



News Bulletin

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Papun Interview: Saw N---, January 2012

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during January 2012 in Bu Tho Township, Papun District by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed Saw N---, a 39 year-old married father of four, who is both a hill field farmer and village head from K--- village in Day Wah village tract, who described the forced recruitment of soldiers into the Border Guard, and how he had arranged for the release of a local villager who had been prohibited from leaving the DKBA by making a cash payment totalling 1,000,000 kyat (US \$1,135). Also described in the report, are instances of theft of villagers' livestock, forced labour and forced portering instigated by the Border Guard. Saw N--- mentions the continuous physical assault and other abuse of local villagers, specifically by a Border Guard soldier called Thaw Kweh. Saw N--- also provides information on village life in regards to healthcare, food security, and education. Saw N--- mentions that villagers have avoided paying for a government teacher and choose to pay a local teacher, whom they pay 5,000 kyat (US \$5.65) per student for a year. Concerns are also raised in regards to construction projects in the local area.

Interview | Saw N---, (male, 39), K--- village, Bu Tho Township, Papun District, January 2012

The following interview was conducted by a community member in Papun District, and 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 Papun District, including 12 other interviews, two situation update, 325 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

¹ KHRG trains community members 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, community members 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 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 K---, June 2010," KHRG July 2012.

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Village head and Hill field farmer



What's your name?

My name is N---

How old are you?

I'm 39 years old.

What's your ethnicity?

I'm of Karen ethnicity.

What's your religion?

I'm Buddhist.

What's your village name?

K--- village.

Which village tract is K--- village in?

K--- village is in Day Wah village tract.

How about the township?

It's in Bu Tho Township.

What kind of business are you doing for your livelihood?

Before I became a village head I did some kind of trading, but when I became a village head I stopped doing it.

How do you get your daily food for your family?

I farm a small hill field.

Are you married?

This photo, taken in January 2012, shows 39 year-old Saw N---, K--- village head and hill field farmer, who described activities pertaining to his position as village head. Saw N--- describes how he had to pay a local DKBA battalion commander a large sum of money in order to gain release of a villager from K--- village. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Yes, I'm married.

How many children do you have?

I have four children.

How old is your eldest child?

My eldest child is 14 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

My youngest child is two years old.

What is your responsibility in the village?

I'm a village head in my village.

How long have you taken this responsibility for?

It has been a year since I took this responsibility. I got the most votes, so I was elected to be the village head.

Did the Border Guard,³ Tatmadaw or KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] ask you to conduct the election?

No, the villagers conducted it by themselves. We limit the village head position to one year; when I have finished as the village head, we will hold an election again.

Can you tell me about your experiences and duties in a year of being the village head?

We arranged something for a villager who wanted to resign from the Border Guard.

What did you arrange for him?

We arranged money for him.

³ Border Guard battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010; they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, that concluded ceasefires with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into Border Guard battalions within the Tatmadaw. Border Guard battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry or light infantry battalions are identified by two or three digit battalion numbers; "DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force" Democratic Voice of Burma, August 2010, and, "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009

How much did you pay for his resignation?

We paid 1,000,000 kyat (US \$1,135).⁴

Which year was it?

It was during the last monsoon season.

Who did you give the money to?

I gave the money to Pu Too.

Who is Pu Too?

He is the battalion commander of Brigade #6 [Dooplaya District].

Is he a Border Guard commander?

Yes, he is a Border Guard commander.

Why did he ask for that money?

The villager was forced to be a DKBA soldier and after some of the DKBA transformed to Border Guard,⁵ he became a soldier of the Border Guard. He didn't want to do it anymore, so we went to see the commander and discussed about his ability to leave, but they didn't allow him to quit, so we paid the money.

Would he still have to be a Border Guard soldier if you didn't pay the money?

Yes, he would have to continue being a Border Guard soldier.

What was the person who resigned from the Border Guard named?

⁴ As of July 16th 2012, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 881 kyat to the US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the Kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1

⁵ While Tatmadaw and DKBA units have for years operated together, this operational hierarchy became formalised with the DKBA's transformation into a 'Border Guard Force' under control of the Tatmadaw and containing a fixed number quota of Tatmadaw officers. This transformation dates to at least May 2009, when commanding officers stated in high-level meeting of DKBA officers that the DKBA would transform itself into a 'Border Guard Force.' Leaked minutes from the May 2009 meeting are retained by KHRG on file. Ceremonies attended by Tatmadaw commanders officially announced 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 22nd2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25th2010

His name is Maung P---

How old is he?

