



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

---

**News Bulletin**

July 20, 2011 / KHRG #2011-B16

---

## **Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011**

---

*This report contains the full transcripts of three interviews conducted during March and April 2011 in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The three female interviewees described the following abuses: attacks on villages, villagers and livelihoods; killing of villagers; theft and looting; taxation and demands; forced displacement; and forced labour, including the production and supply of building materials and forced portering. They also raised concerns regarding food shortage, the provision of education for children during displacement caused by Tatmadaw attacks, and access to healthcare. One of the women explained that villagers communicate with non-state armed groups and other villagers to share information about Tatmadaw movements, prepare secret caches of food in the forest outside their village in case of a Tatmadaw attack, and hold school classes outside of their village in agricultural areas during displacement caused by Tatmadaw attack. These interviews were received along with other information from Toungoo District, including a general update on the situation in Toungoo District, ten incident reports, seven other interviews and 350 photographs.<sup>1</sup>*

---

### **Interview | Naw P--- (female, 28), A--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (April 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a villager in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen P'Gku

**Religion:** Christian

**Marital Status:** Single

**Occupation:** Farming a hill field

**Position:** Teacher

**How many years have you been teaching at the nursery school?**

---

<sup>1</sup> When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Toungoo District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

<sup>2</sup> KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to 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.

Five years.

**What is your duty as a teacher?**

I look after the children in the school.

**Did you want to be a teacher or did other people [the KNU or the SPDC] give you the position?**

My church gave me the position.

**Could you talk to us about your experiences?**

My experiences in the village, starting from when I was teaching in the nursery school for children: our convention [church] leaders gave us duties, one being that the village church should have a nursery for children to learn their own language. The nursery school was started, but some didn't want it [didn't want to send their children to school]. After a while, the village head and the convention leaders understood their problem [as some villagers didn't want to send their children to school]. After that, the government school wanted to join and wanted government teachers to teach in our nursery school, but we didn't allow them to. The school was given to us by our convention [church] leaders.

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

There are 86 households.

**How many villagers are in your village?**

I don't know.

**What are the main jobs for villagers?**

Mostly, they farm and plant in the hill fields.

**Do villagers get enough food from farming?**

No, they don't get enough food. Most of the time, the grain is dry and insects eat it.

**What do villagers who don't have enough food do?**

They have to buy it in the market.

**How much do they have to pay for one sack of rice?**

This year, they have to pay 14,000 kyat (US \$17.77)<sup>3</sup> for one sack of rice.

**Do you have a way to get income?**

We can't get an income in our village. We can only get an income during the paddy [harvest] period. If we can do hill field work, we will get money. In our village [A---], we

---

<sup>3</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this interview 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 July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US\$1 = 788 kyat. These figures are used for all calculations above.

only do hill field farming, so if our paddies are good we can sell rice, but if our paddy is not good, we have to buy it in other villages.

**How many years ago was your village established?**

It has already been 160 years.

**Do you have to face any problems in your village? Could you tell us about your problems?**

We have to face problems from the military government, because we stay in the area that is called Than Daung Township, and this year our A--- villagers have been commanded to do forced labour by the SPDC many times. We have to carry or cut bamboo. We cut bamboo for them but they weren't happy. They said "*your bamboo was young, you have to cut mature bamboo*". They didn't use the bamboo only to build their camp, they also sent it to the city. That was a problem. They not only sent bamboo, but also wood that was mature. Now, we don't have much mature wood.

**What kind of bamboo do you have to cut for them?**

We have to cut *wa thoh* [oily bamboo]. Sometimes, we have to cut *wa blaw* [glutinous bamboo]. In our village, some had *wa blaw* bamboo, but we didn't have any. In our village, we have 86 households, but we only a few houses have the *wa blaw* tree, so if the SPDC asks for it, we have to buy it for them. We had to pay 500 or 450 kyat (US \$0.63 or \$0.57 respectively) for one *wa blaw* bamboo.

**How long do you have to cut the bamboo for them?**

At least 10 cubits [measurement from fingertip to elbow].

