



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

November 3, 2011 / KHRG #2011-B43

Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in September 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in T'Nay Hsah Township, Pa'an District during September 2011. It details an incident in which a soldier from Tatmadaw Border Guard #1017 deliberately shot at villagers in a farm hut, resulting in the death of one civilian and injury to a six-year-old child. The report further details the subsequent concealment of this incident by Border Guard soldiers who placed an M16 rifle and ammunition next to the dead civilian and photographed his body, and ordered the local village head to corroborate their story that the dead man was a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldier. The report also relates villagers' concerns regarding the use of landmines by both KNLA and Border Guard troops, which prevent villagers from freely accessing agricultural land and kill villagers' livestock and pets, and also relates an incident in September 2011 in which a villager was severely maimed when he stepped on a landmine that had been placed outside his farm.

Situation Update | T'Nay Hsah Township, Pa'an District (September 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Pa'an District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

Injury and concerns involving landmines

On September 13th 2011, a Gk--- villager named Saw P---, 30, had gone to his farm to replant his rice paddy which had died. He returned to his village in the evening and on the way, at 6:30 pm, he stepped on a landmine outside his farm. His farm is far from Gk--- village, about a 20-minute walk. He stepped on the landmine along the La--- River bank outside his farm. His left foot was torn apart when the landmine exploded. After the landmine exploded, [Tatmadaw] Border Guard Battalion #1017 Corporal Saw Bpa Mi Hsaw went to investigate and brought him [Saw P---] back to Gk--- village. The landmines were planted by Corporal Saw Bpa Mi Hsaw and his soldiers. They planted the landmines and sharpened bamboo stakes around the village. After the Border Guard soldiers took Saw P--- to the village, a medic named Saw B--- treated his injuries. *Thara*² Saw B--- provides medical training in Gk--- village.

¹ 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 writing situation updates, villagers are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area. KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Pa'an District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Functionally Refoulement: Camps in Tha Song Yang District abandoned as refugees bow to pressure," KHRG, April 2010.

² *Thara* is a Karen term used for a teacher, pastor, or any person to whom one wishes to show respect.

In the Gk--- area, the active armed groups are Border Guard Battalion #1017, the KNU-KNLA [Karen National Union-Karen National Liberation Army] Peace Council³ and KNLA Battalion #101. Gk--- village is located in T'Nay Hsah Township near Ky---, Na---, N---, M--- and Dt--- villages.

The villagers also reported that the armed groups which are most active in this area are the Border Guard and KNLA, and that they plant landmines. However, the KNLA plants the landmines around their army camp, and when they plant the landmines they tell the villagers where they plant them. Border Guard Battalion #1017 soldiers use the villages as their army camp and they also plant landmines to protect themselves, but they do not let the villagers know where they plant them. The Gk--- village head also mentioned that because of the landmines, dogs, goats and a herd of cows have also been killed. No one knows exactly how many cows or dogs have been injured or killed [by landmines]. The dogs were mating [when they were killed by landmines] and no one knows who their owners were.

The [Gk---] village head also said that the Border Guard soldiers living in Gk--- and Ky--- villages mostly use *dtaiing* [tripwire] mines. The Border Guard [Battalion #1017] commanders are Gk--- and Ky--- villagers, so they [Battalion #1017 soldiers] live in those villages and they have not built a separate army camp. Border Guard Battalion #1017 Company Commander Captain Saw Hsa P'lee and Section Commander Corporal Saw Bpa Mi Hsaw live in Gk--- village. Because the Border Guard soldiers are based in the village, the villagers live in fear as they worry that a battle might occur in the village.

The [Gk---] village head also said that Border Guard Battalion #1017 left [Ky---] on September 19th 2011 and removed all the landmines that they had planted.⁴

Attack on villagers

On September 17th 2011, a Border Guard Battalion #1017 soldier shot at a Ky--- villager's farm hut. According to the villagers' beliefs, they were making sacrificial offerings in the hut to ensure their farm's success when the Border Guard soldier shot at them. The villagers believed that the Border Guard soldier shot at them because he had heard loud voices and assumed that, because of the loud noise, KNLA soldiers might be in the hut. That villager's hut is close to a KNLA army camp. In this attack, a villager named Saw A--- was killed, but this villager is not from the Ky--- village area. He was from Pathein [the capital city of Irrawaddy Division] and had come to work in the area. The owner of the hut that the Border Guard soldier shot at is named *Pa Dtee* [Uncle]⁵ Ht---. According to the villagers' beliefs, if a villager from another village dies in their village they will not bury the villager where they bury their own [villagers] so they buried him in another place. The villagers also mentioned that a child was injured in the attack. The child was injured on the inside of the left arm. This child is only six years old.

³ The villager who wrote this report is here most likely referring to the KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), an armed group based in Htoah Gkaw Ko, Pa'an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2007 and subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform its forces into the Tatmadaw Border Guard; see: "KNU/KNLA Peace Council," *Mizzima News*, June 7th 2010 and "KPC to be outlawed if it rejects BGF," *Burma News International*, August 30th 2010.

⁴ While the villager who submitted this report to KHRG reported here that the Ky--- village head believed Border Guard Battalion #1017 to have left the Ky--- area on September 19th 2011, another report submitted later in September by the same villager documented a subsequent attack by Border Guard Battalion #1017 in the Ky--- area on September 21st; see: "Pa'an Situation Update: June to September 2011," KHRG, October 2011.

⁵ *Pa Dtee*, meaning 'Uncle', is a familiar Karen term of respect attributed to an older man; it does not necessarily signify any actual familial ties between the 'Uncle' and the villager who wrote this report.

The Border Guard Battalion #1017 soldier who attacked the villagers is named Saw Htee Yoh. He was a [civilian] medic before the transformation of [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)] into the Border Guard, after which he joined the Border Guard.⁶

The Ky--- village head also reported that on the day of the attack, and after the villager [from Pathein] died, the Border Guard soldiers put an M16 assault rifle and two magazines [of ammunition] beside the villager who died and took a picture. After that, they ordered the village head to tell people this villager was a KNLA soldier.

Further background on the current situation in Pa'an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Pa'an Situation Update: June to September 2011* (October 2011)
- *Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011* (October 2011)
- *Displacement Monitoring: Regular updates on protection concerns for villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts and adjacent areas of Thailand* (October 2011)
- *Pa'an Situation Update: April 2011* (September 2011)
- *Pa'an interviews: Conditions for villagers returned from temporary refuge sites in Tha Song Yang* (May 2011)
- *Extrajudicial execution of two civilians in Pa'an District* (February 2011)
- *Human rights abuses and obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians amidst ongoing conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts* (January 2011)

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>.

⁶ While Tatmadaw and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) units have for years operated together, this operational hierarchy became formalised with the DKBA's transformation into a 'Border Guard Force' under control of the Tatmadaw and containing a fixed number quota of Tatmadaw officers. This transformation dates to at least May 2009, when commanding officers stated in high-level meeting of DKBA officers that the DKBA would transform itself into a 'Border Guard Force.' Leaked minutes from the May 2009 meeting are retained by KHRG on file. Ceremonies attended by Tatmadaw commanders officially announced the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard Forces in September 2010; see, for example: "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, September 2010.

