



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

June 29, 2011 / KHRG #2011-B15

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**Nyaunglebin Interviews: May 2011**

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*This bulletin contains the full transcripts of three interviews conducted by KHRG researchers in May 2011 with villagers from Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District. The interviewees described the following human rights issues: forced relocation; threats to shell or burn villages; movement restrictions, including curfews, the requirement of travel permission documents and the restriction of river travel by boat; theft and looting; restrictions on the transport of medicine in civilian areas; arrest and enforced disappearance; killing of villagers; forced labour, including portering, camp and road construction and maintenance, the production of construction materials, and sentry duty; the use of villagers to shield Tatmadaw troops during foot patrols; and abuse by non-state armed groups. The villagers also raised concerns regarding food insecurity, access to livelihoods and access to health care, particularly while living in forced relocation sites. In order to address these concerns, the interviewees explained that villagers use strategies including: covert travel to agricultural projects to avoid curfews and movement restrictions; individual and collective negotiation, including with senior military authorities or non-military authorities; bribery; false compliance with relocation orders; submission of petition letters; and temporary strategic displacement to evade immediate human rights threats. These interviews were received in May 2011 along with ten other interviews with villagers from Nyaunglebin District.<sup>1</sup>*

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**Interview | Saw B--- (male, 31), Ta--- village, Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District (May 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a KHRG researcher. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Buddhist

**Marital Status:** Single

**Occupation:** Farmer

**Position:** [censored for security]

**Can you tell us about the situation in your old village, as you have known?**

The situation was, we couldn't work as we wanted. We had to face the SPDC government.<sup>3</sup> You could go [only] when they allow you to go. Like, to go and work in the fields, you had to go and

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<sup>1</sup> When these interviews have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Nyaunglebin District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Nyaunglebin District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Livelihood consequences of SPDC restrictions and patrols in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, September 2009.

<sup>2</sup> When conducting interviews, KHRG researchers use loose question guidelines and 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.

take a travel permission document from them. You could go and work after you went and got a travel permission document. They'd blame [accuse] you when they see you going to work without a travel permission document, and problems would happen.

**Did the Army [Tatmadaw] stay in the village?**

The army base was in front of our village, in a village called Ka---. It was close to our village. It wasn't so far. It was [*distance censored for security*] miles from our village.

**Did they always come to the village?**

They always came. Before, an army unit came and stayed with us for a month in our village. They were from MOC #567.<sup>4</sup>

**How many households were in your village?**

There were [*number censored for security*] households and over 300 people.

**What did villagers do for their livelihoods?**

Some people did daily work [day labour] and some people had small farms so they cultivated their farms. No one farmed hill fields. Some people farmed [flat fields] and some did daily work.

**Did they face problems in their work?**

Everybody had a problem in the village, because we lived in the same village.

**Did they have enough rice to eat?**

There was a barrier [to having enough rice] because you couldn't do what you wanted to do. People who did daily work couldn't go and work as they wished. They had to get a permission document from the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] to go and work. If the situation wasn't good, they wouldn't allow you to go outside [of the village]. It was very bad for villagers if they couldn't go and do their own work.

**What were the human rights abuses that happened in the village, or that villagers had to face?**

We needed to do our work but we couldn't because we had to work for them [the Tatmadaw]. They ordered us to go and build fences around their camp or roof their huts. It isn't good if you don't go and work for them [the villagers would have problems if they refused to work]. We did their work and we couldn't do our own work.

**Did they come and make demands from the village head?**

Yes, they demanded one person from each house from the village head. Each villager they asked for had to go and fence their camp. You had to bring ten logs, five bamboo poles and ten

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<sup>3</sup> The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was officially 'dissolved' on March 30th 2011; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term 'SPDC' was used by the villagers interviewed for this report, and is therefore retained in the translations above.

<sup>4</sup> Note that there is no Military Operation Command (MOC) #567. The villager likely meant to say Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #567.

shingles of thatch with you. You had to go and work. It took two or three days. You had to go and clean the camp compound when the grass grew up. They call it *loh ah pay*.<sup>5</sup>

**Did they come and oppress villagers?**

They came and demanded chickens. If the villagers didn't organize [the animals] for them, they'd steal them at night time. They took them when the villagers gave them, and they stole them when the villagers didn't give them. They'd still steal, even if the villagers didn't give them [what was demanded]. Their leaders tell them '*Don't steal*,' but their soldiers steal when their leaders can't see.

**Did they do anything to women when they saw them?**

No.

**How about children?**

For children, as I told you a moment ago, the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw] gives them trouble when they are seen and don't have documents. The soldiers fine them. Everyone has to carry a permission document. You can't go anywhere without a permission document.

**Which armed groups are active in your area?**

There was the DKBA Army in the past, but they all went back. I had to be village head when the DKBA Army was there. I was 20 years old at that time. Fighting with the KNLA happened beside our village. We knew nothing. They came and asked us. We told them that we didn't know. They said it wasn't true that we didn't know. They [DKBA soldiers] said we fed them [KNLA soldiers] but I told them '*No, we didn't feed them*.' They called me and punched and beat me for a little while. After that they called me back to their Battalion Commander and he interrogated me. Then they gave me punishment for a month. I had to build a pagoda.

**Which DKBA unit was it?**

They were from Brigade #777, a unit under Officer Taw Teh.

**Did he come and arrest you?**

It was one of his soldiers, under the command of Officer Pa Leh.

**When did it happen?**

It was over 14 or 15 years ago. I don't remember the exact date. There was just the DKBA. The Burmese Army [Tatmadaw] hadn't come yet. They [the DKBA] came and stayed with us once. It lasted five or six years. The Burmese Army never came at that time when the DKBA was there. The Burmese Army came after the DKBA went back. After one or two years, we had to move [relocate]. We had to move once.

**Which SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] units came and stayed?**

The unit that came and ordered us to move was [LIB] #439.<sup>6</sup> They were not an MOC. They were a battalion. They were from Kw---. They ordered us to move. We had to move within seven

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<sup>5</sup> *Loh ah pay*; a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

days. They wouldn't let us stay longer. We had to move within seven days. We had to move beside a village called Ka---

**Did you have to go and work when you stayed in your old village?**

Yes, we had to go and do that [work].

**Did the villagers have to flee because of the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] operations?**

We had to flee when fighting happened. We came back after the fighting was finished. We fled twice from fighting. The fighting happened beside our village. We all fled to the jungle. Just the eldest people were still left. Everybody fled, including children. We came back after the Burmese [Tatmadaw soldiers] went back.

**Did you remember the date when they asked you to move?**

We moved [relocated] in August 2002. I don't remember the date.

**Who demanded you to move?**

It was [Tatmadaw] Army unit [LIB] #439. I don't know whether they were ordered from above or not. They decided it.

**Why did they demand villagers to move?**

They said we welcomed the KNU and fed them. They said they would separate us, so they ordered us to move beside their camp. They ordered two or three village tracts that were close to us to move also. They gave the order, and they came and waited at our village and ordered us to move within seven days. We could move people and food but we had to leave our houses. Later, they said we had to dismantle our houses. Some people dismantled their homes and some still kept their houses [intact], but those were destroyed by the rain because the houses had no roofs. Some people went and stayed [in the relocation site] for one or two years. Their workplaces [agricultural projects] were far from them. They couldn't come back and cultivate them [their agricultural projects], so some people sold their houses. People from the city came and bought them. We went and stayed there [at the relocation site] for three years, and then we came back and some people still had their houses but some didn't. To be able to come back and stay, we had to go and meet together with the village heads and [Tatmadaw] leaders. Each of us paid 10,000 kyat (US \$12.58)<sup>7</sup> to the [Tatmadaw] leaders. Then they let us come back and stay.