**How big [wide] is the bamboo that you have to cut?**

Two hand spans.

**What kind of wood do you have to cut for them?**

We have to cut *thay hter* and *thay pway* [ironwood tree, commonly used to build houses]. In here we have only *hter* and *pway*.

**How long [cubits] do you have to cut the wood for them?**

Sometimes, we have to cut it to 12 cubits long and, for the *hter*, we cut it to 6 cubits for them.

**For what do they use the wood and bamboo that you cut?**

They use them for a fence.

**Where is their [Tatmadaw] camp?**

Their camp is in between S--- and A--- villages.

**Do you know their officer?**

I don't know.

**How many people are in the camp?**

Some people said that there are 30 or 40 soldiers.

**Does the SPDC come into your village? Do they come often or randomly?**

They come very often.

**Do you notice the dates that they come?**

I don't notice, because they stay near and come very often.

**What do they do when they come to the village? Do they hurt villagers?**

They don't hurt people, they mostly asked for food. Sometimes, they order village heads to buy wine for them. If the village heads can't buy the wine, they are forced to take chickens from the village. They force us to give them things.

**Do they pay for the food that they demand when they are in the village?**

No, they don't pay.

**In the days before you came here did the SPDC kill any villagers?**

No.

**Have you ever been forced [to do labour] by the SPDC?**

Yes.

**Did anyone escape from forced labour?**

No, because they were very strict on the villagers. If villagers escaped, they asked the village head to send them back, and then they would hit or punish them.

**If they ask for money, how much do you have to pay per person?**

Sometimes, we have to pay 2,000 kyat (US \$2.54), and sometimes we have to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$6.35).

**Do they pay you or give you food when you work for them?**

No, they don't give us anything.

**Do they ever enter to your village while you work for them?**

They don't come [to our village while we work for them].

**Can you tell us your opinion about the SPDC's actions [military activities]?**

In my opinion, the SPDC Light Infantry Division goes around the Than Daung area everyday. In the evening, they come and steal things, even if you tell them they aren't allowed. They do bad things to us. They also stole pigs.

**Which LID entered to your village?**

I don't know the number.

**Does the SPDC rape women or take things without paying the villagers?**

In the village, they took our chickens and vegetables without asking us. If we told them [not to do it], they said "*We walked and we were tired so we wanted to eat. We don't need to ask because this area is controlled by the Burmese. I am the owner, not you*".

**Did any fighting [with armed groups] happen while you were portering?**

No.

**Do you want to tell us about the SPDC tactics of oppression?**

Yes, I want to tell you. The SPDC Army came in our village and forced us [to do labour] and asked us for food. Our villagers and other villages in the area don't want them here. We don't want them to use power and force us. We want them to go back to where they are from. We don't want them to stay in our village.

**Do you have a school in your village?**

Yes.

**For your school, did the SPDC or the villagers build it?**

It was a government school.

**How many teachers were in the school?**

Three teachers.

**How many grades?**

Up to fourth standard.

**How many students?**

78 students.

**How much money do the teachers get per person?**

For headmasters, they get 45,000 kyat (US \$57.11).

**For the salary, did the villagers or the government pay them?**

The government paid them, but teachers stayed in our village, so we had to give them rice and everything that they asked for. As we are villagers, sometimes we didn't have food to eat. Some students also didn't have enough food to eat. They asked [for food] once a week so some students could not give.

**Where were the teachers from?**

They were from Tantabin.

**Do students have to pay money for entering the school?**

They have to pay 4,500 kyat (US \$5.71).

**Who do they have to pay?**

They have to pay the headmaster or the teachers.

**Do the students study peacefully [without interruption]?**

In the past, they studied peacefully. But this year, the teachers were always absent, so the students didn't get a good education.

**Do they allow teachers to teach the Karen language in the school?**

No, they don't.

**Why don't they allow teaching of the Karen language?**

During school they only teach in Burmese, so they don't allow [Karen to be taught]. Most of the time, they want to use only Burmese.

**Does the SPDC Army come and disturb the school?**

No.

