



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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Thaton Interview: Naw L---, February 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted in February 2011 by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The villager interviewed Naw L---, a female village head from Bilin Township, Thaton District. Naw L--- described being interrogated and threatened at meetings with local Tatmadaw officers, including at times when she was pregnant. She described the killing of her son-in-law by then-DKBA Brigade #333 soldiers, and the defection of a Tatmadaw soldier to the KNLA, after which Tatmadaw soldiers arbitrarily arrested and tortured villagers and ordered Naw L--- to provide a firearm to replace the one taken by the defecting soldier. She also described how Tatmadaw soldiers forced H--- villagers to banish persons suspected of being KNLA soldiers and burn down their houses. Naw L--- explained that villagers face ongoing demands for forced labour, including forced portering of military rations, messenger and guide duty, for Tatmadaw, Border Guard and KNLA troops, but that she and her villagers employ a multitude of strategies to resist or mitigate abuse, including partial-compliance with forced labour demands; cultivating relationships with different, and oppositional, armed groups; lying about non-state armed groups' soldiers and their operations; and successfully raising complaints to commanding officers about abuses perpetrated by their inferiors.

Interview | Naw L--- (female), H--- village, Bilin Township, Thaton District (March 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a villager who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Thaton and Nyaunglebin Districts, including three other interviews and four incident reports.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Noodle vendor

Position: Village head

How many children do you have?

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 conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to 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 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 villager responses in Thaton District*, KHRG, November 2009.

I have eight children.

How old is your oldest child?

My oldest child is 30 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

Seven years old.

Could you explain to me how you became village head?

By looking at the villagers' situation, [I could see that the] SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]³ soldiers oppressed them. I try to work for the villagers so that we can work and live together, hand in hand. All the villagers want me to serve [as village head], so I do. All villagers wanted me to be village head, so I am.

How old were you when you became village head?

I was 38 years old.

When [what date] did you become village head?

I have no idea when [what date] I became village head. It was when I was 38 years old.⁴

Did villagers elect you to be village head or did the SPDC Army choose [appoint] you to be village head?

The villagers elected me to serve as village head.

Why did they elect you?

The villagers saw that I dared to talk bravely and I could travel and reach many places. If any of the villagers were arrested and tortured, I'd follow them.⁵ They saw that I dared to follow them and that I was an appropriate person [for the position of village head], so they elected me.

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 army, 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 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 conducted this interview and interviewee and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

⁴ Although Naw L--- did not provide her age during this interview, a KHRG researcher who has met with her estimated her age at the time of this interview to be over 50 years old.

⁵ It is probable that Naw L--- is here referring to the role frequently adopted by village heads of negotiating, or attempting to negotiate, with military officials to secure the release of villagers from military custody. This may involve serving as 'guarantor' for the detained villager's behaviour after their release or may necessitate the payment of an arbitrary fine. Village heads also tend to serve as the intermediary between military officials and local villagers when demands for forced labour or payment are issued and often face threats of violence as they attempt to balance the interests of their own community with demands issued by multiple and oppositional armed groups. For more on negotiation tactics employed by village heads in eastern Burma, see: *Civilian and Military order documents: March 2008 to July 2011*, KHRG, October 2011; "Village heads negotiate with Tatmadaw, armed groups to forestall human rights threats amid continued conflict in Dooplaya District," KHRG, August 2011; *Village*

What are your responsibilities as you know them?

The villagers elected me to serve as village head. I knew that the villagers loved and cared for me. I could go here and there, inside and outside the village, and I could manage things, so they elected me.

How do you manage to take care of your family and be village head at the same time?

As for my family problems, my children go to school, but we don't have enough money to pay for school fees. I sell noodles and can eat from the money I make, but I need more money. The villagers love and take care of me. I protect them from the problems caused by SPDC Army soldiers and KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] soldiers. They see me as a good person because I can protect them like this.

As for the problems you've faced, how have you, step by step, solved the problems that your village has faced?

If fighting [between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers] occurred, we had to solve problems. If we had to give them [soldiers] food, we gave it to them. In the past, serious fighting took place. After they [Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers] fought each other, the SPDC Army soldiers would shoot [villagers'] pigs and chickens to eat, but we didn't dare say anything to them. However, I tried to talk to them as best I could. I tried to talk to them and they let me. I had to do this because I'm the village head. I'm the village head whether I'm good or bad at it. We have to solve problems like this as times passes, month after month, year after year.

