



News bulletin

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More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District

Civilians in Dooplaya District continue to be impacted by conflict between the Tatmadaw and armed Karen groups, who have increased fighting in the area since November 7th 2010. Villagers in the Palu area have left on multiple occasions in the last six days, and continue to report that they are struggling to complete harvests and protect homes from looting while also fearing conflict and conflict related abuses. KHRG continues to document movement restrictions and arbitrary arrests, including the arrest and detention of six more villagers over the last three days.

Civilians in Dooplaya District continue to be at risk due to conflict between Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw, and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), as well as other armed Karen groups in the area. Following continued clashes in the Waw Lay area since November 8th 2010, last week forces of the DKBA blocked operations by Tatmadaw soldiers attempting to re-supply units engaged farther south in Dooplaya District. According to DKBA officers that spoke with KHRG, this pushed Tatmadaw units to take positions at the village of Palu, north of Waw Lay along the border between Dooplaya and Phop Phra District, Tak Province, Thailand. Frequent clashes have been occurring in the Palu area since November 25th 2010.



This photo, taken on November 28th 2010, shows families from Palu taking shelter in Kay Thoo Kloh, Phop Phra District; these refugees were receiving support from community members. As of 5 pm on November 28th nearly 1,000 refugees from the Palu area were seeking protection in Thailand, fearing that they could not yet safely return to their homes; the following day most refugees were returned by the RTA. [Photo: KHRG]

At least 1,000 refugees fled to Thailand from Palu and surrounding villages, but many were returned in spite of ongoing conflict. Many are now in hiding in Burma or in discrete locations in Thailand. At least 300 have been allowed to seek refuge by the Royal Thai Army, while others have been prevented from entering Thailand. Further details on obstacles to protection for civilians fleeing the Palu area are available in a field report released by KHRG today.¹

Civilians remaining in the Palu area report struggling to manage threats to their human rights and security, including movement restrictions and the threat of arrests and reprisals, being forced into service as porters, minesweepers and guides. Movement restrictions enforced by

¹ See, "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for villagers seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

Tatmadaw soldiers in Palu have prevented at least one group of civilians attempting to flee on November 28th 2010 from entering Thailand. Movement restrictions south of Palu in Waw Lay village, documented by KHRG last week, also remain in place. One Waw Lay villager that spoke with KHRG described the situation as the following:

Last night [Nov 28th 2010] the DKBA army shelled the place where the Burmese [Tatmadaw] army is based at Htee Nyah Lih. In the morning, they [the Tatmadaw] did not let villagers visit. People don't know if [the Tatmadaw soldiers got injured or not]. The SPDC [Tatmadaw] army hasn't let villagers go out outside the village at all this morning [November 29th 2010], so villagers can't go and do their work.

Villagers also continue to report that they are treated with intense suspicion by Tatmadaw troops. This suspicion is both exposing civilians to risks of human rights abuses, such as arbitrary arrest and detention, and limiting the ability of community leaders to negotiate protection for civilians.² KHRG has documented two more incidents of arbitrary arrest over the last three days. In the afternoon of November 27th 2010, Tatmadaw soldiers in Palu arrested four Palu villagers, including one student. KHRG could not confirm the boy's age, but villagers that spoke with KHRG said he was still attending school in Palu, which offers classes to students through the 8th standard. Because of worries that the villagers would be forced to serve as guides and escort Tatmadaw soldiers to DKBA or KNLA positions, the village head of Palu, Saw L---, organised a group of village leaders including government-salaried teachers to meet with the Tatmadaw commander. After negotiating with the Tatmadaw, the group was able to secure the villagers' release.

Underscoring the difficult position occupied by community leaders that must attempt to negotiate protection from all armed groups amid an unstable military context, Saw L--- subsequently notified villagers that he would not be able to organise similar negotiations in the future, because his relationship with the Tatmadaw has become tense. Because he could not protect them, Saw L--- also warned male villagers that they should avoid the Tatmadaw because they risked being forced to act as porters or guides. This tension appears to be the result of contact between Saw L--- and the DKBA. According to villagers that spoke with KHRG, during the evening of November 27th 2010, Saw L--- contacted the DKBA to complain that mortars fired by the group were landing in the village. Later that night, a Tatmadaw commander in Palu contacted Saw L--- to warn him that his contact with the DKBA was being monitored. As of November 28th 2010 when KHRG last confirmed Saw L---'s whereabouts, he no longer felt safe to stay in the village.