**Does the KNU [KNLA] come and disturb the school?**

No.

**Do the students get support like books or other things?**

No, they didn't get anything.

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

No.

**Where do you have to go if you are sick?**

We had to go to the hospital in Zayatkyi [town] or in Tantabin town.

**Were there any problems on the way?**

There weren't any problems.

**Do villagers get free medicine when they go to the hospital?**

No, we have to pay. Last week, my aunt was bleeding. She went only one day, but it cost millions [of kyat].

**How much do sick people have to pay for one injection?**

Some cost 5,000 kyat (US \$6.35), and some cost 200 or 300 kyat (US \$0.25 and \$0.38 respectively).

**What is the most common disease in your village?**

Malaria.

**In the past, has malaria caused death?**

No.

**How about this year?**

No.

**Do the villagers work smoothly [peacefully]?**

In the past, we worked smoothly [peacefully] in our farms but now we cannot. When we need to go to our farm, the SPDC does not allow us to go. If the LID come and see us when we go to the jungle they make us go with them [to work for them] for a week. When you go with them [to work for them], they don't give you rice. They give you only one handful of rice.

**Do villagers get enough food? If not, if they have to buy food, how much do you have to pay for one viss [1.6 kg or 3.5 lb] of meat?**

For pork, it costs 3,500 kyat (US \$4.44), for beef the cost is 4,000 kyat (US \$5.08).

**How about for fish paste, salt and sweet powder?**

For market fish paste, one viss is 1,200 kyat (US \$1.52) or 1,500 kyat (US \$1.90). For the home-made fish paste, it costs 3,000 kyat (US \$3.81).

**How much for one sack of rice?**

It costs 14,000 kyat (US \$17.77).

**Do you see the SPDC comes and makes your village better?**

For the SPDC, they never come and make our situation better. They come and ask for villagers' food. I don't see them as good.

**How about the KNU? Do you see good things from them?**

I saw that if we didn't have the KNU, the SPDC would oppress and kill us. We have the KNU and they stand up for us, and now things are different. The difference is that, in the past, if we have to go somewhere, we have to be afraid of many things, but now because of them we have less danger.

**Do you want to report anything else?**

The other information I wanted to report happened in the past, the SPDC came in our village and searched things in my house and saw Ba U Gyi's [first president of the KNU] photo that cost over 100,000 kyat (US \$127). And, they said they would kill me, because they saw it in my box. Their commander didn't say anything but the soldiers wanted to

do bad things to me. Their commander kept calm and went back, so they followed him. Also, last week the LID came in our village and slept under our house. At night time, about 9:00 or 10:00 pm, they entered under our house and at 10:00 or 11:00 pm they were drunk. At that time we were sleeping. Under my house, there were six hens. The hens had all laid eggs. In the morning, the hens screamed and I said, “*Don’t steal my hens, my hens lay eggs.*” The oldest [highest-ranking] one among them said not to accuse his soldiers. “*If we wanted to eat we would ask you.*” But in the morning, I found that they had stolen my two hens. I was unhappy and said to them, “*You said you didn’t steal my hens but I lost two hens and if you want to eat my hens, eat them all.*” They said, “uncle [a term directed at elders for respect] didn’t eat your hens, pray a lot and the one who ate your hens will die someday”. So it is best if they don’t come in our village. If they come in our village, they always oppress us. We were afraid of them, so it is best for us if they don’t come. We are Karen, so we can’t speak Burmese fluently.

**Did you know the name of the commander who saw Ba Oo Gyi’s photo in your house?**

I didn’t know.

**Did you notice the date?**

I didn’t notice the date.

---

## **Interview | Naw R--- (female, 35), S--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (April 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a villager in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>4</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Christian

**Marital Status:** Married

**Occupation:** Farming

**Position:** [censored for security]

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

I have five members in my family.

**How old is your oldest child?**

17 years old.

**How old is your youngest child?**

Six years old.

---

<sup>4</sup> KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to 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.

**What is your duty?**

I work for the [censored for security] organisation.