**Did all the villagers go to the relocation site?**

All of them. No one was left.

**How many villages did they order to move?**

There were three village tracts there. There were four villages in G--- village tract, three villages in our village tract and four villages in H--- village tract. All those villages have to move beside the [Tatmadaw] army camp.

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<sup>6</sup> For previous KHRG documentation of forced relocation in Ler Doh Township in 2006 linked to LIB #439, see: "Forced Relocation, Restrictions, and Abuses in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, July 2006.

<sup>7</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this bulletin are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of June 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US\$1 = 795 kyat.

**What is the name of the place where you were relocated [to]?**

The place where we lived they called Yo---, and the *su see*<sup>8</sup> [relocation site] was the place where G--- village tract was relocated to.

**What does 'su see' mean?**

It means they want to make it become a big village tract [a village tract with a large population].

**How many years did you stay at the relocation site?**

Three years. We faced a big problem when we went and stayed there. To come back and work [in your agricultural project], you had to come back [pass] in front of their camp. You couldn't leave as you wish.

**For three years, what did you do when you went and stayed at the relocation site?**

We came back and worked at our workplaces [agricultural projects]. It was far, two miles away. They didn't allow us to sleep [at the agricultural projects]. We had to come back and sleep at the relocation site. We travelled on foot. Every villager came back to do his work. In the rainy season, the water arrived up to here [*the villager gestured to his knee*]. There was no place to work [in the relocation site].

**What were the problems that you had to face when you stayed there?**

Travel restrictions, like you couldn't go back to your village. You could go out [only] when they allowed you. You couldn't bring a basket [when leaving the relocation site to work]. You could bring only one pack of rice, [enough] for one person. You couldn't take extra. They fined you [for carrying extra rice]. They arrested one of our villagers. They said he was a member of KNLA, because they saw a mole on his face [and they had heard that one of the KNLA soldiers had a mole on his face]. People told them [Tatmadaw soldiers] '*No, he isn't [a KNLA soldier]*.' They still kept him, and we had to buy him back with money. We had to give 10,000 kyat (US \$12.58).

**Did they abuse him?**

They didn't beat him, but they kept him at *bpah kuh thoo* [a secret place]. We had to get him out by giving money. They didn't abuse him.

**Did they feed him?**

They fed him, and they detained him just for one night. They arrested him in the morning and people went and picked him up at night.

**How was the situation different from your village when you were in the relocation site?**

The difference was that you couldn't come back to work in your village as you liked. It was worse for poor people. They had to sell things that they had saved. Because their livelihoods weren't going well, people who had cows sold their cows, and people who had buffaloes sold their buffaloes. People who had houses sold their houses because they had no food to eat. You couldn't go back and work when you stayed there [at the relocation site]. You weren't free anymore. It was too far to go back and do our work, so some people sold their houses.

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<sup>8</sup> '*Su see*' is a Burmese term meaning 'to gather' or 'to collect'. The term '*su see ywa*' is often used by villagers to refer to a village designated as a relocation site.

**Did the SPDC [Tatmadaw] order you to go and work when you lived in the relocation site?**

They called ten people [from the village], or one person from each house, to go and carry things for them when they went into the forest. Sometimes, it took six or seven days. They went around [patrolled] in the area [near the relocation site].

**Did fighting happen when you went and portered for the soldiers?**

They said they would kill us if fighting happened, so the KNLA didn't shoot at them. They had said it, and the KNLA heard it so the KNLA didn't do anything. They couldn't do anything until now. The SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers said '*You [villagers] will have to die if a landmine explodes beside your hut and you don't escape.*'

**Were there landmines in your area?**

There were no landmines. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] threatened the villagers, so the KNLA couldn't do that [plant landmines]. If they did that [planted landmines], we'd have been harmed. They [the Tatmadaw] told us we'd have to move if fighting happened beside our village.

**Did they order you to work more when you moved to the relocation site?**

Forced labour has decreased, but we have to go and work every year in their base. You have to go and make fences twice a year.

**Did the village head go and meet with them?**

Village heads met with them every day. They called village heads to meetings every day. They call us the KNLA's children. There were Burmese people [living] beside our village. The Tatmadaw didn't order them a lot. They didn't get any trouble, even if a mine exploded beside their village. The Tatmadaw treats Karen people especially badly. For Burmese people, they treat them especially well because they are their own people.

**Were there Burmese people in the place where you were moved?**

There were Burmese people who had to move. There were two villages in our village tract. We had to move and they also had to move. In the upper part of our village, about five miles away, there was a Burmese village but the SPDC Army didn't order them to do forced labour. They just ordered Karen people.

**Has your village head ever gone to meet with SPDC [Tatmadaw] leaders about forced labour?**

We always go and meet with them, but you can't ask them to reduce forced labour. You have to bring things for them when you go to them. You go one time and you have to bring things for that time. You have to bring one or two chickens when you go and meet with them.

**Do they reduce the work [demands for forced labour] when you go to meet them and bring food for them?**

No they don't reduce it.

**Didn't they feel *ah na deh* [to do that]?<sup>9</sup>**

No, they didn't feel *ah na deh*.

**Was there a clinic in the relocation site?**

There was no clinic. There was a clinic in our old village. They [the Tatmadaw] set up a clinic. We had to go to He---, when we got sick [while staying at the relocation site].

**How long was the trip?**

It was seven miles from the place where we lived [at the relocation site].

**How did people go?**

We went on foot in the rainy season and with motorbikes or bicycles in the summer. You had to carry patients [because the roads were not navigable in the rainy season].

**Didn't they [Tatmadaw soldiers] help?**

No, they didn't help.

**Do you have to spend your own money when you go to the hospital?**

You have to spend your own money when you go to the hospital.

**You said there was a clinic in your old village. Who set up the clinic?**

The Burmese Army [Tatmadaw]. They just gave a teacher [nurse or medic] but they didn't provide medicine. The teacher bought medicine with her own money and treated villagers, but it wasn't for free. You had to pay money. You couldn't go and buy medicine by yourself. They'll arrest you when they see you carrying medicine. The teacher had to go and buy medicine.

**Is there a school in your village?**

Yes, it's a primary school. It goes up to fourth standard. There are three school teachers from our village and two from outside the village. In total there are five school teachers.

**Who founded the school, villagers or the SPDC government?**

Villagers set it up. For the school, they didn't order us to dismantle the school [when the village was ordered to relocate], like the Po--- school. We didn't need to build it again when we came back. We repaired it and we could use it. Students have increased, so we have to build a new one because it's a small school, but there are more students. There are over 100 students, maybe 140 or 150 students.

**How do the school teachers get salaries?**

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<sup>9</sup> The phrase *ah na deh*, for which there is no direct translation in English, is commonly used in both Karen and Burmese in a wide range of contexts. It can be used variously to signify embarrassment, obligation or restraint due to feelings of respect, delicacy, honour or a fear of offending. In this case, the researcher is asking if the Tatmadaw officers felt ashamed to accept the chickens while at the same time continuing to demand villagers to perform forced labour duties.

The government comes and provides a salary to them. They get 28,000 or 30,000 kyat (US \$35 – 38). The students have to buy books and other school materials themselves. There's no support.

**Do students have to pay money when they go to school?**

Yes, they have to pay money. A small [young] student has to pay 500 kyat (US \$0.63) and a big [older] student has to pay 1,000 kyat (US \$1.26) for school admission, but it doesn't include buying books.

