Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Ler Doh Township, May to July 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in August 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Ler Doh [Kyauk Kyi] Township, Nyaunglebin District, between May and July 2011. It provides details on human rights abuses committed by Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #345 including: demands for forced labour clearing vegetation around Tatmadaw camps, serving as set tha at Tatmadaw camps, and collecting and delivering building materials and firewood; the imposition of movement restrictions and the requirement that villagers purchase travel permission documents to access agricultural workplaces; arbitrary demands for food and payment; and an order to dismantle field huts. This report also notes that villagers were directly ordered by LIB #345 Captain Thet Zaw Win not to discuss or report demands for payment, and describes cooperation between public and military sector officials to levy demands for payment. This report also mentions that some villagers have responded to abuses by negotiating with Tatmadaw officers to avoid orders to dismantle their field huts, and by moving to areas beyond consolidated Tatmadaw control to access humanitarian support and pursue livelihoods activities.

Situation Update | Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District (August 2011)

The following situation update was written by a village in Nyaunglebin 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. This report was received along with other information from Nyaunglebin District, including two interviews and 70 photographs.

Introduction

In my area, the Tatmadaw commits many different kinds of human rights abuse. Tatmadaw soldiers always demand tax and force villagers to labour. The [November 2010] election
changed nothing and, as for the situation here, nothing has changed. The soldiers still force villagers to work for them and demand things from the villagers.

**Forced labour, taxation and demands**

In May, Tatmadaw LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #345 ordered the villagers not to build huts on their farms and to dismantle all huts [already established] in the villagers’ farms. This has happened in the Ler Doh [Kyauk Kyi] Township area and is causing farming problems for the villagers. The village head discussed [the problem] with the Tatmadaw soldiers and the Tatmadaw soldiers agreed to let the villagers build huts on their farm. However, if the villagers build huts on their farms they have to pay 3,500 kyat (US $4.55). The villagers have to work on their farms, so they had to agree to pay.

On June 13th 2011, Captain Thet Zaw Win of Tatmadaw LIB #345, which is based at the H--- army camp, ordered the villagers from B---, L---, T--- and K--- village tracts to go and repair the army camp [at H---]. Each household had to bring two bamboo poles and two wooden posts. There were 400 households that had to bring the wooden posts and bamboo poles, and ten villagers that had to work for them [as set tha] every day at the army camp. The Tatmadaw soldiers did not ask the villagers to work for them in the same way they had before. They asked instead for ten set tha to actually stay at their army camp to work for them.

On June 19th 2011, the Ler Doh Myo Lon Mu [Township Security Director] demanded three chickens from S--- village. This Myo Lon Mu always demands food from villagers and when Tatmadaw LIB #345 came and took military responsibility for Southern Ler Doh Township, they made demands on the villagers for a whole month. The villagers cannot raise enough animals [to meet soldiers’ demands for food]. Each household has to pay about 3,000 kyat (US $3.90) each month into a village fund. If they demand a lot of food, the village head has to collect more money, about 8,000 kyat (US $10.39), from the villagers. Because of this [regular demands for food], the village head has to collect more and more money from the villagers.

On July 21st 2011, Tatmadaw LIB #345 Company Commander [Captain] Thet Zaw Win ordered the villagers from K---, B---, L--- and T--- village tracts to buy four [prepaid] cellular phone cards, totalling 150,000 kyat (US $195). The village tracts decided to divide the cost between them. B---
- village tract had to give 50,000 kyat (US $64.94). K--- village tract had to give 30,000 kyat (US $38.96). T--- village tract had to give 20,000 kyat (US $25.97) and L--- village tract had to give 50,000 kyat. This commander, after he demanded and took the money, did not allow the villagers to talk about or report [what had happened].

On July 22nd 2011, Company Commander [Captain] Thet Zaw Win based at H--- camp ordered villagers to procure 1,500 [empty] fertiliser bags to build the army camp’s defences. He ordered [villagers from] L--- and B--- village tracts to deliver these and to build the army camp defences.

At the same time [July 22nd], each household in T--- village tract and K--- village tract was ordered to give the Tatmadaw [LIB #345] one load of firewood every day and whenever they [villagers] came to the H--- army camp. There are 200 households [in T--- and K--- village tracts combined].

On July 25th 2011, Z--- Camp Commander Kyaw Kyaw Zin ordered villagers to bring firewood. Every household in A---, C--- and G--- villages had to provide one load of firewood to the camp.

**Life under Tatmadaw control**

Even though the [November 2010] election brought change, the Tatmadaw soldiers still come into villages and their relationship with villagers has not changed. They demand more and more money from villagers. The demands for money from the Township Administrative Officer come through the Village Tract Administrator. They [civilian officials] meet together with Tatmadaw LIB #345 every 15 days.

**Villagers’ situation**

The villagers who live in the hill areas are now facing food shortages because last year, in 2010, the Tatmadaw came and attacked their villages, burning down the villagers’ houses and destroying their food supplies. The villagers did not have the chance to work on their hill farms regularly, so they have food shortages this year.6 Because of this, and because [villagers] under Tatmadaw control do not have jobs to do, some villagers have moved closer to areas where they can receive help from the organisations [from Thailand providing cross-border support]. So they have moved closer to hill areas to look for work and to catch fish to sell.

When villagers [in Tatmadaw-controlled areas] want to travel they need to ask permission from the Tatmadaw soldiers. Tatmadaw soldiers allow the villagers travel because they can demand [payment for travel permission]. Farmers also have to pay money in order to work on their farms without disruption.

**General information**

In May, Tatmadaw LIB #264 at I--- army camp demanded money for each villager’s farm hut. Villagers had to give 2,000 kyat (US $2.60) per farm hut. The Tatmadaw soldiers give villagers the chance [to work and travel] because they can demand money from villagers and force villagers to work for them. They allow villagers to move around and work without disruption because they get money from them.

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6 While the KHRG researcher who wrote this report did not specify the timeframe of the attacks to which he was referring, KHRG has previously reported that approximately 2,000 villagers in central Kyauk Kyi [Ler Doh] Township fled a series of attacks in which five villagers were killed, eleven houses burned and landmines planted in abandoned villages between January 17th and March 26th 2010, following the establishment of a new Tatmadaw camp in Kheh Der village tract, See “Attacks and displacement in Nyaunglebin District”, KHRG, April 2010 and “Attacks on displaced villagers in Nyaunglebin District”, KHRG, January 2010.
The Burmese government’s primary school in E--- village sent a funding request to UNICEF and received millions [of kyat] to buy supplies and students’ books. However, for the transportation of the books, they [the Burmese government] demanded that the students’ parents pay more than the books would have cost if they had bought them themselves.

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

• “Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw Sa---, May 2011,” (August 2011)
• “Nyaunglebin Interview: Saw My---, May 2011,” (August 2011)
• “Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw Ka---, May 2011,” (August 2011)
• “Nyaunglebin Interview: Saw Th---, May 2011,” (August 2011)
• “Nyaunglebin Interview: Saw S---, May 2011,” (July 2011)
• “Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw P---, May 2011,” (July 2011)
• “Nyaunglebin Interviews: May 2011,” (June 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.

7 While the villager who wrote this report did not mention any specify actors in the Burmese government, other unpublished information received by KHRG from the same villager suggests that, with regard to this incident, he is referring to the Kyauk Kyi [Ler Doh] Township Education Coordinator within the Burmese government’s Education Department.