**How many years have you been in the organisation?**

[I joined] in this year.

**What are your duties, as you are in the organisation?**

We work for women.

**Did you want to become part of the [censored for security] organisation, or did the KNU or the SPDC [Tatmadaw] give you the position?**

Our village head gave me the position.

**Can you tell us about your experiences, as you are a women's leader?**

I can't say because I am a new staff [member].

**What is the name of your village?**

It's called S---

**How many households are there in your village?**

400 households.

**How many villagers are there?**

I don't know.

**What kind of jobs do villagers do?**

Farming [rice paddy] and planting betelnut.

**How much they get from betelnut plantations in a year?**

In one year, we sell 1,000 viss (1,600 kg. / 3,520 lb.) of betelnut.

**How much [do you receive] for one viss (1.6 kg. / 3.5 lb.)?**

One viss is 2,500 kyat (US \$3.17).<sup>5</sup>

**Do villagers get enough food from their farms?**

No, it's not enough.

**What do they do if they don't have enough food?**

---

<sup>5</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this interview 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 July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US\$1 = 788 kyat.

They sell rice [to get money to buy other food], collect leaves [to make thatch to sell] and borrow from other people.

**How much do they have to pay if they borrow from other people?**

If they take rice [from them], they have to pay 4,000 kyat (US \$5.08). [*Naw R---* did not specify the quantity of rice that could be acquired for this amount of money.]

**Do villagers have any way to get income?**

Only during the paddy harvesting period, because we can sell rice and betelnut.

**How many years has your village been established?**

I don't know.

**Does your village have to face any problems?**

Yes.

**Can you tell us what kind of problems?**

The SPDC comes and oppresses us, and sometimes forces us to cut wood and bamboo. And they ask us to make fences for them.

**How many bamboo do you have to cut for them each time?**

Over 100 bamboo [poles].

**How many people do they ask for [to cut and deliver the bamboo]?**

We have to go with 10 or 15 carts each time.

**How about the number of people?**

Fifteen people.

**What kind [of wood] was the biggest bamboo or wood you've had to cut?**

*Thay ter* [a type of wood from which villagers often collect leaves to make roofing thatch].

**What length do you have to cut [the pieces of *thay ter*]?**

Ten cubits.

**How wide?**

Two or three handspans.

**What kinds of wood [do you have to cut]?**

*Thay ter* and *thay pway* [literally 'iron wood'; a type of wood often used to build houses].

**How about for bamboo?**

*Wa blaw* [glutinous bamboo] and *wa thoh* [big bamboo].

**How long must the wood [bamboo] be?**

Twelve or fifteen cubits.

**How wide?**

I don't know.

**Does the SPDC [Tatmadaw] ever enter your village?**

Yes, they always enter our village.

**Did you note the dates that they've come?**

I haven't noted it.

**What do they do if they enter the village?**

If they enter the village, they ask villagers to porter.

**Have they hurt villagers?**

Yes.

**How did they hurt them?**

They put them in the water, and stepped on them and sometimes punched them.

**Do you know the names of the villagers that suffered this?**

Yes, their names were Saw T---and Saw P---.

**How old was Saw T---?**

40 years old.

**What was his parents' name?**

I knew only his father. His father's name is Saw K---.

**How did they kill him?**

They didn't kill him. He escaped.

**How old was Saw P---?**

25 years old.

**Do you know his parents' name?**

His father's name is Saw L--- and his mother's name is Naw H---.

**Did they put him in the river?**

Yes.

**Which river?**

The K--- River.

**How wide is the K--- River?**

10 cubits. No, not only 10 cubits, [wider than 10 cubits].

**How deep is it?**

It's very deep.

**What difficulties did they have to face before they escaped?**

Before they escaped, they had to catch *ta mu khar a su* [literally 'the hand of ghosts'; a term used to refer to poisonous animals and insects] and they were afraid so they escaped from the Army camp through three fences.

**Did the SPDC [Tatmadaw] see them after they escaped?**

The SPDC never saw them again.

