



News Bulletin

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Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw P---, May 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher in May 2011 with a villager from Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District. The researcher interviewed Naw P---, a 40-year-old farmer who described her experiences living in a Tatmadaw-controlled relocation site, and in her original village in a mixed-administration area under effective Tatmadaw control. Naw P--- described the following human rights abuses: rape and sexual violence; indiscriminate firing on villagers by Tatmadaw soldiers; forced relocation; arrest and detention; movement restrictions; theft and looting; and forced labour, including use of villagers as military sentries and porters. Naw P--- also raised concerns regarding the cost of health care and about children's education, specifically Tatmadaw restrictions on children's movement during perceived military instability and the prohibition of Karen-language education. In order to address these concerns, Naw P--- told KHRG that some villagers pay bribes to avoid forced labour and to secure the release of detained family members; lie to Tatmadaw commanders about the whereabouts of villagers working on farms in violation of movement restrictions; and organise covert Karen-language education for their children.

Interview | Naw P--- (female, 40), 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.¹ This interview was received in May 2011 along with twelve other interviews with villagers from Nyaunglebin District.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farming

Position: [censored for security]

What is your name?

My name is Naw P---.

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.

² 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 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.

How old are you?

I'm 40 years old.

Which village, township and district you are from?

I'm from Ta--- village, Kyauk Kyi [Ler Doh] Township, Nyaunglebin district.

What is your occupation?

I'm a farmer.

Do you live in your old [original] village or do you live in a new village [relocation site]?

I live in my old village.

Can you tell us about the situation in your old village, and what are villagers' occupations?

Some villagers are farmers and some don't have farms. They [villagers who don't have farms] work as day workers [for daily wages].

I mean how is the situation in the village?

Sometimes the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] comes to our village and we can't work smoothly [without disruption] because they come and ask for villagers to do sentry duty for them and to carry things for them. My village is big so each time they ask for ten or fifteen people to porter for them. When they [villagers] go to carry things, it sometimes takes them five days, sometimes 15 days and sometimes one month. Their family [members] which are left behind can't work, because they need the family head to lead the family. The SPDC Army camp is near my village so we have to go and fetch [porter] for their army camp.

What is the name of the army camp?

They call it Ka--- army camp.

What is the officer's name?

The officer's name? I'm not sure because the battalion changes all the time. Sometimes they're based in the village for three months, and other times for six months.

They change the battalions, but is [the Tatmadaw] still based in your village?

They change the battalion but the army [soldiers] rotates all the time. They never stop. They tell the village head to go to see them. They say '*We don't have food, so bring us food and chickens*'. They ask villagers to go and guard their army camp [perform sentry duty] but if a person can't go they have to pay 2,500 kyat (US \$3.18)³ for one day and one night.

³ 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 July 21st 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 785 kyat.

Is that 2,500 kyat (US \$3.18) for one person?

Yes, for one person. In the morning the villager [who is a sentry] has to go and check the news for them [such as] *'Is the KNLA Army coming?'* We have to write a report for them [about KNLA movements]. Villagers [who are sentries] have to stay at the army camp every day, to guard their camp for them.

How many villagers have to go each day?

Each day, three villagers have to go and stay at their camp. One villager has to go to find out how close the KNLA Army is to their camp. One has to send the news to the [Tatmadaw] Army leader, and one has to guard the army camp. So, it causes problems for the villagers' livelihoods because there's no time to do their own work. They [the villagers] often have to go and be a guard [sentry] for the SPDC Army, so they are too tired to work on their livelihoods.

How many households do you have in your village?

We have [number censored for security] households.

How many villagers do you have in your village?

We have [number censored for security] villagers.

What are the villagers' occupations?

Some of the villagers are farmers and shop keepers. Some sew and do agricultural work, such as raising pigs and chickens.

Does the village face food problems?

Yes, some [villagers] face a lot of food problems because they don't have their own farms, so they don't have enough food. Villagers have to go stand guard [perform sentry duty] at the army camp, and have no time to work for themselves. They have to go for forced labour many times, and some have small kids. When they go to guard the army camp they bring their kids with them.

How old are the children who have to go stand guard at the army camp?

If they're 16 years old, they have to go.

How about the children under 16 years old?