What problems does your village usually face?

Serious battles have not taken place [for some time now]. Five years ago, though, they [Tatmadaw soldiers] still oppressed us a lot. At that time, my son-in-law served as a [KNLA] soldier. They knew that he was a [KNLA] soldier, so they tried to find him. SPDC Army soldiers looked for him and DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army]⁶ soldiers looked for him too. Later, they [Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers] found him and they shot and killed him. We found his body five days after he'd died. We cremated him for the funeral. Thereafter, DKBA soldiers demanded thatch shingles and bamboo poles from us. They demanded them and we had to deliver them. They demanded one thousand thatch shingles, but we only gave them five hundred thatch shingles. We resisted them like this. They ordered bamboo poles to build their camp, but we didn't have to build the camp for them. We just sent them the bamboo poles and were done with it. We have *set tha*⁷ in our village. If KNLA soldiers come, we have to guide them. If SPDC Army soldiers come, we have to guide them. If DKBA soldiers come, we have to guide them. We're just villagers. *La may law tel ler tah su a'poh koh nay la plo, tah su may law*

agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State, KHRG, November 2008, pp. 93 – 95. For a recent example of villagers released from military custody following the payment of arbitrary fines, see: "Papun Interview: Maung Y---, February 2011," KHRG, September 2011.

⁶ The term DKBA has been used in this interview by both the villager who conducted the interview and the interviewee to refer to DKBA units and soldiers prior to their incorporation into Border Guard units and to those DKBA units and soldiers which now form Border Guard forces. In this case, it is likely that Naw L--- is referring to DKBA units prior to the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard Forces in September 2010; see for example: "Border Guard Forces of South-East Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 22nd 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25th 2010.

⁷ *Set tha* is a Burmese term for forced labour duty as a messenger usually stationed at army camps or bases and serving as a go-between to deliver orders from army officers to village heads. However, it can also involve other menial tasks when no messages are in need of delivery as well as when villagers are tasked within villages to provide messaging, guiding, portering and other services to incoming armed groups.

tel ler la koh nay thay la plo law [When a leaf falls on a thorn, the leaf gets a hole; when a thorn falls on a leaf, the leaf also gets a hole]. We're like the leaf.⁸ So, there's nothing we can do. We have to defend ourselves from every side. If we're ordered [to do something], we can't say: "We won't do it, we won't guide them." We have to do it and guide them.

As for your experiences regarding forced labour, who [has ordered you to do it]?

I can't tell you [which army unit] because the army units always rotate once a year. When DKBA soldiers came, we were really afraid of them. They came to the village and asked: "*Where are [the KNLA] soldiers?*" People told them that they didn't know. We didn't dare to talk to them. After we told them that we didn't know, they became angry and ordered villagers to queue up. They called everyone and people stood in a line as they beat them with a bamboo stick. The bamboo stick broke. *Bo Moe Kyo*⁹ said: "*You say you saw nothing when I asked you. I'll sew your eyes [shut], and the thread won't run out.*" *Bo Than Htun*¹⁰ was also very aggressive. They always tried to make enemies with villagers when they came to the village. During *Thingyan*¹¹ – I don't remember the date or year – they came and asked if we'd sent rice to KNLA soldiers and who'd sent the rice to them. We didn't dare to answer. If we did answer honestly, we'd be killed. We're just villagers and we have to be wary of all sides. They'd kill us if we told them the truth. We didn't dare to say anything, so they beat us. They beat U Th---. His head bled and he was very old. They punched two or three villagers. Early the next day, I told them: "*That wasn't right. You're soldiers, yet you came and tortured villagers. You should think through how you've lived in the past.*"¹² *Don't you remember how you lived and ate in the past? Now you come to the village and torture people. Don't you have any heart?*" After that, they thought carefully about themselves. It was during *Thingyan*. People worshipped their elders. I thought that because they were Buddhist soldiers they'd know about religion, but they didn't know anything about religion. They came back and beat villagers and they looted villagers' buffalos frequently.

The army unit that looted things and forced people to do things, do you know who their Battalion Commander was?

It was [DKBA] Commander *Bo Moe Kyo*. He was based out of Khaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu, Pa'an District].

Do you know how many soldiers were under his command?

I don't know how many soldiers were in Commander *Bo Moe Kyo*'s army unit.