**Did they stay in the village?**

They stayed outside the village. If the SPDC saw them, they would have killed them.

**Has the SPDC taken your cows or buffaloes when they entered your village?**

No, but when they entered the village, they've asked for chickens and then stolen pigs and dogs.

**Did they pay for the things that they took?**

No, they didn't pay.

**Did they ask villagers [for permission]?**

They didn't ask us. They stole and took whatever they wanted.

**In the past few days, did you hear that they killed any people in your village or around your village?**

No, they haven't.

**Tell us about how you feel about the SPDC oppression?**

Now, we stay in our village and they always ask us to work. One day, we have to bring chickens for them and, one week later, we have to bring pork for them.

**When the SPDC asks you to work or cut bamboo or wood for them, do they allow you to go back or do you [have to] escape?**

They allowed us to come back.

**If you porter for them how long does it take?**

One day.

**For what do they use the bamboo poles that you cut for them?**

They build their camp.

**Where is their camp?**

In S---

**Do you know their officers?**

I don't know them.

**How many people soldiers [are there] in their camp?**

I don't know.

**Do they pay or give you food when you portered for them?**

No, they don't pay or give food.

**While you were portering for them did they come to your village?**

Yes, they entered. They entered in two or three groups.

**Do you know the dates?**

I don't know the dates.

**What did they do when they entered your village?**

Mostly, they asked for villagers' food.

**Can you tell us about your feeling about the SPDC [Tatmadaw]?**

I can't tell.

**Does the SPDC rape the women?**

No.

**Do they take villagers' things without permission? What kind of things?**

If we plant vegetables, they steal it. They always steal chickens and pigs. You can't tell them [anything].

**Does their Commander order them to steal or do they [lower-ranking Tatmadaw soldiers] do that as they want?**

I don't know.

**Did any conflict [fighting with non-state armed groups] happen when you portered?**

No.

**Do you want to tell us anything else about SPDC oppression?**

The SPDC asks us to bring food for them without paying for it. They steal our pigs, dogs and vegetables without asking the owners. They do whatever they want.

**If they ask you to cut 1,000 bamboos for them, can you give only 500 bamboos?**

No, we can't.

**How many bamboo poles do they ask you to cut each time?**

Mostly, 100 bamboo poles.

**Do you have to give them thatch?**

Yes.

**How many thatch pieces do you have to give?**

We have to give 20 thatch pieces to each house. The whole village is 2,000 thatch pieces.

**Do you have a school in your village?**

Yes, we have a school.

**Who built the school? Did the SPDC [Tatmadaw] build it or did the villagers build it?**

The SPDC built it.

**How many grades [in the school]?**

Until grade four.

**How many students?**

145 students.

**How many teachers?**

It has four teachers; two male teachers and two female teachers.

**Who gives the salary for teachers? The SPDC or the villagers?**

The SPDC gives them a salary but they stay in our village so we have to give them rice and oil.

**How much rice and oil do you give them each time?**

If we give money, it is over 10,000 kyat (US \$ 12.69).

**How much do you have to pay for one child to enter the school?**

It costs 3,000 kyat (US \$ 3.81).

**Who do they have to give it to?**

They have to give it to the headmaster.

**Do the students study without interruption?**

No, their teachers are always absent.

**Why don't they come to the school?**

I don't know.

**Do they allow teaching Karen?**

No, they don't.

**Why?**

I don't know.

**Do the SPDC or the KNU come and disturb your school?**

No.

**Do the students get books or other things?**

No.

**Do you have a hospital [clinic] in your village?**

No, we don't have.

**Where do the villagers go if they are sick?**

To Zayatkyi in Tantabin Township.

**Do they have problems about travelling?**

No, we have no problems.

**How about travelling costs?**

We have to ride in a line car so it costs 5,000 kyat (US \$ 6.35).

**Do they get good cure?**

Yes, they do.

**Any problems?**

No problems.

**Do they need to buy medicine?**

Yes, they have to buy.