**Do the school teachers receive food support from the government?**

No.

**Are there any issues that you want to raise but I didn't ask you about?**

We want peace and equal rights, like that we can go as we wish [travel freely]. Like we can go to work as we wish. But now, they obstruct us and you can't go and do your work very well; for example if they allow you to go at 6:00 am, you have to go at 6:00 am [exactly]. You can't go as you want. In the rainy season, you need to be quick to go back and work on your farm in your village. You need a boat, but they don't allow you to travel by boat. You have to swim, so the women can't go. There were one or two rivers between our village and the relocation site. They stopped [obstructed] travel by boat, so you couldn't go. Just people who knew how to swim could go. People who couldn't swim had to stay. Some people travelled secretly by boat, and they were harmed when they were seen [by Tatmadaw soldiers]. It's good if we don't have those things happening. It would be different if we had freedom in our work.

**Do they still call for forced labour since you came here [returned to your village]?**

It still happens, until now, that they call for forced labour. They call four or five villagers when they need them, when they travel [patrol from] village to village. We have to carry their backpacks and they let [force] you to go at the front [walk in front of patrolling soldiers]. They do that so that the KNLA won't dare to shoot them. If the KNLA shoots, it will hit the villagers first. They patrol with 20 or 30 soldiers and they include 10 villagers with them. You have to walk between them [villagers have to walk interspersed with soldiers].

**What about your trip here?**

We came secretly. If they know that we come back here, they'll do something to us. We came secretly, and with understanding [awareness]. They'll take action against us if they know that we come here. They'll give you punishment if they know you come here. They'll kill you or demand money. They'll put you in jail if they don't kill you. They'll say we communicate with or meet with the KNLA. We're under their hands and they step down on our necks when we live there.

**Do they stay in your village now?**

They don't stay in our village. They live in Ka--- village in the *su see* [relocation] village tract, where we were staying at the relocation site.

**What is the [Tatmadaw] Army unit that stays in Ka--- now?**

They're [LIB] #--- [*battalion number censored for security*]. They're from Arakan State [under the Tatmadaw's Western Command].

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## Interview | Saw So--- (male, 52), Wo--- village, Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District (May 2011)

*The following interview was conducted by a KHRG researcher. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Christian

**Marital Status:** Married

**Occupation:** Farmer

**Position:** [censored for security]

### **Please can you tell us about the situation in your old village?**

We had to face many kinds of problems when we lived in our old village. The SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] oppressed us. I won't say the incidents that happened in 2007, 2008 and 2009. I will tell just the current incidents. In February 2011, the SPDC Army wanted to arrest me. They said I had contacted the KNU. I foresaw this, because my villager went and sent a message to the [Tatmadaw] army camp. He came back and told me that the SPDC soldiers had asked for me, and asked me to go [to meet the Tatmadaw commander]. He was asked to send a message back if I wouldn't go. So I asked him to go and report that I couldn't go. He went and reported that and then he came back, but I wasn't at home. So he told your auntie [Saw So---'s wife], and he went back again to the army camp and reported that I wasn't at home. I came back and your auntie told me that the soldiers had asked for me for this reason; she said: *'They asked you to go and meet with them. You can't refuse. You have to go.'* I thought and I told her, *'They don't know me, so why are they asking for me?'* She said, maybe they just wanted to meet with me. [But] If they just wanted to meet me, they could've asked me to meet next time. [I said] *'I think, there must be a reason.'*

I considered it, and I went to sleep in another place in the evening. They came and arrested my eldest son, who's 21 years old. They tied him up and took him back [to the Tatmadaw camp]. They told him, *'Your father cooperates with the koh per thoo [KNLA soldiers].<sup>10</sup> He sends bullets [to the KNLA] and keeps may bpo [grenades or landmines] and walkie-talkies.'* But my son told them that there were no such things: *'My father doesn't do those things. My father is a farmer.'* They said: *'That's not true, don't lie. If you'll lie, we'll kill you.'* They tied him up and dragged him [to the Tatmadaw camp]. [The soldiers heard] that people gave money [as a tax] from fishing and farming, and that I was a member of the committee [that collected the tax]. This information spread out to another village, and they said I had a bag of money so they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] asked my son. My son said, *'My father doesn't have money bags, weapons, bombs, bullets or walkie-talkies. If you don't believe, come and search our home. I'd see it sometimes, if he had those things, because I stay together with him in the same house.'* He called [brought] the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers to my house.

At that time, I avoided [hid from the Tatmadaw]. I went to Da--- [where senior Tatmadaw leaders were based]. I went and planned [negotiated] with a top leader in Da---. His name is Na---. He's Burmese. He's a leader of the [political] party called Ke---. He [Na---] talked to the upper [Tatmadaw] leader and he said, *'He [Saw So---] is not a person like this. [Maybe] His younger brother's name [makes it] appear like he does something like that. Actually, it's not true. He*

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<sup>10</sup> The Karen phrase *koh per thoo* translates literally as 'black scarves'. It is used to refer specifically to KNLA commandoes with six months or more special training, or as a general euphemism for KNLA soldiers.

*doesn't to meet [the Tatmadaw]. The Burmese [Tatmadaw soldiers] will take action against him, and kill him, if he lets himself meet with the SPDC soldiers. Now, the SPDC soldiers have arrested his son, and dragged his son to an army camp.'*

He [the senior Tatmadaw officer] went back and discussed with the LID Commander, and asked me to go and meet with the officer. He said he had already organised it with the LID Commander, that [he had said], *'My man isn't a bad person. He's a good person. If you do something like this [falsely accuse him], a good person can become a bad person [start to cooperate with the KNLA].'* He organised this and he asked me to go and meet [the Tatmadaw commander] but I didn't dare to go and meet, because people said different things, like *'They're just persuading you.'* Then they [the Tatmadaw] said, *'We'll release your son.'* Other people said, *'Your son is young. He isn't guilty and he's young so they won't kill him. They're just threatening you. Maybe they'll kill you when you arrive there.'* I considered it, and I didn't dare to go. Before, I went twice a day [to meet Na--- and the senior Tatmadaw officer]. The next day, he [the Tatmadaw officer] said, *'You can't stay here without going to meet them [the Tatmadaw LID Commander]. Go and meet them. I've already organized it. You go, and if something happens inform me quickly.'* I went to them, and they released my son. I went and met with them. I brought food like chicken. If we go once, we have to spend money each time. I went four or five times. I brought chicken – one viss (1.6 kg. / 3.5 lb.) of chicken is 3,500 kyat (US \$4.40) – and duck and beer.

#### **How much did you have to spend?**

I forgot. I had to spend more the first time. The first time, I had to spend 40,000 kyat (US \$50). The second time was 20,000 kyat (US \$25), and it was 13,000 kyat (US \$16) the last three times. Later, they let me go but I had to go and visit them once every two or three days. For those ones [meetings], it didn't cost a lot. It cost just 1,500 to 3,000 kyat (US \$1.89 – 3.77) or 5,000 kyat (US \$6.29) because when I went, I had to bring things like Landon [cigarettes], cigars, betelnut and beers, and we drank together. They always asked me to go and see them. If I didn't go and meet them, they'd say, *'You're going and meeting with the koh per thoo [KNLA soldiers].'* That army unit went back [rotated out] now. They were from MOC #10. Their battalion number was 567.<sup>11</sup> I wouldn't have arrived to this place [the location of interview] if they hadn't gone back. I couldn't come here if the soldiers hadn't gone back.