⁸ A KHRG researcher who met with the interviewee explained that the metaphor used here is an oblique reference to women's vulnerability to rape when they have to guide soldiers unaccompanied, the thorn being the male soldiers and the leaf being the woman who has to guide them. The use of the vulnerable 'leaf' metaphor may also refer to the villagers themselves, caught in between numerous armed groups and exploited from all sides.

⁹ KHRG has on several occasions reported incidents and abuses involving *Bo Moe Kyo*, a former commanding officer within DKBA Brigade #333 and Gk'Sah Wah Special Battalion #777. He and the soldiers with him have become notorious across Thaton, Papun and Pa'an districts for their brutality towards villagers; see: *Surviving in Shadow: Widespread Militarization and the Systematic Use of Forced Labour in the Campaign for Control of Thaton District*, KHRG, January 2006; and *Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control*, KHRG, August 2010.

¹⁰ KHRG has previously reported abuses committed by Column Commander Than Htun of DKBA Brigade #333; see: "Exploitative abuse and villager responses in Thaton District," KHRG, November 2009.

¹¹ *Thingyan* is the Burmese name for the water festival marking the Buddhist New Year, which usually falls in mid-April. In Thailand, the same festival is called *Songkhran*.

¹² While Naw L--- did not clarify any further as to when 'in the past' she was referring, the KHRG researcher who translated this interview into English believed she was referring to times before the KNLA split and the DKBA was subsequently formed in 1994, when DKBA soldiers were part of the KNLA.

As you see them, what are the differences between DKBA soldiers and SPDC Army soldiers?

If I look carefully at the differences between DKBA soldiers and SPDC soldiers, SPDC soldiers are quite a bit better than DKBA soldiers. DKBA soldiers are so aggressive. They've not come here this year yet, but we'll wait and see whether they'll be more aggressive or not. However, we've heard that they now take their salaries from the SPDC Army.¹³ They previously demanded 1,000 thatch shingles every year, but we didn't give them [all the shingles they demanded]. This year, we've heard that they get their salaries from the Burmese government, so we have other strategies to protect ourselves if they order forced labour. Before, when they didn't get their salaries from the Burmese government, they demanded things. We were afraid of them and we gave them what they demanded because we didn't know any of their superiors to report abuses to. Now that we know that they get their salaries from the Burmese government, we have a strategy to report abuses to their superiors. [I would say to them:] *"You receive a salary and still you order things for free, yet there's currently an agreement which you [the Border Guard] have signed and [it states that] you're not allowed to oppress villagers and you have to buy food if you want to eat something. You have to buy everything whether it's a chicken, a bottle of alcohol, a pig, a fish or a cigarette."* As we've heard, they're not allowed to take things for free. We women, we communicate with Yangon three times a day and we can hear the news as well. Therefore, we'll defend ourselves assertively. We won't give up and we know that foreign countries have agreed that villagers shouldn't be oppressed.

How did you solve the problem about forced labour?

We couldn't solve it. The DKBA soldiers ordered us to work and we had to work. We went to work, but we only sent three people if they ordered five workers. We sent them one worker if they ordered two workers. They were based close to us, so it was impossible not to send them workers, but we tried [to resist] a little bit like this. It'll be better [in the future]. Currently, we still have to do forced labour and the Tatmadaw soldiers become more aggressive if KNLA soldiers come close. We could live normally if they [KNLA soldiers] didn't come close to us. Instead, we have to lie to the Tatmadaw soldiers a little bit. We tell them that we haven't seen KNLA soldiers even when we have. If I'd told them the truth, my son-in-law would've been arrested. I didn't want to see him arrested because he was my son-in-law.

Do you remember the dates your village had to do forced labour?

I can't remember because I didn't note them down. Forced labour always happens, but I can't note down all the dates. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] always order us to do things and we always have to do them. SPDC Army units rotate regularly. The army unit here now is new. The last army unit that was here, they took care of us if we were sick and they treated as many as they could. They looked after us well. People said that Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers act kind, but have three hooks in their hearts.¹⁴ However, we had no choice [but to accept their help] because we have to choose the umbrella that's closest to us when the rain comes.

Could you describe to me your experiences, step by step, since you became village head?

¹³ It is likely that Naw L--- is referring to the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard Forces in September 2010; see for example: "Border Guard Forces of South-East Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 22nd 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25th 2010.

¹⁴ The expression 'three hooks in their hearts' is used in Karen to suggest that acts of kindness should be perceived as dishonest and/or manipulative.