**How much for one medicine?**

We have to pay 300 kyat, 400 kyat, 5,000 kyat, 6,000 kyat, or 10,000 kyat (between US \$ 0.38 – 12.69).

**Can they get free medicine?**

No.

**What is the most common disease in your village?**

Malaria.

**What kind of medicine do they take?**

They take malaria medicine.

**Does malaria cause death?**

No.

**Do villagers work without interruption and do villagers get enough food?**

For farming, we work without interruption but if we go to the forest [to work], we have to get written work permission documents.

**Do they get enough food?**

Not really enough.

**How much do they have to pay for one sack of rice (50 kg. / 110 lb.)?**

15,000 kyat (US \$ 19.03) for one sack of rice.

**How about for meat?**

For pork is 4,000 kyat (US \$ 5.08) and beef also 4,000 kyat (US \$ 5.08) per viss.

**How about for salt and fish paste?**

For fish paste it is 1,500 kyat (US \$ 1.90) and salt is 500 kyat (US \$ 0.63).

**Does the SPDC come and make your village better?**

No.

**How about the KNU, do you see them come and make your village better?**

Sometimes, they do. Because of them our village is stable.

**Do you have anything else to report?**

No.

---

## **Interview | Naw M--- (female, 24), Th--- village, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (March 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a villager in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>6</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Christian

**Occupation:** Teacher

**When they shot your uncle, did he die directly or did he have to suffer?**

I didn't see. He didn't die on the way [near the road]. He died beside the tall hill.

**Do you know where he died?**

I know. In D---.

**Did the SPDC [Tatmadaw] eat pigs, chickens, cows, or buffalos when they entered your village?**

Yes. When we ran, if you couldn't take [the animals] and left them, they ate them all.

**If they came once, how many animals did they eat?**

Some animals, they ate them, but other animals, they just killed them. They didn't eat them all. Some animals were just killed.

**Do you remember the date that the SPDC killed your uncle?**

I don't know because I didn't notice [the date].

**You said the SPDC killed two people, Saw G--- and Saw Y---. Why did they kill them?**

---

<sup>6</sup> KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to 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.

No reason. For Saw G---, he went and carried things from Kler La. He was outside the village [on the way back] and he didn't dare to face them [Tatmadaw soldiers], so when they called him and he ran away, they shot him. For my uncle, he fled and thought that they [Tatmadaw soldiers] would take [loot] things from his house, and when he went back [to check on his house], he met them and they killed him. Now, my uncle's son and daughter went and stayed in a refugee camp with their mother.

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

No, we don't have one.

**Where do villagers go if they are sick?**

We go to the KNU office and to the medic.

**Did the KNU medic cure you comfortably [was the medical treatment good]?**

Yes, they cured us comfortably.

**Did they give you enough medicine?**

It wasn't enough. If we need other medicine [that the KNU medic doesn't have], we have to buy it ourselves. Other people sell it.

**Did you need to buy medicine when you went to the KNU medic?**

Sometimes, we got it for free but sometimes we had to pay.

**How much did you have to pay for one [dose of] medicine?**

For one saline solution, we had to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$6.35).<sup>7</sup>

**In your village, what is the most dangerous disease?**

It's malaria.

**What kind of treatment do you use for malaria?**

We use Chloroquine [tablets].

**How do you feel about the SPDC military government?<sup>8</sup> Can you tell us?**

For the SPDC military government they govern us, so they oppress us in many ways such as food and travelling [restrictions]. They disturb us. Furthermore, we can't stay in our place. We want to stay freely but we can't.

**Where do you usually escape when the SPDC military [Tatmadaw] comes to your village?**

---

<sup>7</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this interview 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 July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US\$1 = 788 kyat.

<sup>8</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 interviewer and interviewee, and is therefore retained in this translation.

We escape in the jungle but some go to the city [towns under Tatmadaw control]. Mostly, we escape around the village.

**How many days, weeks or months do you have to stay around the village when you escape?**

At least a week.

**At what time do the SPDC [Tatmadaw] usually come to your village?**

They usually come in the hot season [February to April].