#### **Can you tell us about the livelihoods in your old village?**

In 2006, we were relocated to Ka---. We had to go and stay there. We went and stayed there for three years. After three years, we came back. We gave them money when we had to go. We had to [were ordered to] move once in 2004. The elders gathered, and we went to Da--- [where senior Tatmadaw leaders were based]. Each village tract paid 500,000 kyat (US \$629). The five village tracts [combined] paid 2,500,000 kyat (US \$3,145). We went and gave them [Tatmadaw soldiers] money. They said, *'You don't need to move. You can stay.'*

In 2005, they started again. They said, *'You need to move.'* We couldn't do anything. They ordered us to go and build huts [in the intended relocation site]. We had to pay the money again. That time, we paid 200,000 or 300,000 kyat (US \$252 – 377), but each village tract paid differently. In 2006, we couldn't pay money anymore. We had to move. We delayed the time. We told them to wait, that we hadn't done our [agricultural] work yet. We collected money, over

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<sup>11</sup> Note that KHRG has previously reported LIB #567 as being under Tatmadaw MOC #16, not MOC #10. See: "SPDC forces attack rice harvest to force villagers into 'new towns'," KHRG, November 2006. MOCs #10 and #16 were both documented as active in Nyaunglebin District in 2006 as part of the Tatmadaw's 2005-2008 Offensive in northern Karen State; see: "Forced Relocation, Restrictions, and Abuses in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, July 2006. For background on the 2005-2008 Offensive, see: *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010.

470,000 kyat (US \$591). All the elders of the community gathered, and we went and bought golden necklaces [for the Tatmadaw officers]. We could do our work if we could stay in our villages. We couldn't do our work if we had to go and live there [in the relocation site]. We'd have had to face many problems. We wouldn't have been able to do our work. It [the relocation site] was far from our village. We collected money, and we got over 470,000 kyat. We gave one necklace to the Battalion Deputy Commander and a ring to the Battalion Commander. But they said no.

We all had to move after *Tah Law* [the water festival] on the first day of the new year. They ordered us to work when we went and stayed there. We had to build the road and make the fence. We can't tell all [the work] because it was a lot. We had to build the road and make the fence. We had to fence our houses, and build a road between each house. The place where we went and lived [the relocation site], it was the very worst. [In our village] if we keep [cultivate] 200 baskets of paddy grain, we can have enough food. When we lived there, we kept [cultivated] 250 baskets of paddy grain, but it wasn't enough. I don't know why. It was like you couldn't find food. You had to buy vegetables. You had to exchange [trade] for rice when you didn't have money. Some people had to borrow rice from other people who lived there. People had to go and borrow rice from them. They said, '*Find the way to be able to go back to your village.*'

### **Who told you that?**

Villagers who were older than us. They're rich people. People who didn't have rice went and took rice from them. They also didn't have enough when they [first] went and stayed there [in the relocation site]. They told us to find a way to come back and stay at our village. We gathered, and we went to Da---. We collected money again there [in the relocation site]. We looked at the households and their living standards and the village, and people collected differently [the villagers pooled money according each household's resources]. I can't tell you all the details. But I can tell you that in my village we collected 6,550 kyat (US \$8.24) from each house. There were [*number censored for security*] houses. We collected money and sent it to them [the Tatmadaw]. But we couldn't come back and stay at our old village. We came back and stayed between Ha--- and Ko---. We had to stay in the farm fields. We had to build here and there [in specified places], and keep the road in the middle [of the houses]. We stayed there for three months, then we could come back to our village.

### **How many years did you have to stay in the relocation site?**

2006, 2007 and 2008. Three years. We came back in 2008. We came back and did our work. Villagers have to work hard. [In the relocation site], you have to go to work on time. You can go at 6:00 am. For us [now] we go when we want, for example at 4:00 am when there's moon light. For them [in the relocation site], they aren't the same. They have to go at 6:00 am [the villagers in the relocation site can't leave the village until 6:00 am]. All the people have to come back and stay in the [relocation] village by 6:00 pm. You can't stay at your workplace [agricultural project]. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] will punish you [for violating the curfew]. They'll ask you for chicken or money or ducks. So villagers face problems.

### **Is there forced labour?**

Yes, there is. They ordered villagers to go cut down trees or clear plants and forest that are close to our village, in the early summer [dry season] this year. It was at the end of 2010, around November or December, at the time people have to harvest. The paddy plants became red [ready to harvest] but people couldn't harvest. Trees fell down on the farms, and paddy plants were destroyed. Many farms were [partly] destroyed, but not the whole farm. For example, one or two acres of a farm was destroyed if the farm had five or six acres. One or two

acres of some villagers' farms were destroyed, but some villagers' farms were just a little [damaged].

**You said there are over 50 households in your village. What about the village's population?**

There are over 100 people.

**What do villagers do for their livelihoods?**

Some people are farmers and some people are daily workers. For the poorer people, they go to the jungle and find vegetables. They come back and exchange the vegetables for rice, and some people sell them to get money. They buy items like salt, chilli and others. They go and sell vegetables in the town. People couldn't do that when they went and stayed at Ka--- [the relocation site]. People faced a lot of problems. [As] I've said, there wasn't enough food even if we keep [cultivated] 250 baskets of paddy grain. This reason also was included [contributed to the food shortages]: people could go and get vegetables and sell them in the town when they lived in the old village. They could go all the time. They could go in the morning and come back in the evening. Sometimes they could go early and come back late. But when you go and stay in Ka---, they [Tatmadaw soldiers] limit the time. If you don't reach home when the time is over [before curfew], they'll give you punishment.

**Did you have to face food shortages when you stayed in your old village?**

No, there was enough. Poor people could go and get vegetables from the forest and sell them in the town. They could make their living. When you go and live in Ka---, you can't do like this. Just to come back for farming, they check you and said, '*Don't bring a packet of rice.*' They said we brought rice for the jungle. If you pack rice, it means you bring it for jungle people, the *koh per thoo* [KNLA soldiers].

**Did villagers have to face human right abuses in your village, like rape and oppression?**

There was no such thing.

**What about forced labour?**

For that one, it has happened. They asked for forced labour and called villagers to carry things when they arrived to the village. They demanded chicken. They stole the chickens at night if you didn't give them [meet the demands] but we didn't note down the exact dates. [Tatmadaw Light Infantry] Battalion #567, that already went back [rotated out], after I went and met them, they came to the village and the Battalion Commander stayed at another house. His soldiers stole the villagers' chickens, but he didn't see it. The Battalion Commander's name was Kyaw Ko Hteh. They are a Light Infantry Division [Battalion], under MOC #10. I had to go and meet him [the Battalion Commander]. If I didn't go and meet him, he'd have said I went to meet with the *koh per thoo* [KNLA soldiers]. He didn't believe me, so he came and stayed at my home. He stayed at my house but he spread his soldiers everywhere. His soldiers stole my duck. It was very close to my house, but the commander didn't see them. But they saw [in their eyes] I was guilty. I saw it [when they stole the duck] but I didn't inform him [the Battalion Commander]. I worried that if I told the commander, he'd feel bad and do something to me because I had already lost my reputation [by being accused of contacting the KNLA]. So I didn't say anything. I just stayed silently.

**Because of the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] activities, have your villagers fled to other places?**

No, only I had to flee.

**Which armed groups were active in your area?**

It was [Infantry] Battalion #242, under the command of MOC #10.<sup>12</sup> [Light Infantry] Battalion #567 came after #242, and now LIB #--- [*battalion number censored for security*] is active in this area.

**When were villagers forced to move to the relocation site?**

In 2006. I don't remember the month.

