



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Dooplaya Interview: U Sa---, July 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher in July 2011 with a villager from Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. The researcher interviewed U Sa---, who described how his family and other residents of Pa--- village faced threats and abuses from Tatmadaw soldiers after local DKBA forces captured a Tatmadaw soldier at his home on June 15th 2011. U Sa--- described the following abuses: threats to burn or shell civilian areas; shelling of civilian areas; indiscriminate use of small arms in civilian areas; the taking of civilians as hostages; threats to kill civilians; and the imposition of movement restrictions, including threats to shoot villagers violating restrictions on sight. U Sa--- explained that he and his family fled Pa--- on June 16th to avoid these threats; as of July 3rd, they did not yet feel safe to return to their home. This interview was conducted by a KHRG researcher in July 2011; other details on the situation in Pa--- village after June 15th, including a general situation update, one incident report, and three photographs were submitted by a different KHRG researcher in June and July 2011.

Interview | U Sa--- (male, 50), Pa--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (July 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.¹

Ethnicity: Pa-o

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married with three children

Occupation: Shopkeeper

Why did you flee to Ka---?

I came here because the DKBA captured a Tatmadaw soldier named T---, who is 52 years old and has one chevron [holds the rank of Lance Corporal]. It was at the time when that soldier came to use the phone. After that, the Burma Tatmadaw came and scolded and threatened villagers and village leaders that they'd burn our Pa--- village [Pe--- village in Karen] and that they'd shoot [at] our homes and beat our



This photo, taken on July 1st 2011, shows U Sa--- (back right) with his wife (back left) and three children, aged 13, 16 and 18. The family fled Pa--- on June 16th 2011 amid Tatmadaw threats and abuse after the capture by the DKBA of a Tatmadaw soldier on June 15th. [Photo: KHRG]

¹ 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.

villagers if they didn't get their soldier back. They called the village leaders to go to the place that they specified, at a pagoda at the western exit gate of the village, by 2 pm, and if we, the villagers, didn't arrive there, they'd shell mortars into our village. And [then] they did shell the mortars into the village after 2 pm. The Tatmadaw soldiers often came and used the phone at my house.²

When did it happen?

The DKBA captured the soldier on the 15th [of June], and the Tatmadaw told the village leaders to go and meet them on the 16th at 2 pm. I fled on June 16th 2011.

How many bullets did they shoot on the 15th [of June]?

They shot a lot of small guns at Saw R---'s parents' house.³ The whole group of soldiers shot at Saw R---'s parents' house. They also shot guns in the street. On that day they arrested Saw R---'s mother. At the time when they fired guns at Saw R---'s parents' house, there were three of Saw R---'s brother's kids in the house, inside a bomb shelter. Only the three kids were in the house, because after they arrested Saw R---'s mother [earlier that day] there were no older people [adults] in the house.

Did they arrest only Saw R---'s mother?

Yes, because at that time only Saw R---'s mother was in the house. His father went to his field. On the 16th [of June] the Tatmadaw shelled two or three mortars into the village. First they shelled mortars, and after that they shot small guns. Then I didn't dare to stay in the village any more, so I fled. None of the villagers were injured by the shelling.

Did they [Tatmadaw soldiers] come into the village after the shelling?

After the shelling, they called the village leaders and went around the village together with them, and then came into the village.

When did you start to flee?

I started to flee when the Tatmadaw soldiers started shelling. At that time, I fled alone. I ran across the La--- River. After about half an hour or one hour, my wife followed me and I told her not to go back [to Pa--- village]. [I said] '*Because I ran, they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] will give you trouble. For our children, we can ask someone who's going back to the village to tell our children to follow us.*' That night we started to leave our village. Starting from the riverbank, we slept one night at Ha--- village, and the next day on the 18th we arrived at Re--- village. We slept [at Ha---] on the 17th and the next day we arrived in Re---.

So you started to leave on June 15th?

No, on that day, I hadn't fled yet. On the 15th, the DKBA captured the soldier and the Burma Army [Tatmadaw] arrested Saw R---'s mother. On that day they shot small guns, and on the 16th

² A KHRG researcher in Dooplaya District that spoke with local sources about conditions in Pa--- village after June 15th explained that U Sa---'s family had installed a telephone landline connected to Thai networks in their home, which villagers and soldiers could use for a fee. The researcher also reported that two different Tatmadaw battalions were active in Pa--- and the surrounding area in June 2011; the specific battalion numbers have been omitted from this bulletin for security.

³ A KHRG researcher in Dooplaya District that spoke with local sources about conditions in Pa--- village after June 15th explained that Saw R--- is a local DKBA officer holding the rank of *thu sghay koh*, or 'Platoon Commander', who led the detachment of soldiers that kidnapped Tatmadaw soldier T---.

they shelled mortars into the village, so I fled that day. In the evening on the 16th my whole family gathered together [and fled].