**Why do you come back to your village when the SPDC leaves?**

We come back to stay in our house, because if we stay like that [in the jungle] we stay on the ground, so it's uncomfortable. We come back to our homes.

**How do you feel when you are displaced people? Tell us all about what you feel.**

I've had a lot of suffering, for the place [we live] isn't stable and, for food, also there isn't enough. For travelling also it's not comfortable. If we travel, we always have to listen to [monitor] where the SPDC is. If they stay here [in one place], then we have to go there [a different place]. If we need food, we have to go back and take it from where we kept it [stored secretly outside the village]. When we stay outside [beyond Tatmadaw control] like this it isn't easy if we have to travel. We always have to listen to where the SPDC is and always have to avoid them, because we know that if they see us they'll kill us. For school, in 2006 to 2007, we fled so we didn't study in the school and we had to teach and learn in the betelnut orchard. The place wasn't the same.

**What are the effects on family life?**

The effects are on healthcare and food because when we stay like this, it's cold and children get sick easily. We have to sleep on the ground, so it's not good.

**Does anything change for women's jobs when you stay in the jungle? Like when you stay in the village you have to do one thing, and when you stayed in the jungle you have to do different things?**

Yes, when we stay in the village we have jobs to do, but when we stayed in the jungle we didn't have anything to do so we just sat and talked to each other.

**How did the women live while staying in the jungle?**

I couldn't tell [explain] that.

**Do women who are pregnant face problems?**

One of my cousins was pregnant and she didn't tell [anyone] so she died while giving birth. *[Naw M--- is probably explaining that her cousin's baby was born prematurely, so she didn't have time to make arrangements for assistance with birth].*

**Did she die outside the village?**

She died in the village. There was no one there because we escaped, and sometimes we stay far from each and can't look after each other was and it's difficult. At night time we have to use flashlights, and the way [path] also is difficult and it also takes an hour to go from one house to another house. There was no time, so she died.

**Does anything change for women's jobs? Like do they have to do anything that isn't like women's jobs?**

Yes. Women's jobs are that they have to stay in the house but [when we stay in the jungle] for finding food, if the men go [then] the women also have to go with them. If the men have to go in danger [then] the women also have to go in danger.

**Does anything change for children's lives while they stay in the jungle?**

While we stay in the jungle, the children don't study [enough]. They should study, but they don't get enough education.

**Do they go to school? Why don't they go to school?**

Some go to school but some don't go to school. For some their parents couldn't send them because of health problems.

**Do the children have jobs themselves, or how do they feel?**

Now, in our village, diseases [illnesses] disturb the children who are studying. Sometimes, bad spirits went inside them and they were unconscious and saw only evil. If they slept, it disappeared but if they didn't sleep the spirits did what they wanted [*Naw M---* is probably referring to a Karen animist belief that if children get sick, it is because an evil spirit or ghost took their shadow.] So they couldn't study with their friends.

**How about for older people? Has anything changed their lives? Like for elderly people, do they need to work and, if they have to work, what kind of jobs are there?**

Some elderly people who don't have children have to work for food, to live.

**How do villagers manage their lives when they move their place [flee their village]?**

To live and no longer staying under SPDC oppression, we'd [like to] work with KHRG.

**While staying in the [hiding] area do you have to plant or farm or anything? Could you tell us about what kind of plantations [crops] you plant?**

We plant betelnut and cardamom. If we don't have enough food, we have to buy taro and bananas. For other food, I can't say. For taro and bananas, if we grow them, after one year we can eat them.

**How do you know when the SPDC [Tatmadaw] will come?**

We know because our KNU gave us the information.

**How do you look after and manage yourselves when the SPDC comes to your village?**

If we get early information that the SPDC will come, we can prepare our main foods, such as salt and fish paste, and we have to hide some in a safe place.

**What do you understand about the word 'IDP' [internally displaced person]?**

The SPDC fights and oppresses us, so we become IDPs. They come and destroy our village, our food isn't enough, and our place [village area] also isn't stable, so we become IDPs.