Children under 16 years old are students. Students have to go to school in Bo--- village and, when they go to school there, they have to go through [pass] the army camp. Sometimes they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] say to students: *'The situation isn't good, so you have to go on time and come back on time.'* So, the students have to hurry to go to school.

Do you mean the SPDC [Tatmadaw] doesn't like the students to go to school?

No, they say the situation isn't good, so the students can't go to school. If the students have bicycles, it will take them one and a half hours to get to school. But, if the students don't have a bicycle, it will take them three hours to walk. Sometimes the situation isn't

good and they [Tatmadaw soldiers] write a letter to the school and say the students have to come back home before school is finished.

Do you have a school in your village?

We have only a primary school. So the students have to go to Bo--- village for middle school. In our village there are 40 middle school students. They have to go to Bo--- village middle school.

What languages do they learn?

They learn Burmese and English.

Do the schools teach the Karen Language?

They do teach the Karen language, but not openly. The [information censored for security] people hide and teach the Karen language to their kids at [location censored for security].

What would they do if they found out [information censored for security] people were teaching the Karen language?

If they find out, we just lie to them and tell them we are only [activity censored for security]. We have to solve the problem in that way.

Which villagers' rights do they abuse?

They abuse the villagers' rights. They forced the villagers to move to a relocation site, and some people didn't have carts or oxen, and they couldn't move at the time they [the Tatmadaw] asked. The villagers had to sleep in their old village, and the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw soldiers] raped the girls. That battalion was LIB #440, from the army camp called Py---. The name of the officer [in LIB #440] was *Bo Thu Kha*. They said that if the villagers didn't want to move to the relocation site, then the most beautiful young girls had to marry [be like a wife to] the soldiers. The villagers asked the officer not to make us move to the relocation site. The villagers said: '*You ordered us to move and we will move, but if our children have to marry you, we won't let them marry you.*' But, one young Karen lady *kei taw b'yaw ta aw* [literally 'became Burmese Army food']. The battalion officer [*Bo Thu Kha*] didn't rape her. Instead, he asked one of his soldiers who already had a wife and children to force this girl to marry him [*Bo Thu Kha*]. This girl believed [the soldier with a wife and children], and her parents also believed him, but she said she wouldn't dare marry [*Bo Thu Kha*]. The next day, the SPDC Army soldier [with the wife and children] called the girl to come see him at the school. She said she wouldn't go and he [the soldier with the wife and children] said to the girl: '*If you won't come, I'll arrest your mother.*' She was afraid that the SPDC soldiers would come to her house again and he [the soldier with the wife and children] lied to her, saying: '*Don't worry, a few of your friends are at the school.*' She was afraid and didn't have a choice, and she went to the school and the soldier [with the wife and children] raped her. The girl came back and complained to the KWO [Karen Women Organisation].

How old was she?

She was 18 years old.

They asked you to move to the relocation site, but you didn't, and you still lived in the old village?

No, they forced us move to Ka--- relocation site. They forced us to move right away but some villagers had many things to bring. They didn't have carts and oxen to carry things and there was no vehicle road. The SPDC Army threatened to burn all of their houses. We had to dismantle our houses in front of the SPDC Army. When we were forced to move to the relocation site, we weren't the only village. There were many more villages that also had to move.

Can you tell me the village names?

The village names are Ta---, La---, Ma---, Ye---, Ge---, Ka---, Ha---, Wa---, T---, Lu--- and Du---. These villages all had to move to the relocation site. There were 11 villages in total which had to move on the same day.

Which DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] battalion's army troops were based in your old village?

I can't remember the DKBA Battalion's name, but they were based in my old village for three years. They were based beside the Hoh Nee [pagoda] in the Paya Gyi area. [If villagers had] a family member who had joined the KNU Army [KNLA], those villagers were forced to go and stay in Paya Gyi area, where the DKBA Army was based. For example, if my son had joined the KNLA troops, I would have had to go and live in Paya Gyi.

Was the DKBA based in the relocation site?

No, the DKBA wasn't based in the relocation site, only the SPDC Army was based there.

Did the DKBA make the villagers do forced labour?

Yes, the DKBA made the villagers do forced labour.

Was the DKBA more forceful than the SPDC Army?

The DKBA forced us like the SPDC Army forced us, because they were also SPDC *a'bpwah* [soldiers or members].

Did the DKBA rape the women?

No, they didn't.