Arrests have also been reported elsewhere in the area. On November 28th 2010, Tatmadaw soldiers arrested two men as they returned from their field near Kyo G'Lee village. Residents of Kyo G'Lee, located south of Waw Lay, opposite from Thailand's Umphang District, Tak Province, are also being required to purchase travel documents and register their movements outside of the village. As of last night the two men, Saw B---, age 42 and Saw P---, age 38, remained in the custody of the Tatmadaw. The reasons for their detention, how long they will be held or whether they were being interrogated or forced to act as guides or porters has yet to be confirmed. A resident from Kyo G'Lee interviewed by KHRG, however, reported that he did not think the men had secured travel permission before leaving for their field.

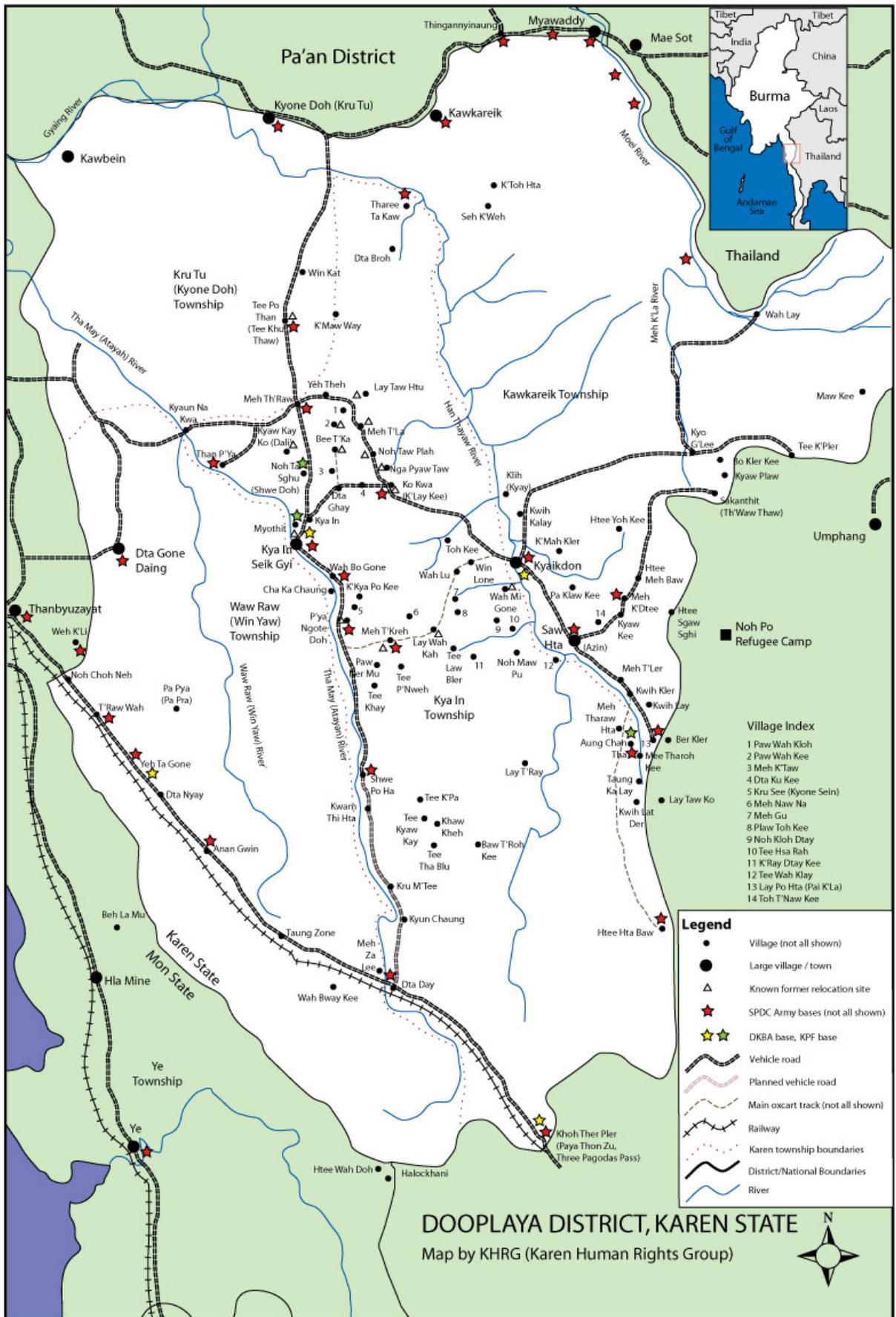
Further background on the situation in Dooplaya District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for villagers seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand, KHRG, November 2010.*

² "Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010.

- *Shelling injures villager, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *School closures and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts (November 2010)*
- *Civilians at risk from continued SPDC-DKBA conflict in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *DKBA burns village and forces residents to relocate in Pa'an District (June 2010)*
- *SPDC shelling destroys villagers' rubber plantations in Dooplaya District (May 2010)*

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.



Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles