



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Thaton Situation Update: June to October 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Pa'an Township, Thaton District between June and October 2011, specifically forced labour demands for villagers to clear vegetation from roads, to rebuild Tatmadaw Border Guard camps, to porter for three-month periods, and to guide and serve as human shields for Tatmadaw soldiers on active patrol duty. This report also details demands for villages to provide recruits and payments to support recruits' salaries to Tatmadaw Border Guard Battalion #1014; arbitrary demands for payment in lieu of the provision of villagers to fill demands for forced labour; as well as an explicit threat of violence issued against village heads if they failed to comply with a Battalion #1014 demand to send villagers as porters. The report further documents the imposition of movement restrictions preventing villagers from accessing agricultural workplaces, and raises concerns about the future food security of residents living in areas proximate to the Salween River whose paddy fields were flooded and destroyed during the last rainy season.

Situation Update | Pa'an Township, Thaton District (June to October 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Thaton 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 This report was received along with other information from Thaton District, including six interviews and 21 photographs.²

Tatmadaw and Border Guard abuse of civilians in Pa'an Township between June and October 2011

On July 15th 2011, Tatmadaw³ LIB #220 led by and under the command of Battalion Commander Zaw Win Htun, which is based in S---, T--- and H--- villages, did not let villagers in

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.

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 Thaton District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Thaton District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Exploitative abuse and villagers response in Thaton District," KHRG, November 2009.

³ In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state military, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen

the area leave their villages. They [the Tatmadaw] did not let villagers go out to look after their cattle or go to their farms. Then they said they will kill any villagers and village heads who contact the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA], if the KNLA comes and shoots at them.

On July 21st 2011, soldiers under the command of Aung Kyaw Soe, Column #2 and Deputy Battalion Commander of Tatmadaw LIB #215 and Tin Win, a Company Commander of Tatmadaw Border Guard Battalion #1014, forced two villagers [per household] from K---, Y--- and G--- villages to go and clear the road from G--- monastery to the foot of the large limestone outcropping at G---. He ordered two people per household from these three villages to go and clear the road.

On August 5th 2011, Tatmadaw LIB #216 led by Battalion Commander Naing Tin Hla entered W--- army camp and [then] went to E--- village in Bilin Township on August 7th 2011. He forced one person from each household [in E---] to go with his troops and guide them to A---. He ordered villagers to walk between his soldiers [one villager between two soldiers]. Even though the villagers were afraid to go, they had to go.

On August 9th 2011, Tatmadaw Border Guard Battalion #1014 [soldiers] led by Company Commander Tin Win ordered villagers from each village in O--- village tract to porter and stay with them for three months. If a village did not provide porters, the village had to pay 450,000 kyat (US \$584).⁴ They demanded one porter from L--- village, one porter from N---, one porter from I--- village, two porters from B--- village and two porters from R--- village. They threatened that they would *boh* [cover something with cloth or plastic] the village heads' heads [if they did not provide porters or payment]. On August 15th 2011, they also demanded porter fees of 1,200,000 kyat (US \$1,558) from Kh---, Ky--- and Ht--- villages, and 600,000 kyat (US \$779) from Kw--- and P--- villages.

On August 20th 2011, Tatmadaw Border Guard Battalion #1014 Company Commander Tin Win moved and set up an army camp at H--- village, and forced villagers to go and build the army camp for him. The villages that had to go and build the camp were S---, Hs---, T---, H---, Bp--- and U--- villages. The army camp had to be built by August 24th 2011. The villagers finished building the camp by the date when they had to finish. This Border Guard unit recruited soldiers to increase their strength, so they forced [forcibly recruited] Saw G---'s son, Saw B---, Saw H---, Saw T---, Saw P--- and Saw N--- in H--- village. They also demanded 13 people [recruits] from S---, Hs--- and T--- village. They will pay 35,000 kyat (US \$45.45) per month to these people. To recruit new soldiers and pay the new soldiers' salary, they demanded 2,000,000 kyat (US \$2,597) from S--- and 1,000,000 kyat (US \$1,298) from Hs--- villages, 1,000,000 kyat from T--- and 4,000,000 kyat (US \$5,194) total from Bp--- and U--- villages. Those villages have already paid half [the amount], but they will have to pay it all by August 30th 2011.

