authorities hindered this activity by requesting bribes from local community members and arresting villagers.

While they were transporting wood back to their villages, local community members had to pay taxes and bribes at different Tatmadaw checkpoints, army camps and to different Burma/Myanmar government authorities. For instance, villagers had to pay 30,000 Kyat [US \$22] to each of the local Tatmadaw groups, including: the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #440 based at K’Pel Camp, the LIB #440 that based at Bin Pyeh Camp, the Infantry Battalion (IB) #60, the LIB #351, the IB #75 and the Tatmadaw Military Security Affairs. Villagers also had to pay 20,000 Kyat [US \$15] to the Forestry Department and 50,000 Kyat [US \$37] to Burma/Myanmar police.

In addition to this, villagers had to pay 30,000 Kyat [US \$22] to other authorities, including the Township minister, the media group (Pegu Wikali) and Sittaung Thazin JMC. Finally, they also had to pay 5000 Kyat [US \$3.8] for each checkpoint along their route. Sometimes, villagers were also arrested in this process.

Even though the KNU gave permission to log and transport wood, local community members paid a large number of bribes on their way from the forest back to their village. [They faced challenges] even though they paid bribes to every group of authorities. In this situation, nobody stood with the local villagers when they were facing challenges. Villagers had to solve these issues on their own.

[KHRG has received reports of] local community members being disturbed when they are logging wood by officials from Tatmadaw Military Security Affairs, the Forestry Department, or the police.

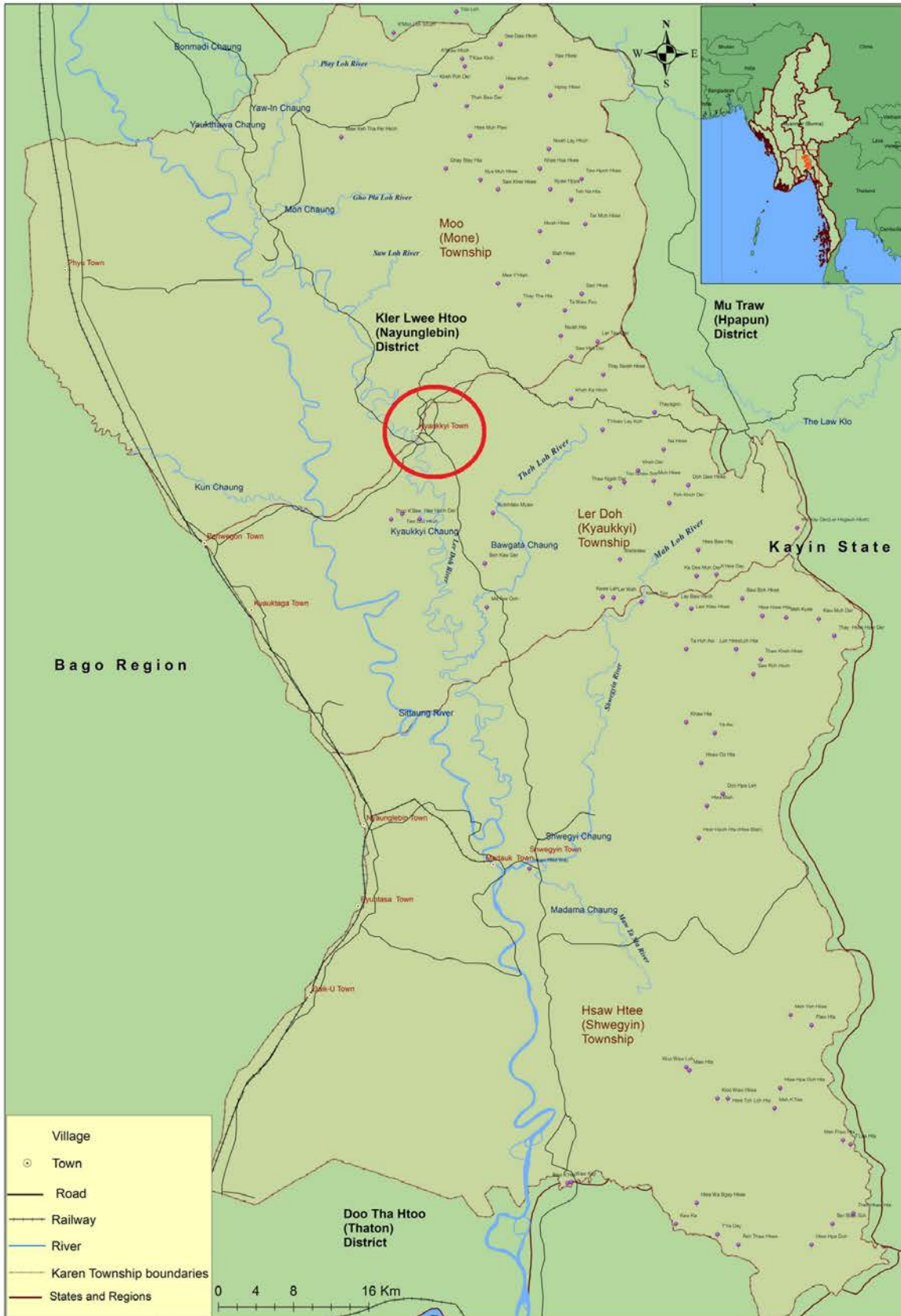


These photos were taken on March 15th 2018 in Mone Township area. The KNU Forestry Department gave permission to local villagers to log wood so they can build their houses. Representatives from the Tatmadaw Military Security Affairs led by Saya Lwin Maung Maung arrested local community members. They confiscated the logging equipment used by villagers and sent it to the Burma/Myanmar Forestry Department. Local community members reported that this incident occurred because they did not offer bribes to the representatives of the Tatmadaw Military Security Affairs. *[Photos: KHRG]*

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

- “Nyaunglebin Interview: Saw A---, May 2017”, (December 2017)
- “Nyaunglebin Field Report: Militarisation, land confiscation, violent abuse, ‘re-relocated’ IDPs, landmines, and development projects, December 2015 to December 2016”, (October 2017)
- “Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi Township, January to May 2017”, (October 2017)

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



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