Yes, I'll explain these to you step by step. What I suffered the first year was so sad for me because I was pregnant for eight months [of the year]. A soldier named S--- under a local SPDC Army Company Commander [Bo Htun Than] defected to the KNLA. This soldier drank alcohol in H--- village, stole things and [generally] disobeyed his commanding officer, so Bo Htun Than beat him which made the soldier angry at him Than went back with S--- to Y--- monastery and then S--- defected to the KNLA at 8:00 pm that same day. Then SPDC Army Company Commander Bo Htun Than tortured villagers in H---. They tortured people in our village. A KNLA officer lived in our village and they arrested his wife. They tied her up together with her daughter. We asked this KNLA officer's sons to flee. One of his sons decided to become a monk and the other son moved to and hid at the monastery.

They tied them up [the KNLA officer's wife and daughter] and I decided to report this incident to the SPDC Army officers at the army camp. I went to the army camp and I asked them: "*One of your soldiers defected, but why are you torturing my villagers?*" [Bo Htun Than replied:] "*The KNLA officer took my soldier, so I had to arrest his wife.*" I replied to him: "*Her husband took your soldier, so you should arrest him, not his wife.*" It was impossible to reason with him like this. Then the Camp Commander suggested to me that I should go to meet with the battalion commander based in N--- in U--- village.

I met with the Y--- village head and I called the *set tha* to go with me. It was so hot, but I went and reached there [N---]. He [the Tatmadaw Commander based in N---] asked me: "*Where are you going?*" I replied to him like this: "*You said to me to tell you if I needed help, and I currently need help.*" He asked what I needed help with and I told him: "*An SPDC company commander, one of his soldiers defected and took a gun with him. That commander is beating my villagers and putting me under duress. I don't even dare to look because he's beating them so badly. Now he's ordered me to find his gun. He said to me to come back once I'd found his gun. Now I can't find his gun, so sell one of your guns to me.*" He replied, "*I can't sell you a gun.*" I told him that I dared not go back and that my villagers would be killed: "*They [Bo Htun Than and his soldiers] tied his wife and daughter and you can't imagine how badly they've beaten them. Ants have bitten them.*" The battalion commander suggested that I use my head and to write a letter to the Operations Commander based in Gk--- and to find a person who can write well to help send the letter. If the Operations Commander told him [Bo Htun Than] to stop, the problem would be resolved.

I returned [to my village] because it was impossible to buy his gun. Before returning, the battalion commander told me that I should just go back and that nothing would happen and that he would ask the SPDC Army company commander [Bo Htun Than] to release them [the villagers]. I told him: "*I don't believe you. You should call him.*" He did, but Bo Htun Than didn't answer even though the battalion commander called him again and again. When I reached back to my village, I learned he didn't answer because he'd been beating villagers when the battalion commander called him. He'd beaten them until their heads and backs broke. It [the situation] was so dangerous. SPDC Company Commander Bo Htun Than ordered me to find the gun from KNU [Karen National Union] soldiers, DKBA soldiers, or SPDC Army soldiers. He said: "*Buy it however possible and I'll take it.*"

There was nothing else I could do, so in the early morning, I went to B---. I was pregnant and it was so hot because it was during March and April. I called on the [H---] monthly village head and went together with him to ask for help from DKBA soldiers [in B---]. I asked him [the DKBA commander] to please help me because I was in trouble. He asked me: "*What kind of trouble?*" I explained the situation to him, but he said: "*I don't know; I haven't heard about this. I can't help you.*" As it wasn't possible for him to help me, I asked him to send me to the SPDC MOC [Military Operations Command] commander. The MOC commander knew me from when he came [to my village] and he told me to tell him if I needed help. I was in trouble, so I went to meet him. I told the DKBA soldiers not to say anything to him and to just send me to him. I was so glad because they didn't come with me, but just sent me to there.