The civilians' situation

The problems that civilians in Pa'an Township have to face are Tatmadaw and Border Guard demands for money, and flooding and destruction of paddy fields [due to flooding]. Within the five months between June to October 2011, villagers have had to pay millions of kyat to the soldiers under the Tatmadaw and Border Guard commanders. Some villagers have had to sell

villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this report and informants; however, in order to ensure clarity in this translation, "SPDC" has been replaced with "Tatmadaw" when referring to the state military and with "Burmese government" when referring to the national government.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report 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 November 15th 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

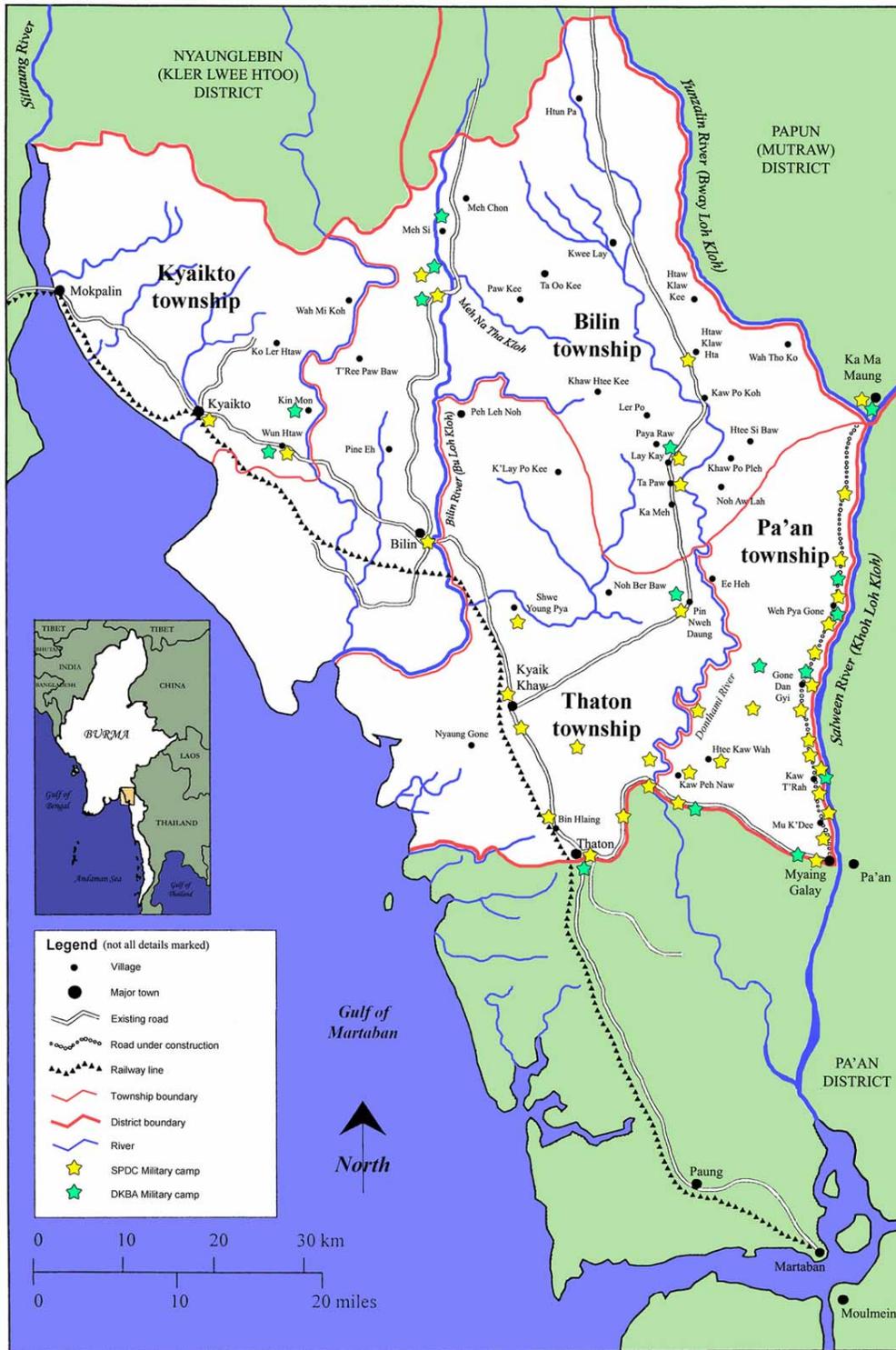
their land and property to pay porter fees and the recruitment fees for new soldiers. This year, there was also heavy rain and flooding for a whole month which caused paddy in the fields to become rotten. Pa'an Township is close to the Salween River. The farms are about 4.5 miles (7 km) away from the river. Most farms there were destroyed and paddy crops died because of the flooding. For this reason, we can say that the villagers will have to face food crisis [shortages] in the coming year.

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

- *Thaton Situation Updates: May 2010 to January 2011* (May 2011)
- *Exploitative abuse and villager responses in Thaton District* (November 2009)
- *Land confiscation and the business of human rights abuse in Thaton District* (April 2009)
- *SPDC and DKBA extortion and forced labour in Thaton District* (November 2008)
- *Villagers' responses to forced labour, torture and other demands in Thaton District*, (October 2008)
- *Oppressed twice over: SPDC and DKBA exploitation and violence against villagers in Thaton District* (March 2008)

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

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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