Do the villagers hide in the jungle?

When they run to the jungle, the SPDC Army comes and arrests their parents. They have to talk to the SPDC Army a lot before they [their parents] are released, and they have to pay money for them to be let go.

Do they arrest them again?

Yes, they say: *'Your children went back and joined the KNLA and share information about the SPDC.'* They arrest their parents, their brothers and sisters.

Do they set them free?

If you don't give them [the Tatmadaw] money, they won't set them free. If the children go to visit their parents, they have to bring some food for the village leader to solve the problem. You have to go and solve the problem with [bribe] both the big officers and the small officers [upper and lower ranking soldiers].

When did you move to the relocation site?

I moved to the relocation site between March and April in 2006.

Which battalion numbers forced you to move to the relocation site?

The battalion LIB #440,⁴ company #3 and the officer's name was *Bo Thu Kha*.

How did you come here?

From Ta--- village we came here. We had to go through [pass] the army camp. When we walked in front of their camp they asked for our ID documents. They asked me where I was going. I said, 'I'm going to farm.' Then they asked, 'Will you sleep there?' 'Yes,' I said, 'I'll sleep at the farm one night and come back.' They allowed me to go and sleep for only one night, and asked me to come back at the right time. They signed [a permission document] for me, and then I could go. When I came to [location censored for security] I didn't come in front of their camp again, I took another way instead. We slept at He--- one night, and in the morning we took a car and came to [location censored for security]. When we came here, we lied to them [the Tatmadaw] by telling them we were going to [activity censored for security].

How long have you stayed here?

I came here on [date censored for security].

What will you do if you go home and the SPDC Army finds out that you came here? Does anyone know you came here?

Yes, the elder people [village elders or leaders] know and when I go back I'll get a car from somewhere and I'll take a different way. If they ask, I'll tell them I had to go for [activity censored for security].

Did the SPDC Army come and tell you in person to move to the relocation site?

Yes, they came themselves and forced us to move to the relocation site. Then the eldest people asked them if they had an order letter. They [the Tatmadaw] said: 'It doesn't matter if we have one or not. We're telling you to move so you have to move. If you ask for an order letter, we'll kill you, so don't ask for an order letter. You only have three days to move, and you have to finish moving in three days. If you aren't finished moving in three days, we'll burn down all of your villages.' They threatened villagers like that. Some villagers were so *law tha gk'nyaw* [literally 'pitiful' or inspiring pity] because they didn't have a carts and oxen to carry things for them. Some villagers had big families and they had a lot of things to bring with them.

⁴ Note that KHRG has previously reported that in March and April 2006, LIB #440 was active in the area to the north of Ler Doh Township, in Mone Township in Nyaunglebin District and Tantabin Township in Toungoo District. Abuses by LIB #440 reported to KHRG at that time included forced relocation, destruction of rice barns and killing of villagers. See: "Forced Relocation, Restrictions and Abuses in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, July 2006.

Do you live in your old [original] village?

Yes, I went back to live in my old village, but I had to pay them [the Tatmadaw] a lot of money for permission to go back and live in my old village.

When the SPDC Army forced you to move to the relocation site, did the villagers say anything [complain] to them?

The villagers said: *'We'll move, but can you wait for a couple of days?'* The SPDC Army said: *'No, you have to move now.'* For example, they forced us to finish our move to the relocation site in only three days, even though we asked them to give us ten days.

What would the SPDC Army do to them [villagers], if they didn't finish moving [in the time required]?

The SPDC Army asked them to finish moving, and if they didn't finish moving they [villagers] couldn't do anything. They still had to move and leave their things [behind]. So, we couldn't bring all our things with us. One villager said *'If you want to burn our things, you can.'* But the SPDC Army said: *'We're not going to burn your things. We'll burn you [the villagers].'*

Did all the villagers go and stay at the relocation site?

Yes, all of them went to stay at the relocation site, but some villagers who had relatives in a different village ran to [their relatives] and stayed with them.

How many people didn't go to live in the relocation site?

About ten families didn't come to stay in the relocation site. Those villagers went to live with their relatives in other villages.

What was the name of the relocation site?

The relocation site was called Th--- village, in Kyauk Kyi [Ler Doh] Township Nyaunglebin District.

How many years did you stay in the relocation site?

I stayed in the forced relocation site for three years.

