



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in January 2012 by a villager describing events occurring in Papun District during November 2011. The villager who wrote this report detailed an incident in which 18 Tatmadaw LIB #218 soldiers were killed or injured by landmines and local villagers were subsequently ordered to porter the supplies and equipment that the soldiers had been carrying. The villager also provides information on the closure of the Yunzalin River to boat traffic between Papun Town and Ka Ma Maung for three days by Border Guard Battalion #1013 soldiers and the imposition of a tax on boats travelling along the river. The villager also reiterated concerns expressed by other villagers in recent KHRG reports about severe flood damage to agricultural areas at the end of the 2011 monsoon season and resulting food shortages due to the destruction of paddy crops. This report notes that villagers have responded to food insecurity by replanting damaged fields with diverse crops as quickly as possible after the floodwater subsided, sharing food amongst themselves and pursuing additional livelihoods activities, including cutting bamboo cane to sell.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (November 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Papun District and 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 nine interviews, and 89 photographs.²

Incidents that happened in Bu Tho Township

Forced Labour

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 H---, March 2011," KHRG, February 2012.

The villagers had to porter when some of the SPDC soldiers got injured. One group of soldiers from LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #218, TOC [Tactical Operations Command] #3 from K'Ter Tee camp were active in W---, Pw---, L---, and they went forward from one village to another until [they reached] H---. The group of soldiers from LIB #218, TOC #3 were active here for the purpose of making the villagers afraid.

While the LIB #218, TOC #3, was staying in H---, eight of their soldiers were killed by landmines, and ten of them were injured, meaning that altogether 18 soldiers [were killed or injured]. The ten people who got injured were far away from the camp [at the time they were injured] and there was not enough medicine, so [in order] to carry them to K'Ter Tee hospital, the soldiers forced villagers to porter their loads [that the soldiers had been carrying]. The villagers who had to porter are from L--- and they went [to porter] on November 15th 2011. The villagers portered from H--- to K'Ter Tee, and it took one day.

The incident was caused by the LIB #218, TOC #3 and their purpose was for the injured people [soldiers] to get good treatment. The victims were L--- villagers. The incident [of forced labour] happened in L--- village, Day Wah village tract, Bu Tho Township. I got the information on November 30th 2011. We don't know yet whether these incidents will continue or not in the future.

Taxation and demand for boat tax

Soldiers from Border Guard Battalion #1013 who are based in K'Ter Tee camp didn't allow boats to travel [on the Yunzalin River], because they said that they had heard that the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] had closed the vehicle road. Whether this was true or not, we don't know. The soldiers from Battalion #1013 based in K'Ter Tee camp didn't allow boats to come. They said if boats came they would have to pay money. A small boat had to pay 10,000 kyat (US \$12.99)³ and big boats had to pay 15,000 kyat (US \$19.48).

[As a consequence] boats didn't come for three days. After the drivers of the boats gave them money, they allowed them to travel. In reality, this incident occurred because Battalion #1013 wanted money. Because they didn't have enough food they demanded money to restock their food [supplies]. It happened on November 25th 2011. Battalion #1013 didn't allow boats to travel, [which meant that] boats in Ka Ma Maung couldn't travel and boats in Papun also were not allowed to travel. The river isn't different from the Papun vehicle road [in this way]. Because Battalion #1013 closed the [water] way, it affected people who have boats. The Sergeant Major of Battalion #1013 is Saw Maw Lah and the Battalion Commander is *Bo Lah Kye*.⁴ I got this information on November 27th 2011.

Food shortages

Food [security] problems have occurred in Meh Ku village tract, Day Wah village tract, Bu Tho Township. The food [security] problem happened because the weather was not

³ 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 7th 2012, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

⁴ The villager who wrote this report also mentioned that *Bo Lah Kye* 'is Bpoh Leh'. It is not clear whether this is an alias or some other description of this commanding officer; four KHRG researchers who are fluent in Sgaw Karen, in which this report was originally written, were unable to determine what was meant by this.

good. Floodwater washed away paddy fields so the paddy was destroyed.⁵ The villagers could not work on their fields and there was not enough food so the villagers now face food problems. The main problems that most villagers face are food problems. There are only a few villagers who have enough food.

Villagers who do not have enough food have to do work, like cutting bamboo or bamboo cane to sell. Villagers who cut bamboo and bamboo cane to sell, [can sell] cane for 4,000 kyat (US \$5.19), and if it is bigger, it [can be sold for] 6,000 kyat (US \$7.79). Some asked their brothers and sisters [friends] and relatives who have rice [for food], and so they shared and helped each other.

For some villagers, floodwater washed the paddy from their fields and [they] could not work [grow paddy] anymore. As soon as it became day [as soon as possible], they ploughed their land which remained and planted other crops such as beans, sesame, tobacco and corn. For that reason, their plantations were of benefit in restocking food [supplies] and [addressing] the problem.

Other villagers who work as day labourers get paid 25 baht (US \$0.30). They work day by day. Some villagers who have enough food help some of the villagers who do not have enough food. Villagers who have to buy rice have to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$6.49) for one big tin (16 kg. / 35.2 lb) of rice. The weather was not good which has caused big problems for the villagers. I couldn't help resolve this incident for the villagers. It happened because the weather was not good.

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

- "Papun Interview: Saw H---, March 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, May to June 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw T---, August 2011," (January 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, November 2011," (January 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, November 2011," (December 2011)
- "Villager executed in Papun District," (November 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August 2011," (October 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011," (September 2011)

⁵ Previous KHRG reports written by villagers trained by KHRG have documented extensive flood damage to agricultural areas at the end of the monsoon season in August and September 2011; see: "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: August to October 2011," KHRG, December 2011. Villagers have noted that food security concerns have been compounded by the scarcity of cultivable areas, where repeated and prolonged displacement due to targeted attacks on civilians, coupled with over-population in hiding areas as villagers attempt to avoid these attacks, has created shortages of arable land, depleted soil fertility and reduced potential crop yields. *"The places to which people flee are crowded and the hill fields there are not good. Many people do not have farms to grow paddy, so livelihoods have become harder and there are more and more people who do not have enough food. Then in September, it rained very heavily, farms were destroyed."* See "Papun Situation Update: Luthaw Township, November 2011," KHRG, January 2012. For detailed analysis of the root causes of current food insecurity in Papun District, see *Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District*, KHRG, April 2011.