When I arrived, the MOC commander asked me: “Where are you going?” I replied: “I came here to buy one of your guns.” He said: “What will you do with the gun?” I told him: “A company commander’s soldier in Y--- defected and took his company commander’s gun and now they’re torturing villagers in our village.” He asked: “Where did that soldier defect?” I told him that the soldier defected at Y--- monastery. He said that the company commander had told him that a soldier defected at H--- monastery. I told him that the situation had nothing to do with H--- monastery. I told him: “Listen to me. I’m not lying to you.” I asked him to sell me a gun. He said: “There are a lot of guns in the B--- market and you can buy guns there. Do you dare to take it back with you if I really sell a gun to you?” I told him that I dared to take it with me. He asked: “How will you take it with you?” I told him that I’d carry it with tapioca trees and people wouldn’t see the gun. I’d tell people that I grew tapioca trees if they asked me. He said: “The problem will be worse if you take a gun with you and you don’t need to take a gun with you. That company commander’s got a short temper, but he’s kind.” I explained everything to him: “The company commander who’s beating villagers, he’s based in Dt---. The soldier who took this commander’s gun, his name’s S---. He shouldn’t beat people like this. His soldier drank alcohol and was so bad. You know, this soldier was so bad. He shouted at the company commander, but the company commander didn’t dare do anything to him. Therefore, his soldier was able to do things to him like this.” The MOC Commander told me: “Go back, negotiate with Company Commander Bo Htun Than. Ask him to donate money when you do a donation ceremony and he’ll donate money.”

When I arrived back in the village, he [Bo Htun Than] didn’t dare look at my face and I didn’t know whether he was embarrassed or I was. However, an officer called Myint Thay, he hated me a lot and he was quartered in my aunt’s house. He told villagers: “Your village head looks at people like an elephant [threateningly]. She reported the case [to Tatmadaw superiors] and we couldn’t keep doing things [beating villagers] even if we wanted to.” He [Company Commander Bo Htun Than] didn’t look at me and I didn’t look at him either. We remained unapproachable, but he came to me before he left [H---]. He said: “I’ll go back. Forgive me the words I said to you, whether they were right or wrong.” I didn’t say anything to forgive him. I told him: “The MOC commander told me that you’re kind, but that you’ve got a short temper.” On the whole, though, I didn’t say anything to forgive him. The *seh aye mu*¹⁵ said to him: “I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you for everything.” As for me, I couldn’t forgive him because it [the beatings of the villagers] had hurt my heart. He hadn’t beaten me, but he’d beaten my villagers. I’d tried to report the affair [to his superiors]. People would’ve said that I wasn’t a good village head if I hadn’t done this. We’ve suffered problems from DKBA soldiers and SPDC Army soldiers. We don’t want to suffer anymore. From now on I’ll try [to protect the villagers] as much as I can with my skills. We’ll put a stop to their abuses swiftly.

How will you protect [yourself and the villagers]?

I’ll protect us like this. If they [Tatmadaw and Border Guard soldiers] do something wrong, I’ll note down the [relevant] information and report them to their superiors. I now have many step by step ways of contacting them. To climb a mountain, we can’t jump directly to the top of the mountain. Our technique has to be that we climb up step by step. Before we can get an education, we first have to start with *gka gyi, ka gkway, ga ngeh* [the first three letters of the Burmese alphabet] to learn to write a sentence. Then, we have to study all about vowels and consonants to make words. We can then write sentences. These are examples.

In your village, is forced labour demanded once a month or twice a month?

¹⁵ *Seh aye mu* is a Burmese term describing a person who holds an authoritative position below that of village head and village secretary with control over ten households. These positions are commonly found within larger villages with many households.

We're asked to do forced labour once a month. Sometimes we're asked to do forced labour twice a month. Sometimes we're asked to do forced labour four times a month. Sometimes soldiers come and we have to do work. Sometimes they don't come. Now the situation isn't like before because KNLA soldiers don't disturb them anymore and so they [Tatmadaw soldiers] don't disturb us anymore either. One time, Tatmadaw soldiers took security along the road and KNLA soldiers ambushed them. This happened one morning when the Tatmadaw soldiers had run out of rice and had ordered me to porter their rations. I left to return [to the village after delivering the rations] at 3:00 pm and there was an explosion, "Boom!" as a mortar hit the ground beside us. We were two [villagers] there. She [the other villager] called to me: "*Sister, sister!*" like this. If we were hurt, no one would've paid us any money for the value of our lives. Why were they shooting? Because, the Tatmadaw soldiers stayed along the road, so the KNLA soldiers attacked them. Nobody would attack them if they'd stayed in their own army camp. However, they couldn't blame us because I warned them: "*In the past, when the Tatmadaw soldiers were sending rations, they were attacked, so you need to be careful. In addition, KNLA soldiers won't only attack you with guns, they'll also attack you with bpoh klee [literally 'tortoise shell bombs', meaning large remote-detonation devices]. They'll plant bpoh klee and they'll attack you with guns. Therefore, you need to be careful. If they attack you, don't make any problems for the villagers or village head. If you cause problems, I'll become a KNLA soldier and I'll fight you.*" They replied: "*We won't make any problems for you.*" [I said to them:] "*If they [KNLA soldiers] do something to you, don't harm us. Tatmadaw soldiers have been attacked in the past, but I currently can't say whether they'll attack you or not. I'm advising you like this because people who steal things, will steal things.*"¹⁶ I can protect my village like this.

