



News Bulletin

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Mother of newborn shot and killed in Papun District

On October 13th 2010, a 24-year-old woman was shot and killed less than 45 minutes after she had given birth, when Tatmadaw troops opened fire on her house during an attack on her village in Dweh Loh Township. This news bulletin is based on an interview conducted with the woman's husband, who has been staying with his newborn son and another one of his sons at a refuge site outside Papun district since December 10th 2010.

On January 1st 2011 a KHRG researcher met with Saw P---, 37, who described how his wife Naw M---, 24, had been shot and killed by Tatmadaw soldiers on October 13th 2010 during an attack on A--- village, Lay Kaw Htih village tract, Dweh Loh Township, Papun District. The shooting occurred at the home of Saw P--- and Naw M---, just 45 minutes after Naw M--- had given birth to their third son. Saw P--- said that he fled his home with their newborn baby after bullets struck his wife in her thigh and her neck. Saw P--- described to KHRG how, after he fled his village, he spent two months living in the forest caring for his newborn son, before seeking refuge at a site outside Papun district. In the following quote, Saw P--- describes in his own words the attack in which his wife was killed, and the difficulties he has faced caring for his infant son in the intervening months.



This photo, taken on January 1st 2011, shows three-month-old Saw G---. His mother was shot and killed by Tatmadaw soldiers on October 13th 2010, less than 45 minutes after he was born. [Photo: KHRG]

My wife's name is Naw M--- and she was shot and killed on a Wednesday morning, on October 13th 2010, while there was a big light coming from the fire in my house and the midwife was busy, helping my wife to deliver her baby. I built my house at the edge of the village, on the border of the forest and the village. My wife was shot after she knew it was a baby boy, and she named her baby Saw G---. When she was shot, there wasn't much blood coming out because a lot of her blood had come out when she delivered her baby. Then everyone was trying to hide. At that time, it was an important period for farming [the harvest] and most of the villagers in the village were spending the night at their farms [sleeping in field huts].¹ When the attack happened, there weren't many

¹ Many villagers keeping farms or plantations in rural Karen State build field huts to be able to stay near their agricultural projects during important points in the agricultural cycle, to protect crops from wild animals, and to reduce time spent travelling between their homes and their farms. The practice of constructing field huts has been

villagers in the village. After the attack, I went back and buried my wife's dead body at 1 pm, with not many people helping me. Then I went up to my hill field hut and stayed with my newborn baby and his two elder brothers. I just fed my newborn baby the excess rice water mixed with sugar for two months. Then I had no money and only some sugar left, which people from the village gave to me for my baby, and I decided to go somewhere. During that time, some people requested to adopt my son and some suggested that I give him to people to adopt. But I made up my mind that I'd take care of him myself and if he died he'd die in my hands and, if he stayed alive, he'd be very much still alive under my care. After my wife died, before I came here [a refuge site outside of Papun district], I stayed in the forest for two months. I had no plan to come here. People told me, 'If you move to that village, you might have a better life.' I just came step by step and, later, I decided to come here. It took me six days. I left my hill field on December 15th 2010 and arrived on 20th December 2010. When I stayed in my village, I just farmed hill fields and I could earn very much and work with other people in their flat fields. N--- and P--- villages were close to my village. Also a reason I left my village was because I worried for myself, that if people said to join the army,² then I'd join and I wouldn't be able to control myself. I didn't want to stay there [in A--- village] anymore and when I stayed there I always remembered my wife whenever I looked at my baby. When I arrived here, I didn't want to go back, too. Whenever my baby cried, I directly saw my wife's face. Also saw the face of Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers. I hate them, but I can't do anything to them. I comfort myself that my wife's fortune was good up until now. But if I have time and an opportunity, I'll go back and call my eldest child to here. When I came, I couldn't bring him because I couldn't carry all of them [the children]. I left him with Auntie and Uncle there. My second son is here and he's happy here because there are a lot of his friends that he can play with. My baby also receives good care and he can get milk powder here. People come and help me a lot, nursing my baby and cooking rice for me sometimes.

-Saw P--- male, 37 years old, former resident of A--- village, Lay Kaw Htih village tract, Papun district (January 1st 2011)

Indiscriminate attacks on civilians such as that which killed Naw M--- appear to form part of a wider pattern of Tatmadaw military practices that cumulatively target civilian populations in areas over which Tatmadaw forces cannot, or have yet to, establish effective military control.³ Such attacks continue to occur more than two years since the termination of a three-year-long military offensive⁴, during which attacks on civilians in difficult-to-control upland areas of

described in previous KHRG reports documenting the manner in which movement restrictions imposed by SPDC authorities constrain the livelihoods activities of villagers living under SPDC control. See for example: "Patrols, movement restrictions and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, September 2009.

² Although Saw P--- did not specify which armed group he might have joined, the context of his statement suggests that he was referring to the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]. KNLA, DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army], and Tatmadaw forces remain active in Dweh Loh Township; however DKBA Special Battalion #777 operating in central and southern Papun District, locally referred to as *Gk'Saw Wah* ['White Elephant'], has been reconfigured as a state-controlled Border Guard Force battalion, as of August 2010; see: "The end of the DKBA?" *The Irrawaddy*, August 2010.

³ For more on Tatmadaw military practices in areas over which Tatmadaw forces do not exert consolidated military control, see: *Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review: Human rights concerns in KHRG research areas*, KHRG, July 2010; for more on targeting of civilians in Papun District, see: *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010. For more general information on Tatmadaw attempts to establish firmer military control over non-State spaces in Karen State, see *Village Agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008, pp. 116 – 132

⁴ Note that although the so-called Northern Offensive (2005-2008) officially terminated in December 2008, when the frequency and intensity of co-ordinated multi-battalion attacks decreased and soldiers withdrew from 30 camps across Northern Karen State, Tatmadaw military operations continue to launch sporadic and unpredictable attacks that deliberately target civilians and their food resources in areas beyond established or consolidated military

Northern Karen State were a central and defining feature. A conservative estimate suggests that, in the first half of 2010 alone, at least 13 civilians were killed by Tatmadaw troops operating in Papun, Nyaunglebin and Toungoo Districts.⁵ Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to physical injury and death arising from the unstable military situation in Karen State⁶ and, in the past two months, KHRG has reported incidents in which pregnant women have given birth, miscarried⁷ or been killed by mortars⁸ while fleeing from military hostilities in other parts of Karen State.

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

- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010
- *Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control*, KHRG, August 2010
- *Central Papun District: Village-level decision-making and strategic displacement*, KHRG, August 2010
- *Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control*, KHRG, August 2010
- *Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River*, KHRG, August 2010
- *Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District* (October 2009)
- *IDPs, land confiscation and forced recruitment in Papun District* (July 2009)
- *IDP conditions and the rape of a young girl in Papun District* (April 2009)

Photos documenting the human rights situation in Papun District are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* (updated June 2010), *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* (updated June 2009) and other previous KHRG photo galleries and photo sets. These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at www.khr.org.

control. For background on the Northern Offensive and an update on Tatmadaw operations in Papun district since the withdrawal from forward positions in December 2008, see *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010 and “Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District”, KHRG, October 2009

⁵ For recent figures on civilian deaths, villages burned or destroyed and IDP populations in Northern Karen State, see *Protracted Displacement and Chronic Poverty in Eastern Burma / Myanmar*, TBBC, 2010, pp. 50.

⁶ For information about other recent incidents in which the Tatmadaw has directly targeted women and children in military attacks in Papun district, see “Human rights violations in Karen State”, Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), August 2010. For information generally concerning maternal and reproductive health in eastern Burma, see *Diagnosis Critical: Health and human rights in eastern Burma*, BPHWT, October 2010, pp.33 – 35; and *Chronic Emergency: Health and human rights in eastern Burma*, BPHWT, 2006, pp.39 – 41.

⁷ “Human rights abuses and obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians amidst ongoing conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts,” KHRG, January 2011, Appendix 3, pp.13

⁸ “Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts,” KHRG, November 2010, Appendix 2, pp. 27

