



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

February 3, 2012 / KHRG #2012-B13

Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, May to June 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in August 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Papun District, between May and June 2011. It contains detailed information about demands by Border Guard Battalion #1013 troops for a total of 10,400,000 kyat (US \$13,506.49) from 65 villages, each of which was ordered to pay a share of the total in lieu of providing villagers to serve as unpaid porters. The villager who wrote this report also details villagers' concerns regarding excessive fees for school attendance, abnormal rains leading to damage to crops and subsequent food insecurity, as well as the collection of arbitrary fees by an organisation that purported to assist families to pay funeral and burial costs, but which subsequently disbanded. The villager who wrote this report points repeatedly to ongoing arbitrary taxation by public officials and expresses villagers' frustrations at what they perceive to be a lack of material change at the village-level in eastern Burma since the November 2010 elections.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (May to June 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Papun 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 Papun District, including three incident reports, 11 interviews and 64 photographs.²

Villagers suffered several problems leading up to June 5th 2011 when I wrote this report which are explained below. This report concerns events that happened between May 5th and June 4th 2011, because these events resulted in harmful human rights abuses.

In the area under government control in Meh Gklaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District, human rights abuses occurred in Papun Town and in the following villages: Yo Klah (Shan Kaik), Meh Th'Roh, Kaw Lar Klah (K'Lah Kaik), Way Naw (Bweh Klah), T'Gkuh Teh, Way

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 In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the Report, "Papun Interview: Saw T---, August 2011," KHRG, January 2012.

Moh, Way Hsa, Ngah Aih Soh (Nar Gkoo Nah), Baw Hta, Gklaw Day, Day Law Bpu, Htee Ber Kar Hta, and Gklaw Law Kloh Hta.³

In Meh Nyoo village tract, human rights abuses occurred in Klaw Hta (Hpah Hih Kaw) village and Meh Nyoo Hta (Hpyin Ma) village. Moreover, in Wee Su Meh Kuh village tract, human rights abuses kept occurring in Meh Gku Hta (Myin T'Hpyay), Htee Doh Hta (Htoh Hpyu), Htoh Muh (Wak M'Aoo) villages as well as [within the villages of] Day Wah and Meh Nyaw village.

Those who abused human rights were Border Guard Battalion #1013 soldiers, led by battalion commanders La Kyaing and Saw Too Loo. Moreover, the rains did not come at the normal time, so this became a problem for people too. An organisation which aimed to help poor people by providing food did not plan well and became a problem for people too. Lastly, U Thein Sein's government⁴ built schools but the school fees are too high, so this also has become a problem.

For those things I mentioned above, the reasons why they caused human rights abuses and problems were because Border Guard soldiers worked [to support] their children and wives to have enough food, but their salaries were not high enough to do so and they therefore demanded money from villagers. The organisation which tried to support poor people also failed in its plan to support poor people because it could not manage to carry out its plan. Also public education staff within U Thein Sein administration did not get salaries that were high enough for themselves and that is why they tried to get more money from villagers.

The following human rights abuses and problems happened one after the other in the same order as below:

- 1) Border Guard soldiers went to villagers to force villagers to porter rations for them.
- 2) The villagers encountered problems because the rains came at an abnormal time and this damaged their paddy and caused them to not produce enough food.
- 3) The organisation that aimed to support poor people had an illegal plan so this became a problem for villagers.
- 4) Under the USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] government, public education staff demanded high school fees that were too much for people to pay, so this became a problem for the villagers.

Precise information about these human rights abuses and problems is presented below.

Border Guard Battalion #1013 soldiers, led by Battalion Commander La Kyaing and Battalion Commander Saw Too Loo, collected large porter fees from villages [in lieu of providing villagers to act as porters]. This happened in Bu Tho Township, Papun District, [where Border Guard Battalion #1013] started arresting porters in the villages located in Day Wah, Kyaw Bpah, Meh Nyaw and Htee Th'Daw Hta (Bp'Zun Myaw) village tracts.

Meh Gklaw and Meh Nyoo village tracts faced problems when the USDP government education staff collecting school fees and the [failed] organisation that aimed to help poor people collecting money. These places are in the areas under government control. Other people outside this area

³ The villager who wrote this report chose, in several cases, to include the Burmese name of a village after the Karen name in the original report. This has been retained to preserve accuracy in the translation.

⁴ The villager who wrote this report used the phrases 'USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] government' or 'Thein Sein government' to refer to the current nominally-civilian government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (RUM) that came to power on March 31st 2011; see "The New Light of Myanmar: President U Thein Sein delivers inaugural address to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw," *BurmaNet News*, March 31st 2011.

do not know [how to monitor human rights abuses] there well, so Border Guard soldiers did whatever they wanted and did not need to respect or recognise human rights.