Regarding forced labour, where did you porter things from and where did you send them to?

We portered things [rations] from the army camp and we had to send them to the place where the Tatmadaw soldiers stayed. They showed us where we had to send things to. Sometimes, we had to go to meet with them first. Sometimes, they wrote with an order letter and then we had to porter.

Based on the questions I've asked you, is there any information that you haven't included yet or any other information that you would like to report?

Yes, there is. Seven or eight years ago, there were people [from the village] who served as KNLA soldiers. Around this time, when Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers were travelling, the KNLA soldiers attacked them by planting a *bpoh klee*. Three Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers died and two were injured. They came [to our village] and got angry. They ordered people together into a group and [the Commander] punched down on the table threateningly. He said: "*You didn't tell me that they [KNLA soldiers] would attack me.*" They'd attacked them secretly so we didn't know. He said: "*There are two of the people who are responsible [KNLA soldiers] in the village and it was their plan.*" We told them we didn't know [anything about the attack]. The Tatmadaw soldiers said that the people responsible [KNLA soldiers] were trying to protect [the village], but couldn't protect anything. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] kept saying: "*Destroy their houses, burn their houses, and tell them to leave within three days.*" So we destroyed their houses and burnt them down. The next morning, they ordered us to go and meet them. They asked: "*Have you destroyed and burned their houses and told them to leave?*" [We replied:] "*They left and we burnt their houses.*" They came and checked, but maybe they still weren't satisfied. They were enemies, so they'd fought each other, but they shouldn't make trouble for villagers after fighting. [After this] villagers said that I wasn't a good village head and couldn't protect them. I again suffered like this. Sometimes, I was good, and sometimes I wasn't good.

¹⁶ Naw L--- is not here implying that the KNLA will steal things from the Tatmadaw, rather that they will do what is in their nature to do; this phrase is akin to the English expression 'thieves will be thieves'.

Before the DKBA was first formed, there was a person called the [KNU] transportation leader and he lived in our village. He was old. He was over 60 or about 70 years old. The DKBA soldiers worked with him before they joined the DKBA [when they were still part of the KNLA]. They always asked about him whenever they came [to the village]. Later Bo Than Htun looked for this man [the transportation leader] and they found him. He had been sleeping in a sugarcane plantation and they found him while he was returning home in order to cook rice. The DKBA soldiers were waiting for him but he didn't know. They shot him and he died. Since the Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers came, there've been ten villagers killed. I was in trouble once after I'd had my third child. I hadn't become village head yet at that time. I sold snacks and noodles, and I sent my children to school. I made a living like this. My children went to school after selling snacks because the school was close by. At this time, SPDC Army soldiers arrested a KNLA soldier. After they arrested him, he reported many things to them. Therefore, KNU soldiers' wives didn't dare live in the village anymore and they fled to other villages. As for us, we couldn't flee because I had young children, my mother was too old and I was raising pigs and chickens. We couldn't have fled. I'd lived here for a long time [already at that point].

One day, I went to Y--- to buy jaggery and sticky rice [and returned] in order to make snacks to sell. [That day], after the KNLA soldier who was arrested had reported information about me, the Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers came for me. The Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers came while I was eating noodles. They called on me before I'd finished eating my noodles. They said: "*Our officer orders you to meet with him. Maybe he needs to send a letter.*" I knew at once that they'd come because the KNLA soldier had reported information about me. I went to meet him [the commanding officer] after eating my noodles. He asked me how many people were working as KNLA soldiers in my village. I didn't need to inform him of anything more because the one who'd been arrested had already told him everything. Everything was noted down in his notebook. As this was the case, I didn't dare to lie. I told him who the checkpoint commander was, his name was O---. He asked for everyone who worked as police. They detained me because my husband was serving as a KNLA soldier. They asked me: "*What's your husband's name?*" I told them that my husband's name was K---. They asked for my older brother's name too. I told them all the names [they asked for]. They asked me to find my husband, but I couldn't find him because he'd split up with me a very long time before – five years. I told them that I couldn't find him. They said they'd find and arrest him. I told them: "*You can do anything to him, whatever you want. I don't live with him anymore and my mother didn't want me to be together with my husband anymore.*" I didn't want to lie and tell them that my husband was dead because he was my husband, so I had to lie to them like I did. They asked me to go and meet with them again one time for three days.