**Who forced you to move to the relocation site?**

[Light Infantry] Battalion #439, I forgot the Battalion Commander's name but the Deputy Battalion Commander was Aung Htay Win.

**Why did they force you to move to the relocation site?**

They said the *koh per thoo* [KNLA soldiers] had arrived to our village and that we were feeding them so they'd have strength and they'd fight [the Tatmadaw]. So they asked us to move to the relocation site.

**Did they send order letters or come by themselves?**

They came and ate our animals. We didn't go when they gave the order. We still stayed. We did [acted] like we'd go the next day or the day after that. They came and they said if villagers didn't move, they'd burn down the village and shell the village.

**What did villagers do when the Army [Tatmadaw] came to the village?**

As I told you, when we received the order before, we gathered and discussed whether we could give money or not, like in 2004. We gave money in 2004 and 2005 [to avoid relocation]. In 2006, we couldn't pay so we had to move. So villagers faced problems. Some villagers didn't have carts. So they just went with people [on foot]. They went and stayed on the ground [without shelter]. They went and carried [their possessions] back [to the relocation site] after the people who had carts finished carrying their stuff. All the villagers moved there. No one was still left. Not only villages, but whole village tracts [relocated]. All the villages in G--- and K--- village tracts had to move.

**How many villages are in your village tract?**

De---, Ha---, Ko---, Wo--- and Ya---. In all there are five villages. In K--- village tract, there is Ta-- -, Gk--- and Le---. All three of these villages also had to move.

**What is the name of the place where you were forced to move?**

Ka---. I went and stayed there for three years.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that KHRG has previously reported IB #242 as being under Tatmadaw MOC #16, not MOC #10. See: "SPDC forces attack rice harvest to force villagers into 'new towns'," KHRG, November 2006. MOCs #10 and #16 were both documented as active in Nyaunglebin District in 2006 as part of the Tatamdaw's 2005-2008 Offensive in northern Karen State; see: "Forced Relocation, Restrictions, and Abuses in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, July 2006.

**How many houses were in the relocation site?**

Many houses. I don't know how many. I thought there were over a hundred houses.

**In the relocation site, which armed groups were active in the area?**

There was [Light Infantry] Battalion #439, led by Aung Htay Win. The Battalion Commander's name was Zaw Tun.

**What did villagers do when they lived there?**

They came back and worked here [in their old village].

**Did they have to get permission documents from the soldiers?**

Yes, the villagers had to get them. They had to pay 500 kyat (US \$0.63) to get a document. The document gives permission for one month. You can't go back and stay there [sleep in the old village]. You go in the morning and come back [to the relocation site] in the evening. We left at 6:00 am and came back at 6:00 pm. They'd put you in stocks if you were late, and demand things from you.

**How was the situation different, when you lived in your village and in the relocation site?**

The situation was worse when we went and stayed there [in the relocation site]. You couldn't sleep at night. There were many insects. Some people were poor; they just had one mosquito net for the whole family. [But] one family had to have at least two or three mosquito nets, [because] there were a lot of mosquitoes. For example, in the daytime, if you hung your clothes like this and you went and shake them, there would be a lot of mosquitoes. Diseases [illnesses] were caused because of this. Diseases like malaria, fever, and *tah her per hsah* [an illness that affects the stomach]. Five people from my village died when they went and lived there. They died because of [general] sickness and malaria. Two others died of 'elders' sickness' [of general infirmity associated with old age]. They wouldn't have died if they'd stayed in the village, because the space is large and we can get fresh air. But there, we couldn't get fresh air because the place was dense [densely populated].

**Were villagers in the relocation site forced to do labour?**

Yes, we had to build the road. You couldn't refuse. You have to go when they order you. Even if you don't have food, you have to go [villagers have to work for the Tatmadaw instead of for their own livelihoods, even if they don't have enough food]. You have to go and do what they order you to. If you don't go, they'll fine you. We had to build their camp and fence their camp compound. We had to go when they ordered us. We went and if we didn't finish, we still had to go next day if they ordered us. They'd fine you if you didn't go.

**Did forced labour increase or decrease when you went and lived in the relocation site?**

It increased, because we went and stayed close to them [Tatmadaw soldiers]. We had to build the road. We fenced their camp and fenced the village in one to three layers [rings of fences]. Then we had to fence our houses too. We had to make a way [path or road] between each house. We had to build a road through the village. We have to keep a way [path or road between] each row of five houses.

**How did you plan to be able to come back and stay in your village?**

We collected money, and we went to find the way to Da--- [where senior Tatmadaw officers were based]. We gave money [to the Tatmadaw] but we couldn't come back and stay directly at our village. We had to stay along the way for three months.

**Was there a school in your old village?**

Yes. It went up to fourth standard. The school was built by villagers. Later, the government gave their staff so it became a government school. They sent three school teachers. They give them salaries.

**Do students receive support?**

No, you have to pay.

**Do they teach Karen?**

No, they don't. But they teach it in nursery school. We have a nursery school in our village. The nursery school was built by [*position censored for security*]. They called it... an organization [*the interviewee could not remember the name*]. The school was built in [*location censored for security*].

**How many students are in the school?**

There are about 60 to 70 students, and three teachers. Two teachers are from outside and one is from the village.

**Is there a clinic?**

No.

**Where do you go if you get sick?**

We go to He---.

**What about villagers who get sick, but not seriously?**

They just buy medicine and go to the pastor and ... [*audio recording inaudible*].

**Do you have to pay money to the pastor for the injections?**

Yes. He has to buy them.

**What's the current situation in your village?**

The current situation is just like this. We haven't heard anything, because their leaders have changed.

**Are there any other issues that you want to tell us about?**

No.

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## **Interview | Saw L--- (male, 53), T--- village, Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District (May 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a KHRG researcher. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Christian

**Marital Status:** Married

**Occupation:** Farmer

### **Was your village ever forced to move before?**

Starting in 2003, we were ordered to move.

### **So now you've gone back and stay in your village?**

Yes. We weren't ordered to go back and stay. But our villagers are poor. [When] They went and stayed at other people's places they couldn't do anything [livelihoods]. So they came back to their own place.

### **What made you become a Baptist?**

My mind changed. I found a true God who could help and give us salvation. Because I found God, there's a benefit to what we've faced. I found through [the experience] the gospel and proclamation of God. Even though we experienced many [bad] things, the gospel became a benefit for us.

### **What do you mean it has been a benefit of what you've experienced?**

When we were animists, we had to face war, burning of our houses and death. My father, my parent-in-law, my son and finally my wife have died. Because our worship wasn't correct. So we were fed up.

### **What do you do for your livelihood?**

My sons do *htoo sih* [flat paddy fields] and *gker* [peanuts].

### **What are the different [agricultural] activities for *htoo sih* and *gker*?**

*Htoo sih* is activities to farm paddy in flat fields, and *gker* is activities to farm peanuts.

### **How many people are there in your family?**

I have three sons and a daughter. One [of the sons] is my son in-law. And two [grandchildren], a grandson and daughter. In total there are seven people, including me. We live in the same house.

### **How do you manage food for your family?**

We have to experience difficulty. Even though it's difficult, we can still survive because my sons and daughter are in good health.

**How many houses in T--- village?**

There are [number censored for security] houses.

**Can you tell us about the situation in your village? What do villagers do for their livelihoods or education?**

There are about 15 houses that have plantations and animals. Most people are workers earning a bare [subsistence] living. They work one day, and they eat one day.

