

Karen Human Rights Group **Report from the Field**

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Continued Militarisation, Killings and Fear in Dooplaya District

In early January 2004 Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military junta and the Karen National Union (KNU) agreed to an informal ceasefire pending negotiations for a more lasting agreement. Negotiations have not proceeded any further. Though the informal ceasefire still stands, sporadic fighting continues to occur. One example comes from Dooplaya District of southern Karen State (see map), where SPDC forces pursuing Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA, armed wing of the KNU) soldiers in order to ambush them in March 2005 shot dead a woman shopkeeper and wounded an 80 year old woman and one other villager. Under SPDC protection, forces of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) also continue to abuse and kill villagers with impunity. As a result of such incidents, villagers in Dooplaya District continue to live in fear; there may be a ceasefire between armed groups, but no ceasefire is in place preventing armed groups from shooting at villagers. In addition, forced labour and restrictions on the movements and activities of villagers remain in place, and continue to create great hardship for many people. Whether the ceasefire is observed or not, the heavy militarisation of Dooplaya poses serious threats to the physical and food security of villagers.

Despite the ceasefire, SPDC troop concentrations in Dooplaya have not decreased at all. On January 10th 2005, Light Infantry Division #88 commander Brigadier General Myint Zaw brought ten battalions (approximately 4,000 to 5,000 troops) to Dooplaya District to replace Military Operations Command (*Sa Ka Ka*) #12 commanded by Brigadier General Maung Maung Shin. Brigadier General Myint Zaw promptly set out to strengthen control in Dooplaya district by stepping up military operations using his soldiers. The KNU told them not to enter certain areas but they entered regardless, always taking along two villagers as forced labour to guide them on their patrols. On March 7th 2005 a column of SPDC soldiers led by battalion commander Khin Maung Win of Infantry Battalion #78, operating under the command of Light Infantry Division #88, were returning from Kya In township to Kawkareik township when they saw a small group of KNLA soldiers in Painkaladon (Gka Leh Der) village. They followed the KNLA soldiers to the Ya Gone Ni section of Painkaladon village. The KNLA soldiers didn't know that they were being followed, so they stopped in the third

shop in Ya Gone Ni section to rest and eat. When the SPDC column entered Ya Gone Ni section the owner of the first shop, Nan Thaung Thaung Myint (a.k.a. Naw Pay Thwe, a 35 year old woman), stepped out of her shop just a few metres in front of the SPDC soldiers, who immediately opened fire on her. She was shot once in the head, once in the ribs, and once in the right leg, and died immediately. Two other villagers were wounded by the SPDC soldiers' gunfire: grandmother Naw Mu Kaw, age 80, and a visiting villager from Ah Kyu village. The KNLA soldiers, who were further down the village street, did not return fire on the SPDC soldiers and fled the village. The SPDC troops then looted goods worth a total of 260,000 Kyat from the village shops, shot and killed a pig, and left the village after they had finished eating. Their officers gave 50,000 Kyat in cash toward the cost of Nan Thaung Thaung Myint's funeral, causing the villagers to comment that they are now placing a price on the people they kill. Nan Thaung Thaung Myint was a widow with two children, so her children must now live with their grandfather.

Operating under the protection of the SPDC, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) units in Dooplaya also abuse and kill civilians with impunity. On March 3rd 2005 twenty DKBA soldiers led by Maung Kyi Shin, Platoon #1 commander of Company #1, DKBA #906 Battalion, arrived at Win Kat village in Kru Tu (Kyone Doh) township. On that day a Buddhist worship service with monks was being held at the home of N--- in Wa Done Law village. Ya Paw O'wa, a 60 year old Pwo Karen man from Win Kat village, went to attend the service and make an offering because he is one of the local pagoda trustees. Afterwards he felt tired so he rested at a house in the village for a while before heading home to Win Kat. On his way home, at 3 p.m. he encountered Maung Kyi Shin and five of his soldiers by a toddy palm plantation near Win Kat village. Maung Kyi Shin and his soldiers detained Ya Paw O'wa, took him away and killed him. People saw him being marched away but didn't dare say anything even to his family because they are afraid of Maung Kyi Shin, so his family didn't know. In the following days the villagers looked for him and eventually found his dead body slung over a tree branch and buried him. The villagers live near DKBA military camps and they are forced to provide sentries to guard the families of DKBA members, and also to provide food to DKBA families. The DKBA officers threaten that if anything happens to DKBA families, the villagers will be punished.

Villagers in Dooplaya also face restrictions on their movements and activities imposed by SPDC officers. From January 2005 until the present, the people of Htee Ghu Thaw (Tee Po Than) village in Kru Tu (Kyone Doh) township have been forbidden to stay overnight in their sugarcane, rubber, and fruit plantations, though some of these lie a considerable distance from the village. They have been ordered to move their houses into the central village. SPDC officers have said that they will take no responsibility for whatever happens to anyone who stays outside the village – an SPDC euphemism meaning that villagers can be shot or executed on sight with impunity. Regarding forced labour, villagers in Dooplaya have told KHRG researchers that the only difference under the ceasefire is that they don't have to go as longer-term porters on military operations. Other common forms of forced labour such as sentry duty, *set tha* (messenger duty), repair and maintenance of military camps, rebuilding roads, clearing scrub along roadsides, cutting and hauling logs and bamboo for the Army, and providing roofing thatch to military camps are still practised. These forms of forced labour are only likely to stop if there are no more military camps in the area.

Since the beginning of 2005 only a minority of villagers in Dooplaya district have enough rice and paddy, and even this minority will continue to shrink if the present circumstances persist. Most villagers have no access to 'modern' medicines and are reliant on traditional

herbal and spiritual treatments, which often prove insufficient. Most villages are too poor to build a good school or hire qualified teachers, so many children miss out entirely on formal education and the majority never have a chance to study beyond primary school. For many children who want to proceed beyond primary school, the only option is to leave their family and try to get to a refugee camp in Thailand, where they can attend middle school while staying in a boarding house for unattended children.

The informal SPDC-KNU ceasefire has brought little change for villagers in Dooplaya District. Not only does fighting continue, with the attendant effects and reprisals on civilians, but people must still face forced labour, restrictions on their activities, and the possibility of being abused or killed at any time with complete impunity. The civilians are not considered parties to the ceasefire, and the increased freedom of movement it has created for SPDC forces has made civilians more vulnerable than ever to abuse. There is no sign that the ceasefire will impede or decrease the militarisation of the district; but as long as Dooplaya remains heavily populated by soldiers the lives and livelihoods of the civilian villagers will be in danger.

For additional information on the recent situation in Dooplaya, see also *Dooplaya District: Fighting and Human Rights Abuses Still Continue After Ceasefire* (KHRG Report from the Field #2005-F1, February 2005) and *SPDC Violates the Ceasefire During Karen New Year Celebrations: The Attack on Kah Law Ghaw Village, Dooplaya District* (KHRG News Bulletin #2005-B1, February 2005). Photos from Dooplaya can be seen in *KHRG Photo Set 2005A*.