Do you know how many villagers were in the relocation site?

We don't know how many people were at the forced relocation site. We only knew that there were [number censored for security] villagers from our village at the site.

What occupations did people have at the forced relocation site?

[During the day] they went back to work on their farms in their old villages. They had to get a permission letter from the SPDC Army [that was valid] for five days. They could go to work at their farms [during the day], but they couldn't sleep at their farms.

Do villagers have to pay for the permission letter from the SPDC Army?

Yes, one permission letter covers three people, and each person has to pay 1,000 kyat (US \$1.27). Three people have to pay 3,000 kyat (US \$3.82). But, they can only go for

five days or one week. My farm is in Se---, which is too far away. Sometimes, two people in my house go to our farm. They sleep there secretly for two or three days because if we don't stay like that we won't have a chance to work on our farm for food. If someone in my house disappears [to stay at their farm], the SPDC Army comes and asks where those people have gone. So, I have to lie to them, and tell them they went to Na--- [town]. I had to send a message to them to come home, because the SPDC Army had come and asked about them: *'If you don't come back, they'll arrest your family members in their houses.'* We have to work hard for our food. They set up travel times for the villagers, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. But, if you don't come back at the right time they'll shoot at you. One day, one of the villagers, a boy, came home at about 6:30 pm or 7:00 pm and he brought a light with him, but because the wind was too strong his light wouldn't work and he didn't have a lighter. When the SPDC Army saw him walk towards the village they shot at him and chased him. It was a villager and they shot him in his leg. So he didn't die, but the village head had to watch [keep an eye on] the villager boy for the SPDC Army. The village head explained everything to the SPDC Army and said: *'If you don't believe us, you can look at his family documents.'*

What is name of the [Tatmadaw] army camp?

They came and lived in our old village for three years. But LIB #--- [battalion number censored for security] is still there. Sometimes, they're based there for three or six months, and then they rotate with LIB #--- [battalion number censored for security] army troops.

What's the most difficult problem the villagers face?

Some of the villagers are very poor, so they go to the jungle to collect vegetables to sell. After they sell vegetables and get money, they buy food to eat. Because [when] the SPDC Army forced us to move to the relocation site, the children couldn't go to school. The parents had no money to send them to school, and their mothers and fathers couldn't take care of the children because they both had to go for work. [If] in one family there are three children who go to school, when the family is low on money they can't go to school anymore.

Did the SPDC Army come and make the people at the relocation site do forced labour?

Yes, they came and forced us to build the road for their vehicles. We had to go to repair their army camp. We were forced to move to the relocation site, but we still had to go and stand guard at their camp every day. Every day two people had to stand guard, one person had to stay in the village and one in the relocation site, so two people had to go. At the army camp, one person had to guard on the right [side], and the other person guarded the other direction.

How about the villagers who didn't go?

You had to go, but if you didn't go you had to pay 2,500 kyat (US \$ 3.18) per person for each day.

How is the situation changing? Is forced labour decreasing?

The situation is never getting better. It's only getting worse.

To solve the problem, do villagers go to the SPDC Army camp and talk to them?

No, no one would dare to do that.

Did they have a clinic in that village [in the relocation site]?

No, they didn't have one. So if the villagers were sick, we had to bring them to the township clinic.

What kind of common diseases [illnesses] did people face in the relocation site?

The common diseases the villagers face are malaria and diarrhoea.

Where do they go for a clinic when they get sick?

They go to He--- clinic in He---.

How many days does it take to go to He---?

It doesn't take a full day. If you take a motorbike, it takes only three hours.

How about the relocation site? Did they have a clinic?

They didn't have a clinic. If they [villagers] got sick, we had to make herbal medicine for them.

How far is it from the relocation site to He---?

From the relocation site to He--- takes one day.

Do they cure you for free?

Nothing is free. You have to pay for everything depending on the diseases. The least you have to pay 10,000 kyat (US \$12.74) to go to the hospital in He---.

Did they have a school in the relocation site?

They only had a temporary school, and it only went up to grade four.

Who set up the school?

The school was set up by villagers and the village head. They also had a school teacher.

Did you want to say anything else?

I just want to say we are facing problems because of the SPDC Army, and we can't complain to anyone.

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

- *Nyaunglebin Interviews: May 2011* (June 2011)
- *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)

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.khrq.org>.