**Why do more workers earn a bare living?**

Because we don't have farms, carts and cows. This thing has happened because of the forced demands. Because of debts, to be able to have food this year, they have to borrow from other people. It becomes like they work the whole year, but they get nothing because they have to pay back all of their debts. In March, many Burmese [Tatmadaw soldiers] came and stayed in the village. They entered and stayed seven or eight days. Villagers counted after the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw] left, and some people lost 3,000 or 4,000 kyat (US \$3.77 – 5.03). They had to give food [to the Tatmadaw soldiers]. They had to pay the cost, because the Burmese came and stayed.

**What do you mean? The Tatmadaw came and ate things in your village and the villagers had to pay the cost when they went back?**

Yes. It [food] was collected from the villagers.

**How many armed groups are active in your area?**

The armed groups are the Karen [KNLA] and the Burmese [Tatmadaw].

**Does the DKBA Army arrive there?**

No. they don't arrive [currently]. In 2000, they came and stayed in our area. They stayed until 2005 or 2006.

**What do these active armed groups do in your area?**

They said they'd come and teach civilians. But it has become like they come and find their enemy and get information from villagers. It becomes a problem when fighting happens and there's suffering of civilians. Those kinds of things. Because the KNLA is our people [of the same ethnicity], they [the Tatmadaw] look down on us. If something [KNLA activity] happens, they [Tatmadaw soldiers] say, *'Your relatives, you went and gave them food. You're hiding them.'* Mostly, we have faced this.

**Who told you that?**

The Burmese Army [Tatmadaw]. If something happens in a Burmese village, they [Burmese villagers] are the same ethnicity, so they face fewer problems. Mostly, Karen people have to face more of this.

**Does the Karen Army often go there [to T--- village]?**

They often go, because we live at the foot of the mountains.

**Do they make trouble for villagers when they go?**

No, they don't make trouble for villagers.

**Do they take free food from villagers when they go?**

They do take food for free from villagers. Mostly they pay the cost. Sometimes, because of villagers' kindness and organising, they feed them.

**What about taking by force?**

No, there's nothing like this.

**What about the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw]?**

Yes, they do [take by force]. They go around and beg for things. They ask for alcohol and are unruly. They threaten villagers and say lies.

**What do workers earn [do] for a bare [subsistence] living?**

They plant paddy and harvest groundnuts [peanuts]. They do hired jobs [day labour] from day to day.

**How much do they get per day?**

If you work one day you get 1,500 kyat (US \$1.87).

**Can they eat with 1,500 kyat?**

No.

**For how much do people sell a bowl of rice (1.56 kg. / 3.44 lb.)?**

It's 600 kyat (US \$0.75). It depends on the quality. Some are 600, 700 (US \$0.88) or 800 kyat (US \$1.01).

**How many problems do you think villagers face in their jobs?**

The problem they have to face the most is disturbing by the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw]. They're ordered to go and do sentry duty, carry rations and send messages. They have to face those things.

**What about travelling?**

They have to face [problems] too. Sometimes, the news isn't good. We don't dare to travel when we hear that they [the Tatmadaw and the KNLA] are close to each other. The fighting happens mostly between our villages. In 2008, this incident [fighting] happened in the lower village, and it happened in the upper villages in 2010. We've faced this.

**You want to mean two parts of the village, the upper and the lower parts?**

The Burmese Army entered the village and the Karen Army heard the news, and the Karen Army went and shot at them. The Karen Army attacked them [the Tatmadaw] when they went back. We have to face this problem in our area. They [the Tatmadaw] arrested us and we had to pay money. They left the village and the Karen Army attacked them on the way, so they

arrested us and we had to pay money. The villagers were afraid and they had to flee. In September, the incident happened and villagers were afraid so they fled. They went and stayed with other people in other villages, but the people didn't welcome them because they worried that the Army [Tatmadaw] would give them trouble. They [the Tatmadaw] kept [viewed] our village as a KNLA village.

**You mean villagers from other villages didn't welcome villagers from here?**

Yes. They didn't welcome them. It was the time when I went and was a [occupation censored for security] in He---. Villagers went to He--- [to avoid the Tatmadaw]. People from there didn't dare to welcome them. I had to go and organise, to explain to them [He--- residents] that my villagers are not bad people. [I said] *'They're good people. If you don't dare to accept them, I'll give my guarantee for them.'*

**How many villagers fled?**

Around one or two weeks after the fighting, men in the village didn't dare to stay in the village. Just women stayed behind. One or two households gathered and stayed together. When I went back and saw it, it looked like a group of chickens that gathered together. They [the Tatmadaw] went and cleared up the place. They shot students and people they saw, and shelled the village.

**Who shot them?**

The Burmese Army shot them.

**How long ago did it happen?**

In September 2010.

**Did any villagers get injured when they shot?**

One woman was injured.

**What happened to villagers who fled to He---?**

They stayed around, and came back when the Army [Tatmadaw] didn't go [near the village]. They [the Tatmadaw] didn't go close to the village after the fighting. They were scared. The villagers knew about that, so they went back to the village.

**Did they all flee to He---?**

Some fled to He--- and to other villages. They fled and stayed everywhere. They didn't dare to face them [Tatmadaw soldiers].

**Why?**

They [the Tatmadaw] said, *'You do that [cooperate with the KNLA], because the fighting happens close to your village.'* The Burmese soldiers said *'You did that to me [were responsible for the KNLA activity].'* We have to face this problem.

**Yesterday, you said that two villagers were killed. Can you explain to me about the incident?**

It was in August 2010. Two people [villagers] were killed. A bomb exploded beside their sentry hut. It was their turn to go and do sentry duty, so they went and did sentry duty. The bomb

exploded. The Burmese [Tatmadaw soldiers] came to the village and asked who was on duty. People told them the guys' names. The Burmese Army went and arrested them and killed them. They accused them of doing it [detonating the bomb]. They asked no questions.

**Do you know these two people's names?**

I know one. His name was M---. He was a Gy--- villager. He was Karen. He was around 60 years old. I don't know the other one. They stayed in the same village.

**Why did the Burmese Army kill them?**

They were accused of making the explosion.

**How do you know that those people [the Tatmadaw] killed them?**

I don't know. But they've disappeared since they were arrested. We think they were killed. They've disappeared since then, until now. I just guess. If something happened like this before, they [people who disappeared after being arrested] were killed.

**Have any other incidents like this happened?**

In September, a man was killed by a landmine. We don't know who made the explosion. Villagers were arrested.

**Do you know the guy's name?**

No, he was a Hs--- villager. It was in September 2010. He also disappeared. I don't know whether he was killed or not. Another was in Ga---. He went and worked in A---. His parents-in-law went and had treatment in N---. His wife is a [*occupation censored for security*]. He brought medicine and money for his parents-in-law to pay the treatment costs. People [Tatmadaw soldiers] saw the medicine and arrested him. He was arrested, and we didn't know how to find him. He disappeared. They detained him and didn't let us see him. They harmed him on the same night [he was detained] and they didn't dare to show us. We heard he was killed. We held a worship ceremony [funeral] for him.

**What [Tatmadaw] army unit is active in the T--- area?**

I am a [*occupation censored for security*]. I don't know the army units.

**When did it happen?**

In September 2010. I forgot his name. I don't remember. His father-in-law's name is Thara H---.

**Do you know the army unit that did it [arrested Thara H---'s son]?**

No.

**What do you think? Why did the Army do this thing?**

In my opinion, I think they make civilians poor. They threaten civilians until villagers don't have food to eat, can't think about their livelihoods and no time to think about education. They threaten us not to have contact with our resistance group. For our *poe lee* [literally 'children and grandchildren', here used in reference to the KNU/KNLA] to become weak, that's their purpose. [So] They make us poor. Because of becoming poor, we can't *maw htaw koh* [lift up our heads]. We just have to struggle with our livelihoods.