Those who collected porter fees were Border Guard soldiers from Battalion #1013, led by Battalion Commander Saw La Kyaing, as commanding officer, and Battalion Commander Saw Too Loo. When I wrote this report, I used information [gathered] from a villager who went to Myaing Gyi Ngu [Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District] and came back to Kyaw Gklee Law village, Meh Gklaw village tract. [That villager said] that Border Guard and KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] soldiers joined together as the same group.⁵

Table 1: Villages which faced demands to pay 650,000 kyat (US \$844.16)⁶ in lieu of providing forced labour levied by Border Guard Battalion #1013

Village Group	Karen village names	Burmese village names ⁷	Average fee per village in kyat	Group fee in kyat
Group A	Thay Nah Lah	Thay Nat Lar	130,000	650,000
	T'Gkuh Bpu	Lay Ein Soh		
	Kyaw Gk'Loh Kay Klaw	Za Kauk Lon Kway		
	Bpu Kyee	Ko Loo Pyo		
	Meh Klah	[not included]		
Group B	T'Gkaw Gkoh	[not included]	216,666	650,000
	Ler Kweh	Kyauk Kwin		
	War Thoh Koh	[not included]		
Group C	Maw Law Gkloh	Yay Pu	216,666	650,000
	Nay Gkah	[not included]		
	[not included]	Mee Seh Chaung Pyah		
Group D	Lay Poh Hta	[not included]	216,666	650,000
	Kwee Th'Lah	[not included]		
	Kyoh Day	[not included]		
Group E	Baw Kyoh Leh	[not included]	216,666	650,000
	[not included]	Sway Yay		
	Bpoe Mar Heh	[not included]		
Group F	Tee Theh Lay	[not included]	325,000	650,000
	Htee Law Thee Hta	[not included]		
Group G	Gk'Ter Tee	Ka Dtaing Dtee	92,857	650,000
	Noh Paw Tee	[not included]		
	Nar Kyaw	[not included]		
	Gk'Pyee Kee	[not included]		
	Noh Lah	[not included]		
	Htee Saw Meh	[not included]		
	Pway Taw Roo	[not included]		
Group H	Noh Keh Htar	[not included]	325,000	650,000
	Gk'Ter Tee T'Bpoe Klah	Ka Dtaing Dtee Kaing Taw		
Group I	Kyaw Bpah Tee Nee	Shwe P'Lah Kya Kan Nan	216,666	650,000
	Kyaw Bpah T'Bpoh	Shwe P'Lah Kya Kaing		

⁵ While it is not clear to which incident the villager who wrote this report is referring, a previously-published report submitted to KHRG in April 2011 by a villager trained to document human rights abuses in Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District described the defection of Tatmadaw Border Guard soldiers in February 2011 to a breakaway faction of the DKBA that had previously refused to transform into Border Guard battalions, and to the KNLA; see: "Pa'an Situation Update: April 2011," KHRG, September 2011.

⁶ 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 February 3rd 2012, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

⁷ Alternate names are included only where explicitly noted by the villager who wrote this report.

	Bpu	Taw		
	Kyaw Bpah Tar Gay Htee	[not included]		
Group J	Ha Kyee Thaw Kah Pya	[not included]	130,000	650,000
	Ha Kyee Kleh Mu	[not included]		
	Ha Kyee Taw Pla Klah	[not included]		
	Moe Loh Par	[not included]		
	Wah Thoe Gklah	[not included]		
Group K	Pa Loh Doh	Pan Loh Gyi	162,500	650,000
	Pa Loh Poh	Pa Loh Lay		
	Tee Suh Gklah	[not included]		
	Yo Gklah	Shan Ywa Thee		
Group L	Wah Muh Law	[not included]	108,333	650,000
	Nyat Tay Law	[not included]		
	Meh Mweh Hta	Daw Mweh		
	Ler Keh Kaw	[not included]		
	Wah Gklu Koh	[not included]		
	T'Bper Pah	[not included]		
Group M	Buh Waw Gkwee	[not included]	162,500	650,000
	Thaw Keh Hta	[not included]		
	Gkwee Neh	[not included]		
	Lay Poh Gkaw	[not included]		
Group N	Htee Ghay Law	[not included]	130,000	650,000
	Bpwa Day Muh	[not included]		
	Meh Nyaw	[not included]		
	Bpaw T'Gkwee	[not included]		
	Gkwee Law Chaw	[not included]		
Group O	Baw Tho Hta	[not included]	162,500	650,000
	Noh Gaw	[not included]		
	Wah Thoh Gklah	[not included]		
	Htee Par Doh Gkee	[not included]		
Group P	Tee Tha Bluh Hta	Ko Bpin Wa	130,000	650,000
	Poe Leh	[not included]		
	Poe Gkay	[not included]		
	Bler Bper	K'Nyin Doh		
	Htaw Meh Hta	[not included]		
Overall	65 villages		160,000 (US \$207.79)	10,400,000 (US \$13,506.49)

The second problem is, because of the abnormal weather, the people who live in Meh Gklaw and Htee Th'Daw village tracts along the Bway Loh River are facing insufficient food [supplies]. To be able to eat, villagers had to grow this year's food last year in 2010. In 2010, the rains were abnormal and villagers' paddy was seriously damaged, so there will not be enough food to last through 2011.