They released me and later I returned [to meet them]. I had to go and meet with them one time for three days. I couldn't ask anyone to go with me. The village head [at the time] was a man. Everyone was afraid. It was during a time when they were arresting people, so the village head didn't dare to go. I called a woman who sold baskets. I'm very thankful for that woman. She went with me. The SPDC Army soldiers took her baskets and paid her one bowl of rice per basket. They questioned me and they told me to tell the truth. They said they'd pack my head [in a plastic bag] if I told a lie. They said they'd detain me in the jail. I told them that if they were going to detain me they should also detain my mother and children in the jail, that if they didn't detain them they wouldn't be able to feed themselves as they wouldn't have any rice to eat [to convince them not to arrest and put her in jail]. I told them that they'd have to feed me if they detained me in the jail and that I would become ill if they didn't feed me. They told me to tell the truth and to come again another time for three days, so I went to there once again for three days.

That next time, I was sick after meeting with them. I was shaking while I was talking with them. I was completely ill by the time I left and arrived outside the army camp. I was still sick and I had stomach pains when I arrived home. One of my children had stomach pains too. After three days, they ordered me to come meet them again. They asked me to come and meet with them

regularly. They thought I'd run away when I didn't come [to meet with the Tatmadaw officer]. I told them that I couldn't come because I was ill and had stomach pains, along with my children. They then sent me medicine. They asked me to take the medicine and to take care of my illness and to go there [to the army camp] after I'd recovered. After that, they rotated out [and were relieved by a new unit]. I was so glad because I didn't need to go to there anymore [to meet them at the army camp]. We'd had to be seriously afraid of things because my husband was a [KNLA] soldier. Later, I again got pregnant and my stomach grew bigger and bigger. They asked me: "*Where's your husband?*" They hadn't asked me anything before because they hadn't seen anything [suspicious] and had just returned [to their camp] after coming here [to the village]. I knew then that they'd come to find my husband. I used my head. I got my younger brother to [pretend to] be my husband. He slept beside me when Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers came [to the village]. They asked me: "*Where's your husband?*" I showed them: "*My husband's there.*" They told me: "*Your husband's too young.*" I told them that I'd got a new husband who was single [without wife or child] and he's so kind. So, I escaped [further trouble] by telling them that.

I continued to have babies, one after one. My younger brother got married and he stayed with his wife. Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers rotated unit by unit. Later, the old army troop came again. They saw my real husband drinking alcohol in the village. I couldn't do anything, so I lied to them again that I'd got a new husband who was single and was about eight years younger than me. I told them that my husband had come back to find buffalos to work sugarcane plantations. He drank alcohol and he was drunk. My real husband was very much afraid of them [the Tatmadaw soldiers]. I asked him to fetch water. He was so loyal, he did whatever I asked. He went to fetch water, but I was worried that he'd run away, so I followed him. They [the Tatmadaw soldiers] said to me: "*You love your husband so much and you worry that we'll arrest him.*" [Not being able to stand the lie anymore] I told them: "*I love him and he loves me too.*" I asked him to cook rice when he reached back home, but an SPDC Army sergeant came and told him: "*You don't need to cook rice. You can take my rice.*" He ate the rice and I gave him a shirt. I sent him outside of the village, he left and hasn't come back since. That's all.