### **Where did you move when your village had to move?**

I was the headman. I was chairperson. We went and negotiated. Villagers gathered together and discussed it. We said, *'How we are going to organise it if we have to move? We'll have to dismantle our buildings and they'll be destroyed. It'll cost us if we build them up again. If it only costs one household 10,000 kyat (US \$12.58) not to move, [let's] try to discuss and negotiate not to move.'* For this reason, we, the elders, gathered and we went and organised.

### **How did you organise it?**

At that time, the intelligence hadn't been removed [it was prior to 2004].<sup>13</sup> We went and negotiated with them, about how they could find a way for us [to stay in the village]. Because we went and negotiated with them, they demanded from us [to pay] 500,000 kyat (US \$629) for one area, and we could stay for one more year. When next new Tatmadaw unit came [rotated in] the next year, they did the same thing.

### **How do they [Tatmadaw units] rotate?**

Once every six months. During the time when I served as village head, for five years, they ordered us to move five times. It's a way [for the Tatmadaw] to make money. When we organised some money, villagers could stay. They said we could stay and they said they'd report that the village had already moved. Another group [Tatmadaw unit] came and ordered us to move. We asked them why we had to move. We asked them, *'Can't we deal with you? Is it because we deal with people in the forest [the KNLA]? Aren't the villagers able to deal with you? Please tell us your difficulties, so that we can explain to villagers why we have to move.'* Then they [Tatmadaw soldiers] said, *'It's because the village heads aren't good.'* Then we replied to them, *'In the past, we paid 500,000 kyat for one area and they said that we could stay, but why this is happening to us again? It creates a problem for us.'* But they said we had to move. Then we had to go to the designated area and build one or two houses and take pictures and say we had already moved. But to be able to do that, we had to pay money to them. I did that five times. You had to go and build huts and take pictures to show that you had moved.

### **Did you have to do this every year?**

Yes, every year. It became a big problem to villagers.

### **It means they did it in this way so the information [that villagers had not relocated] never went up to the upper levels [of the Tatmadaw]?**

Never. For the first time as I told you, I went to N---. I went and met with [*occupations censored for security*] and they interviewed me because they heard about the news. I went to worship at C---. It was on a Sunday. They asked me and I spread the news to pray for people who were facing problems in Ler Doh Township. They asked me: *'How many villages, mosques, schools and churches are there in the area?' and 'Who's ordering you to move?'* and they gave us knowledge [advice] after they asked us questions. [They said] *'Villagers can prosecute if they have evidence and you will get more [should collect evidence].'*

### **What do you mean villagers can 'prosecute?'**

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<sup>13</sup> In October 2004 General Khin Nyunt, then-Prime Minister and chief of Burma's intelligence corps, was removed from his post and the intelligence apparatus under his control subsequently dismantled. For extensive background on the dismissal of Khin Nyunt and its implications for the country, see: Kyaw Yin Hlaing. "Myanmar in 2004: Why Military Rule Continues," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2005), pp.230-256.

If they [villagers] know the damage to their houses when they dismantle them, they can collect [assess] the cost of the damage and report to a court. People who do this will have to go and face [present] the case in the court. [The court will ask details] Like '*Who ordered you to do this?*' If the village head said the Burmese Army, it wouldn't show evidence, [because] it was just an oral order. So it would harm the villagers.

**You said you organized five times [to avoid relocation]. Were they all successful?**

Yes, we could stay in the village. The last time, they moved other villages. My village is located close to the road, so they left my village to stay. My village, the *su see* village [relocation site] and He--- are located close to the road, so we didn't need to move our village. For them [the Tatmadaw], they can travel easily [to T--- village] because the village stays close by. For others villages, they all had to move to Ka---.

**How many villages had to move?**

G--- and K--- village tracts. There are five villages in G---. They are Ha---, De---, Ko---, Wo--- and Ya---. In K--- village tract, there are Ta--- and Gk--- villages. In total it was seven villages.

**What is the situation in Ka--- now?**

In the last two years, since 2009, they [villagers who were relocated] organised it with money. They gave money and they were allowed to go back and stay in their villages. Now they've gone back and have been staying for two years in their villages.

**So they don't live in Ka--- anymore?**

No, they don't stay there anymore or in a *su see* [relocation site].

**How were the villagers' livelihoods in Ka---?**

They [the Tatmadaw] wanted to make it like an ideal [model] village. They constructed a road and places for houses. They built a clinic and school. They established it like a city.

**How did villagers work when they went and stayed there?**

They had to go back and do their work at their old villages. They had to get permission documents [to travel]. They had to give money [for the permission documents].

**How does it work with permission documents?**

[A document is valid for] Five days in a week. They [villagers] have to give 500 or 1,000 kyat (US \$0.63 – 1.26). They can't sleep at their workplaces for the five days if the news is not good [if the security situation is unstable]. It's in their [the Tatmadaw's] hands for this one.

**Do villagers have to inform them [the Tatmadaw] if the villagers want to sleep [at their workplaces]?**

Yes, villagers have to inform them. If they want to sleep there, they have to include it [in the permission document].

**Is the cost different for the documents that let you sleep or not sleep [outside the relocation site]?**

Yes, they cost is different. For example if you want to sleep, you have to pay 3,000 kyat or 4,000 kyat (US \$3.77 – 5.03). The price they have to pay for permission documents and huts are different. Each Army unit isn't the same. Some units demand 1,500, 2,000 and 3,000 kyat for each hut.

**Do you see any strong points about what they do in the *su see* [relocation] village, like they built the clinic and school?**

I don't see any strong point. They do that just to control people, and for those people not to communicate with outside people [the KNU/KNLA].

**Did villagers have to face any special issue during the time when they went and stayed in the *su see* [relocation] village?**

The problem they faced was flooding. During flooding, the children had to face diseases [illnesses] like diarrhoea.

**Was there no *loh ah pay*?**

They had to do *loh ah pay*, like filling water, carrying wood and sentry duty. They had to do the. They had to do it every day. They had to build roads. They had to prepare everything.

**Do you know the Army units which are active in the Ler Doh [Township] area? What MOC or LID?**

They all are [under one] LID [MOC], but I don't know their unit. I'm not a village head anymore so I don't know.

**Do you think do they have any other objectives in relocating these villagers?**

The other objective was about paying tax. So people wouldn't be able to pay them [the KNU/KNLA] and to cut off their [villagers'] communication with outside people. They [KNU/KNLA] will become weak if there are no people to encourage them.

**What do you mean by 'they?'**

People from the jungle.

**The KNU?**

Yes, the KNU.

**Do they [the Tatmadaw] usually come and tell villagers or give orders when villagers have to move?**

They call the village head.

**Do they write a letter or give an oral order?**

They don't normally write a letter. They order *set tha* [a messenger]<sup>14</sup> to come, and inform the village head.

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<sup>14</sup> '*Set tha*' is a Burmese term for forced labour duty as a messenger stationed at army camps or bases and serving as a go-between to deliver orders from army officers to village heads, but also involving other menial tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.

**Do they give order letters to the village head that your village has to move?**

No, we don't have this kind of [letter]. We go [to meet them]. They tell us, and we come back and we move.