How many nights did you have to spend on the way to Re---

We spent two nights on the way before we arrived at Re--- village. We arrived in Ka--- yesterday. We had to spend some days in Re--- village because we didn't know how to come to Ka---. I waited for my friend, and when I found my friend I followed him to Ka---.

Could you carry your belongings with you?

We couldn't carry anything with us. The things that I left at my home are one car, one motorbike, and one 22 horsepower machine [generator], and the phone that I set up in my house. These are [just] the expensive things. And there are still other belongings [left behind], such as household materials.

What difficulties did you face on the way [to Ka---]?

On the way, we travelled by foot and we asked one little boy to send [guide] us. We couldn't come by ourselves. We had to travel on the forest paths.

What about other villagers in the village? Did you [personally] face any special threat?

Yes, because the thing [the capture of the Tatmadaw soldier by the DKBA] happened at my house. They [the Tatmadaw soldiers] thought that I was contacting the rebel groups and contacting the DKBA.

How do you know that they thought like this [about] you?

Because of what has happened in the past.⁴ They've always threatened villagers like this. And we've always heard what they've said to the villagers.

This time, what caused you to run away?

This time it [the threat] was a little bit more serious, and what happened [the capture of the Tatmadaw soldier] happened at my house, and they said that if they didn't get their soldier back then they'd kill me. So for me, I fled at the time when I had the chance to flee.

Who told you about this threat?

They [Tatmadaw soldiers] talked about it when they came into the village.

When did Saw R--- capture the [Tatmadaw] soldier?

It was at 8:20 am, before school started.

⁴ For previous examples of detention and violent abuse, including killing, of villagers accused of having contact with Karen armed groups, including violent abuse and killing, reported to have been perpetrated by soldiers under Tatmadaw LID #22 in Kawkaeik Township, see: "SPDC soldiers arrest and kill villagers on allegations of contacting KNU/KNLA," KHRG, January 2008. See especially the testimony of Saw B---, who described how his brother was arrested and killed, and his family forced to flee amid accusations of contact with the KNLA, after KNLA soldiers captured a Tatmadaw soldier near his home. Tatmadaw battalions under LID #22 are active in the current conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts; specific battalion numbers mentioned by local sources interviewed by KHRG researchers have been omitted from this bulletin for security.

How is the situation in the village now?

There's no chance that it'll be better. The situation will become worse.

How far is the Burma Army [Tatmadaw] camp from your village?

It's not very far. If I have to say, it's *t'aw tha* [literally 'one shout'; a Burmese expression similar to the English expression 'within shouting distance']. If you had to walk, it'd take ten to twenty minutes.

We've heard that the DKBA arrested a police officer and they arrested one soldier. Do you know [about] that?

For the policeman, it wasn't an officer. His name is M--- and the DKBA didn't arrest him. He was just sitting in a tea shop, and the DKBA came to him, frightened him, and asked him '*Where is the police officer?*' And the policeman told them '*The camp officer is at U Sa---'s house,*' because the DKBA frightened [threatened] him that if he didn't tell them, they'd capture him. But when the DKBA came to my house, they saw the soldier and captured him. The soldier's name is T--- and [he is] 52 years old. After that they let the policeman [M---] go. At that time, the camp officer wasn't at my house.

How do you know that this happened?

The tea shop owner, whose name is Y---, came and told my wife that the policeman told the DKBA that. For the DKBA capturing the soldier, I saw it with my own eyes because they captured him at my house.

Why do you think they arrested the soldier and didn't arrest the policeman?

I think they'd have arrested whoever they saw. They wouldn't have thought only to arrest soldiers but not the police. For the policeman [M---], in the past he had a good relationship with the DKBA [soldiers], like they drank and ate together.

Did [all] that happen on the same day, or on different days?

Yes, it [all] happened on the same day. It happened on the 15th [starting] at 8:20.

What time was it when they came and fired on Saw R---'s house?

It was because they couldn't capture Saw R---. So they [Tatmadaw soldiers] came down [to the village], and before they arrived at Saw R---'s house they started firing. Then the whole group fired at Saw R--- house and ran up to the house. At that time, I was on the street and while they ran up to the house, I dared to watch it, and went up into my house. It happened right in front of me. I could see it. When the soldiers were firing at the house, inside the house there were three kids, inside the bomb shelter.

How do you know that the kids were in the house?

The kids are Saw R---'s brother's children, and Saw R---'s brother, Saw G---, came and told me himself that at the time when the soldiers fired at the house, the kids were in the house and it was lucky that none of the kids were injured.

Why you didn't flee on the first day [on June 15th]?

On the first day, I talked to my *hsan ain moo*⁵ and I told him I didn't dare to stay, but he told me 'U Sa---, don't flee. If you flee, you'll have a bigger mistake [the mistake will appear bigger to the Tatmadaw soldiers].' So I didn't run away. But on the 16th, when they shelled the mortars, I didn't dare to stay anymore.

You said the Tatmadaw soldiers came and threatened you. Can you tell us what they said to you?