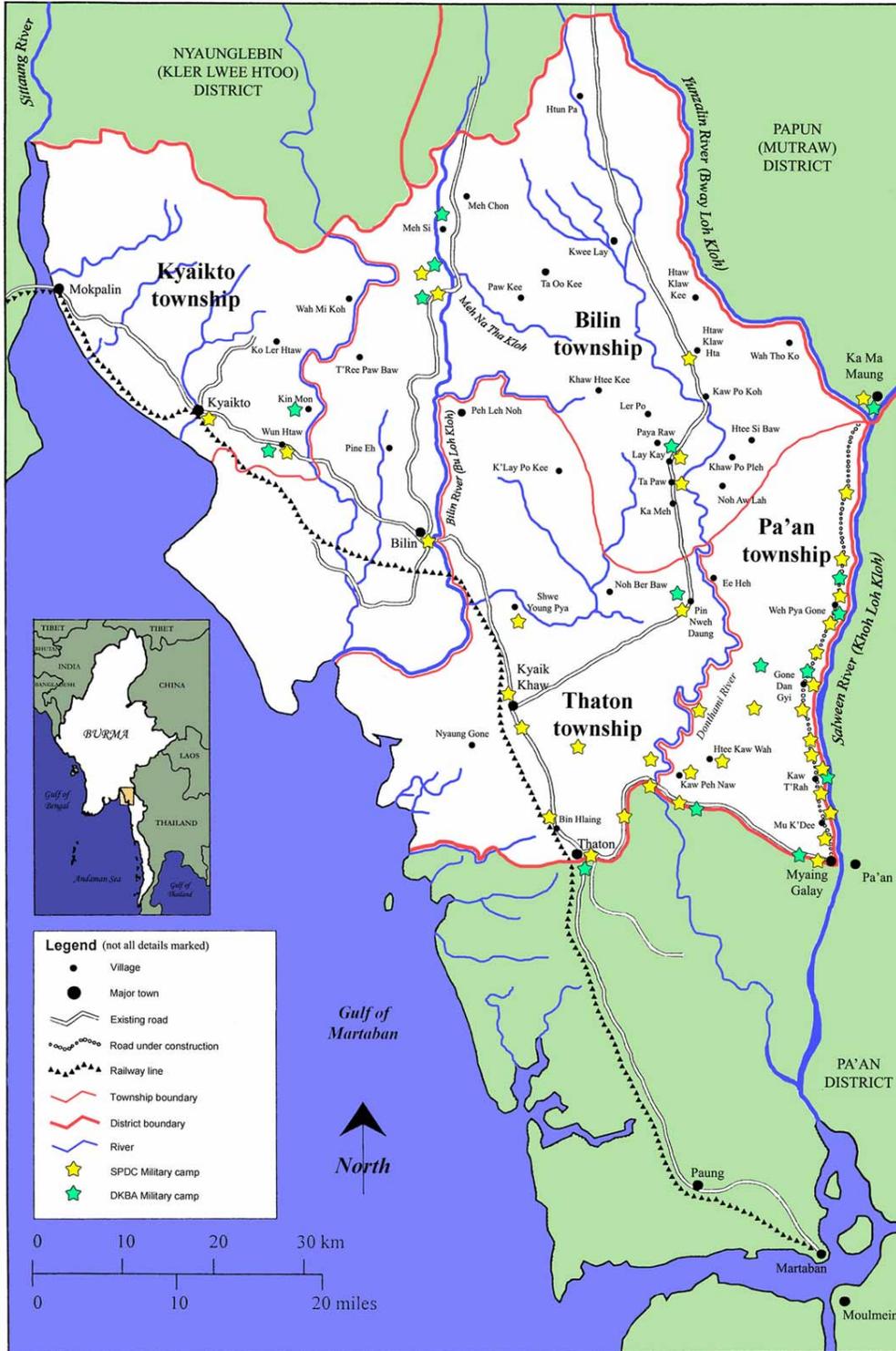
When my daughter grew up, I explained to her about the problems I've suffered step by step. After that, she hated Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers. She got married with a KNLA soldier. She planned to fight the Tatmadaw. Later, DKBA soldiers found out about her and they looked for my son-in-law. He'd served as a KNLA soldier for five years. DKBA soldiers could listen to him while he was talking with his friend by walkie-talkie. He asked his friend to wait for him somewhere. He used his friend's alias, A---. A--- was supposed to go to the M--- area and my son-in-law asked A--- to wait for him there. DKBA and SPDC Army soldiers were already waiting for my son-in-law when he arrived there. The soldiers shot him and he died. They didn't get his walkie-talkie because they didn't follow him. He'd run and they shot at his legs. A Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldier explained to me: "*Maybe his thigh was hit because he fell over. We ordered him not to run, but he kept running. Then, we shot at his hands and back, but we didn't follow him.*" He'd run quite far [before he] died, but we couldn't see him because of the bigger trees that grew there. People only found him [after] because they could smell him. People said that they hadn't heard anything about him after that shooting. We couldn't find him in P--- or R---. We didn't hear anything [about him]. We found his dead body five days after he'd died. There were a lot of maggots and we didn't dare to look. Therefore, all this must stop. This kind of thing shouldn't keep happening in the future. Thank you.

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

- "Thaton Situation Update: June to October 2011," (November 2011)
- "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, (November 2008)*

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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