In the early rainy season, the rain did not come. There was no water to sow the paddy seedlings so they could grow, and some people could not grow paddy seedlings, so this was a problem for them. After growing the paddy [seedlings], the rain did not come when paddy [seedlings] grew bigger. Most of the paddy [harvested] was just empty husks because it had been damaged. When we moved the paddy grain to the paddy threshing area, there came too much rain. The water affected the grain we had finished threshing in the threshing area and most of the paddy grain was damaged. During 2010, the paddy was damaged again and again, so people who live along Bway Loh Kloh [Yunzalin River] have been facing a food crisis.

People who live in Meh Gklaw village tract faced a new problem. The problem was that the USDP government promoted Papun to the level of District. Thereafter, people who wanted to help the public in Papun District gathered together and formed [a branch of] the organisation

called *Na Yay Koo Nyi Moh A'Thin*.⁸ The objective of this organisation is to help poor people, but this became a problem for the public because its strategy plan did not match its objective.

This organisation which aims to help people, it is led by Saw Soh Win. He is the chairperson and he lives in Section Two of Papun Town. Saw Than Shay is the Deputy and he lives in Papun Htee Wah (Papun A'Nauk Pak Kan). Saw Aung Myint Shway is another deputy and lives in Nar Kuh Nah (Ngah Ein Soh) village. Saw Tay Htoh is Secretary, and lives in Section Four of Papun Town. Saw Shway Leh is Assistant Secretary and he lives in T'Duh Dteh village. The staff lives within the area under control of the Thein Sein [Burmese] government. There is one staff member in each village. They collect funds for the organisation: 500 kyat (US \$0.65) from each house, every month. You have to pay 500 kyat more if someone dies.

They tried to help the public and gave 80,000 kyat (US \$103.90) for old people and 20,000 kyat (US \$25.97) for young people. However, we have to pay 500 kyat as a monthly payment, and we [each household] have to pay another 500 kyat for a tomb if a villager dies. These were the problems for the public.

"Before we die, we have to give 500 kyat to cover our tomb's cost. The tax for killing a head of cattle is 20,000 kyat and we have to pay 5,000 kyat [US \$6.50] for tax of pig if we kill a pig to eat it. Therefore, this organisation did not do the right thing because it made problems for the public."

M--- villager, [Papun District]

The other problem that happened for the public was that the USDP government schoolteachers collected school fees that were too high, so students' parents faced a lot of problems. According to the collection of school fees, this new government has not done anything to make changes to improve and be honest.

"When schoolteachers opened the school this year, I enrolled my son and my nephews, three students. I went to M--- middle school and I was so happy because we'd heard the news from Kwekalu that the school fees shouldn't be more than 1,000 kyat (US \$1.30) [per student] and for primary school, we wouldn't need to spend any money. So I thought that I wouldn't have to worry about anything this year. When I arrived at school, though, the schoolteachers said that my son had to attend the first standard and that 4,000 kyat (US \$5.20) needed to be paid for my son's books and school fees. I also had to pay 7,000 kyat (US \$9.09) for each of my nephews who are in the fifth standard. I have two nephews and, as I had to pay 7,000 kyat for each of them, the total amount [for them] was 14,000 kyat (US \$18.18). I had to pay 4,000 kyat for my son. I couldn't imagine that I had to pay 18,000 kyat (US \$23.37) for the three of them. I had only 3,000 kyat (US \$3.90) in my pocket. The USDP government does things differently from what they said. They said that they'd do things to be better, but I haven't seen any improvement. They're the same as the SPDC⁹ was. They're still the same cap on the bottle."

– Saw T---, M--- villager

⁸ This name translates directly as 'Pain Writing Help Brother Crime Teams'; according to a KHRG researcher who spoke to the villager who wrote this report, this organization purported to assist people with medical and funeral costs, and requested donations from local villagers in order to do so.

⁹ 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 report and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this report.

Based on the above, if we are talking about change and promoting a better situation, we have not seen anything or any change by the USDP. As for the village level, we do not call village heads by that title anymore. We call them *aoh kyo yay moo* ['village administrators']. Papun Town became a district and Ka Ma Maung village tract became a Township. There is no big change yet.

In order to promote higher living standards, and so that the public can have enough food and make a living smoothly, fighting should not be allowed to happen. To decrease fighting until it disappears, the USDP government and ethnic [non-state] armed groups have to build a relationship and join hands together. The fighting will disappear if they cooperate happily. Several kinds of problems will disappear if fighting and forced labour disappear, and we can say that the public will then live in a better situation and live in happiness.

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

- "Papun Interview: Saw T---, August 2011" (January 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, Received in November 2011," (December 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August 2011," (October 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, April 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Incident Reports: November 2010 to January 2011," (August 2011)
- *Acute food shortages threatening 8.885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District*, (May 2011)
- "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," (April 2011)