The officer came and told [asked] me, 'Why didn't you come and tell me when they [the DKBA] came and captured the soldier at your house.' And I told him that, because the policeman already went back [was released], I thought he'd go back and report it. It wouldn't have been good for me to go and give information about this [incident]. He [the Tatmadaw officer] continued, 'If that's the case, I'll arrest all the village leaders, the village chairman and Saw R---'s parents.' Then I told him that the soldiers had already taken Saw R---'s mother.

At the time when the soldiers fired at Saw R---'s house, where had his parents gone?

His mother had been taken to the [Tatmadaw] Tactical Operation Command camp before the firing started, and his father was in his field. After that, Saw R---'s father came back to the village at the time when the Tatmadaw brought Saw R---'s mother down to the village. They talked to Saw R---'s father, and told him to go and get their soldier back from his son. The officer wrote two sentences [for Saw R---], which said: 'Return the soldier by tomorrow. If you do not find the soldier by tomorrow, come and get your mother's body here.' I could see those two sentences.

Did they actually kill Saw R---'s mother?

The next morning, I could see that Saw R---'s father had come back, but the soldier didn't come back with him. So I was very sorry about that. I could see them [the Tatmadaw] talking to Saw R---'s father. But they didn't kill Saw R---'s mother. At about 1:10 pm they came down, and asked the village leaders to gather at the pagoda at the exit gate of the village. At first, they asked [everyone] to gather at my house and I went around to tell the village leaders. But not all of the village leaders were at home, and I came back and told them [the Tatmadaw soldiers] that not all of the village leaders were at home. Then, they didn't look at me when they talked to me; they said that if everyone didn't go there [to the meeting at the village gate] by 2 pm, they'd shell mortars into the village.

Did they restrict villagers from going outside?

Before I left my village I heard that they were already restricting villagers from going to other villages. They only allowed villagers to go to their workplaces during the daytime, between 6 am and 6 pm. After that [6 pm], villagers couldn't go outside the village. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] said that if they saw [anyone] after 6 pm they'd shoot them. Yesterday, I met with one villager from Pa--- village, and he told me that at the time when this happened, the villagers couldn't sleep in their houses and they had to go and sleep in the monastery. Two or three days ago, the situation [started to] become better and villagers started going back and sleeping in their houses. I think the villagers had to sleep in the monastery for ten to twelve nights, because the villager I met told me that the villagers [only] started going back and sleeping in their houses in the last three days.

Now, has the DKBA released the Tatmadaw soldier already?

I heard that the DKBA has already released the soldier, but I don't know for sure.

⁵ Literally, 'Ten households leader'; a Burmese term denoting a position below 'Section leader' within a village administration.

The villager told you that the situation is getting better now. Why do you think the situation is getting better?

I think [the situation is improving because] the DKBA hasn't entered and attacked [Pa--- village]. Also, the first village chairman, U Mo--- has come back now. And villagers have more courage now. Another one [reason] is that the Burma Army [Tatmadaw] officer who threatened me isn't there currently, and he went to Ti--- army camp. I don't know the troop commander's name.

During the incident, why wasn't the village chairman at home?

Two or three days before the incident, the chairman went to N--- or W---. I don't know, but I heard that he went to arrange for his children to go to college. When this incident happened, people phoned him and he tried to come back. Now he's also called my children to go back, because I have two children that study in grade ten. But I don't dare to let them go back.

How many households are there in Pe--- [Pa---] village?

At the time when I served as *hsan ain moo* [literally 'ten households leader'], there were [number censored for security] households. We have [number censored for security] sections in the village. This incident affected [number censored for security] sections, but the last section is [located] a little bit outside [the village] so it wasn't affected by this incident. The village is called Pa--- in Burmese, and Pe--- in Karen. Pa--- is becoming a sub- township of Ba--- Township. The first [sub-township] is Ba---, and then Pa---, and then Do---.

When they [the Tatmadaw] shelled the mortars, where were they based?

They were based at a pagoda that's outside our village; [it happened at] about 2:10 pm. They shelled a mortar first, then fired small guns, then they shelled a second mortar, and then I fled. I heard that two mortars landed in the village. One hit U No---'s house, and broke the roof. But the house was recently-built and no one was staying in the house. I don't know where the other shell landed. They shelled about three or four mortars, but I didn't count them. Starting then, I didn't go back [to Pa---] anymore. When my wife saw someone, she asked about me and people told her that I had run across the river; then she followed me.

What are you planning for the future?

We have to stay like this. I don't know what to do now. With this situation, currently I don't dare to go back yet.

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

- *Displacement Monitoring: Regular updates on protection concerns for villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts and adjacent areas in Thailand* (July 2011)
- *Tatmadaw shelling kills one child, injures another in Mae T'Ler village* (June 2011)
- *Three villagers killed, eight injured during fighting in Kyaikdon area* (May 2011)
- *Human rights abuses and obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians amidst ongoing conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts* (January 2011)
- *Villagers flee to avoid fighting and portering: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District* (December 2010)
- *Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand* (November 2010)

Karen Districts



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