**Why don't they give you an order letter?**

I don't know. I think they're afraid because in the order letter, it includes the person who gave the order. They worry that the information will spread out to above and it'll become a problem. I wrote a letter when I was a village head. When villagers had to move, it was the rainy season and the time for children to go to school. Villagers can't move in the rainy season. I wrote a petition letter, and I wrote it to ask them to allow us to move in the coming summer [dry season]. [I said] We'd move at that time if they extended the time for us. We included how many villages, households, residents, monasteries, farms, and schools were in the area. We wrote and we signed it. We requested to them. They knew about it [the letter] and they stopped it. It became a problem. He [a Tatmadaw officer] said '*I ordered with my mouth, and you [should] solve [respond] with your mouth.*' They didn't like it when I did that [responded] with a letter. We don't have education so we can't overcome them. They don't like it, even if you are a little greater than them.

**Is there any *su* see village in your area now?**

No, but there is *ywa bpyet* [abandoned village], like villagers from Ne--- and Lu---, they moved and they didn't come [back]. They went and lived in other villages. For example, four or five houses in one village and another [village]. They didn't dare to come back because there's no person to lead them.

**Did those villagers leave behind their materials in their villages, like villages [homes] and coconut plantations?**

Since *pya ley pya* [the 'four cuts' period],<sup>15</sup> fighting happened [in that area] and they [villagers' plantations] were all cut down. They moved in 2007 and they never came back. At that time, heavy fighting happened in their village and they were ordered to move, but the whole village tract also had to move. If they didn't move, they were shelled. I talked to the village head and they fled to T--- village tract. They left their property, like farms and others.

**Do they come back and do their work in their workplaces?**

Yes. They can't go and work in other places if they don't come back and work [in their agricultural projects near their old villages].

**How many *su* see villages were there when you served as village head?**

Just Ka---. There were none in the other areas.

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<sup>15</sup> *Pya ley pya* was designed to cut armed opposition off from sources of "food, funds, intelligence and recruits" and, in practice, referred to an extensive scorched earth campaign widely credited with enabling the Tatmadaw to take control of much of the country beginning in the 1950s. See: Martin Smith. *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, pp.258-262. Though official references to the four cuts strategy have ceased, overwhelming evidence indicates that Tatmadaw forces continue to employ tactics targeting civilians, particularly in Nyaunglebin, Papun and Toungoo Districts. See, for example: "Attacks and displacement in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, April 2010; *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010; "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011.

**How many people [had to] move to Ka---?**

Seven villages, and there were about 600 households.

**Currently, do you hear anything about relocation?**

We don't hear it, but the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw] threatens us like [by ordering]: '*No fighting can happen.*' If fighting happens, we'll have to move and they'll kill us. They threaten us, like: '*You live there, and you have to take responsibility to stop the fighting from happening.*' They'll take action on us and give us punishment and give us trouble. People who live in the village have to take responsibility [for what happens around the village].

**Why has there been a change?**

There's been a change because of our news [information we reported]. We see that forced labour has decreased. Democracy groups stand up on the other side [in opposition] and they send the information that happens, and our Karen organizations are also working on it. It [forced labour] was sometimes stopped because of this.

**Do you see that villagers do this [kind of] thing by themselves?**

Yes, we do these things.

**Is there any difference when it changes to a different Army unit [when Tatmadaw units rotate]?**

It's different. Some enter the village and stay peacefully. They don't restrict us from travelling. Some are *kyan* [literally 'rough', used in this case to contrast with 'peaceful'] when they enter the village, but they become good before they go back. It's different. They have different policies.

**Do you have a clinic or hospital in your village?**

There's no hospital but there's a small clinic. I founded a clinic but when people moved, the clinic stayed right there.

**What do you mean people moved? You said your village didn't need to move?**

They moved because I did [something] and my *poe lee* misunderstood me. They came and arrested me in 2007. The villagers didn't dare to stay so they moved. They fled for one year. They came back after I went back.

**Who went and arrested you?**

The KNU.

**They went and arrested you?**

Yes.

**For what reason did they arrest you?**

They misunderstood me. You can't do things that all people agree with. I made a mistake. I served as village head for five or six years, but no fighting happened. So people saw me as a *kyaw yoe* [literally 'back bone', in this case meaning one who supported the Tatmadaw]. But

they [the KNLA] didn't harm me. They took care of me very well. I came and stayed peacefully. They sent me back after one year and one month. It means I had to deal with both sides [the Tatmadaw and the KNLA]. I had to stay in the middle. I don't have education so I prayed. Because of the praying, I could overcome the obstacle... [audio recording inaudible]... Fighting happened when I came back. It happened beside the village. Since the beginning, people didn't trust me. They thought people would kill me. I married [performed a marriage ceremony for] two or three Karen soldiers who were friendly with me. They said they didn't like me. I told them, '*My responsibility is done when I die. I will do God's work if I don't die.*' They didn't do anything to me.

**Is there person to look after your small clinic?**

No.

**You said you have health staff, where did they graduate from?**

They attended training from the Burmese government side, not the KNU side.

**How do they treat people?**

They just give medicine and injections because it'll cost more if you go and have treatment in the city. It's very helpful for villagers.

**How many health workers?**

Two health workers. They're male.

**Do you have to pay money when you go and take medicine?**

Yes, you have to pay.

**Doesn't the government provide [medicine] for free?**

No, they [the health workers] have to buy [medicine] themselves and treat patients in the village.

**How is it different to have treatment in the village and in the city?**

The difference is, you can have treatment even if you don't have money in the village. If you don't have money, you can't go to the hospital. This is the difference. It's helpful.

**What about if the disease is serious?**

If the disease is serious, they send them to the hospital.

**Is there any support from outside?**

It could reach here if they supported, but people [in the village] don't dare to accept it. It's not easy if people beside you [neighbours] see you. You have to do it secretly if you want to accept [outside support]. You can't do it openly.

**Villagers from the village also don't dare to go?**

No.

**How many schools are in your village tract?**

There were four schools, but one school closed when people moved in 2007.

**Do those schools receive support?**

There's support from the government.

**What kind of support do they give?**

They just send school teachers to come and teach.

**Do villagers have to support the school teachers?**

No, we just have to go and fence their houses.

**What about food?**

We give if we want to give. For money, they collect it from the students, like the amount each student has to pay and how much for sports. We have to pay a school entrance fee, books fee, sports fee, building fee and cleaning fee.

**How much does a student have to pay for the sports fee?**

500 or 1,000 kyat (US \$0.63 – 1.26).

**What's about support from the KNU? Do they go and give support like books?**

No, it doesn't reach [the village]. They'll give it, but we don't dare to go and take it.

**Is there anything that you want to say that I didn't ask you?**

I think you asked almost everything.

**For example, any issue that you have suffer or that your villagers feel good about?**

Most villagers, one out of two [half the villagers], have to deal with food problems and insufficient food. Some people can't eat regularly. They go and work. They come back at night time. They do have rice to cook at night [after working for a day]. Mostly, this problem has occurred since we came back to our old village.

**For what reason does this happen?**

It happens because of the [Tatmadaw] operations.

**How far is their old village and the place where they had to relocate?**

They had to move to different places. Not the same place.

**Do some people flee to the jungle?**

Mostly, no.

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

- *Attacks and displacement in Nyaunglebin District* (April 2010)
- *Attacks on displaced villagers in Nyaunglebin District* (January 2010)
- *Livelihood consequences of SPDC restrictions and patrols in Nyaunglebin District* (September 2009)
- *Military movements, forced labour and extortion in Nyaunglebin District* (May 2009)
- *IDP responses to food shortages in Nyaunglebin District* (April 2009)
- *Cycles of Displacement: Forced relocation and civilian response in Nyaunglebin District* (January 2009)
- *Military expansion and exploitation in Nyaunglebin District* (August 2008)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrg.org>.