**How do you feel when you are an IDP?**

When we stay in our village we do what we can do, but when we stay in the jungle we can't work. When we work, if the SPDC hears us, they come and kill us.

**How is life different in the village and in IDP sites in the jungle?**

When we stay in the village, our work was good. If we have to move to another place again and again, we can't work and our work isn't good.

**As you always have to flee, have you ever thought that you've lost your rights?**

When we have to escape, we want to go to school but we can't go. For example, if this year we should have gone [passed] to another standard, we couldn't.<sup>9</sup>

**Do you want to change your life, to become developed [get an education] while staying in the [hiding] area? What is your goal to get a better life?**

Now our place isn't stable and our education also isn't good, so in the future I thought we'd make it better. If we can stay in our village, we'll build our school as much as we can.

**Do you want to go back and stay in your own village?**

Yes, I want to go back, and work our own jobs. If we stay in our village it's easier for us to work, but if we stay in another village it's far to go to work and it also takes a lot of time. If we stay near our jobs [workplaces], we can work more. If you stay in another place and you want to work five hours per day, you'll get only two hours.

**What do you need in your village when you go back?**

In our village we need security, and the KNU [KNLA] will protect us and take [provide] information for our safety. If they hear information about the SPDC [Tatmadaw activity] they'll tell us.

**Did the SPDC ever [try to] forcibly relocate you?**

Yes, but we didn't go to that same place. They kept our village as a battle area and told us to go to the peace area.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Note that Naw M--- is not explaining that she herself is still in school; rather, she is speaking in the first person provide an example illustrating the situation for children in her village.

<sup>10</sup> Villages in mixed-control areas that agree to cooperate with military government demands without going into hiding are called 'peace villages' by the Burmese military, or *nye in chan yay ywa*; see *Village Agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008, p. 118.

**Did you think that the forced relocation area was stable, or not?**

It wasn't stable.

**What did the place that you escaped [from forced relocation to] look like?**

If we stay in our place, it's good, but if we stay in the place they force us to move then it's difficult for us.

**What do you do when you always have to stay outside of your village?**

If we stay in our village, we cultivate hill fields, but if we have to flee or if we stay in another village we have to work with them [the other villagers] and carry things for money.

**How did villagers decide they didn't want to go to the relocation area?**

They didn't want to stay with the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] and didn't want to help them. They wanted to stay in their country and with their own ethnic people.

**Which is better: staying in a relocation area or staying in the fleeing [hiding] area?**

If we stay in the village, we can work better. If you go and stay like that, you don't have job so it isn't easy.

**How do you want to live in the future? Which organization do you want to govern you?**

I want to stay in my village, and I want my ethnic KNU leaders to govern me.

**If you have peace in your village, do you think you'll be IDPs?**

If we have peace in your village, we won't be IDPs anymore.

**How do you understand the word 'peace'?**

The word 'peace' means that there's no more enemy oppression, and we stay peacefully. We work and travel independently [freely].

**What is needed for there to be no more IDPs?**

For there to be no more IDPs, first villagers and the KNU have to work together.

**How do you avoid it if the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] is active in your place?**

We stay [hide] in the jungle.

**What do you know about the SPDC [Tatmadaw] operations?**

If the SPDC comes into our village, they'll come and destroy our village, and if they see us they'll kill us. So we have to flee.

**How do you go if you have to pass a car road?**

If we go, the KNU protects [proves security for] us and sends us.

**Do you have communication with other IDPs?**

Yes.

**What kind of information do you share with each other? How do you communicate to them?**

We give them information about food, and the SPDC [Tatmadaw] news, like whether they stay nearby or far away, and whether they'll come [to the village] or not.

**Did you sell or buy things [from areas] under SPDC control?**

Yes.

**What do you need for a better situation?**

For a better situation, we need our KNU leaders to govern us. If the SPDC governs us there won't be peace, so our KNU will lead and govern us.

**What kind of support would make your situation better?**

For a better situation we need our leaders to lead us and to work with villagers, and understand each other. We want our leaders who take security to have contact with villagers, and work in unity to make a better situation.