I'm not sure about that, but I guess he is over 20 years old.

Is he single?

Yes, he is single.

Is he a K--- villager?

Yes, he is a K--- villager.

Did his parents want him to be a Border Guard soldier?

No, he had to be a soldier due to the vote that he got.

Did the Border Guard ask you to vote?

No, it was during the DKBA's time. The Border Guard had not been founded yet at that time.

How many villagers got selected?

Only one person.

Did his parents pay the money or did all the villagers pay it?

His parents and his friends in the village combined their money and paid it.

How long has he been a Border Guard soldier?

He has been a Border Guard soldier for two months, and later he didn't want to be part of it anymore, so we paid the money for him.

Are there any army camps belonging to the Border Guard and Tatmadaw which are close to your village?

No, none of their army camps are close to our village.

Where is the army camp that is closest to your village?

The closet army camp to our village is in K'Ter Tee [K'Taing Tee].

How many hours does it take between your village and K'Ter Tee?

I think it takes two hours by foot.

Is it a Border Guard camp or a Tatmadaw camp, or a combined camp of both Border Guard and Tatmadaw?

It is a Border Guard and Tatmadaw combined camp.

Did they order anything from you?

Not so far this year. In the past they always ordered things from us.

Why have they reduced ordering from you this year?

They don't really dare to come here this year. I think it's because [*censored for security*].

What did you have to do before [*censored for security*]?

Before [*censored for security*], we always had to go for forced labour, such as bringing them bamboo poles, wood, and gardening their army camp.

Did you have to go to K'Ter Tee to do that?

Yes, we went to K'Ter Tee to do that.

Are any other things reducing beside forced labour?

Before you came to our village, they came and looted our chickens, pigs and goats. They didn't ask permission from anyone, they just caught them and took the animals with them.

Was that the Border Guard or Tatmadaw?

It was the Border Guard.

Do you know who controls the Border Guard?

At first they were controlled by the monk,⁶ but after the transforming to Border Guard, the Tatmadaw controls them.

⁶ Although Saw N--- has not specifically mentioned Monk U Thuzana it is likely that this is the monk he is referring to. U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see, "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, March 1996.

The monk didn't control them anymore after they transformed into the Border Guard?

Yes, the monk doesn't control them anymore and now they are under the control of the Tatmadaw.

Can you remember the date when they looted your animals?

No, I can't remember anymore.

Was it in the last two years or last year?

In 2011, they were still looting the chickens in our village.

Didn't they ask permission from the owner or the village head?

No, they didn't.

Didn't you dare to go and report to their battalion commander about what the soldiers had done?

No, we didn't dare to go and report it.

What will they do to you if you go and report it now?

Now they don't live in our village anymore.

For example, [what] if they are staying here?

I think they will hit us and torture us.

Do you think they will hit you in front of their battalion commander or behind their commander [so he does not know]?

I think they will hit us in front of their commander.

What was the most difficult problem that you faced during 2010-2011?

The most difficult problem that we faced and the biggest thing that we were afraid of during that time was, when we were ordered to go and porter at a mountain in Meh Leh Hta.

When was it?

It was in the last year.

Did you also go?

Yes, I did.

What did they ask you to porter?

They asked us to porter the ammunition for RPG-7.

How many rockets did they ask you to carry?

They asked me to carry six rockets.

What is the weight of those six bullets?

I think around 20 *viss*.⁷

Did they give you enough rice?

Yes, they gave us enough rice.

Can you remember when it was?

No, I can't remember anymore because I didn't note it down.

Was it the Tatmadaw or the Border Guard ordering the labour?

They combined together.

Who is the Border Guard working for?

The Border Guard is working for the Tatmadaw.

Who did they say that they are working for?

No, I don't know about that.

Have you even gone for portering during last few months?

No I haven't.

⁷ A *viss* is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg/ 3.52 lb.

How long have they not come to your village for? Did they ever come to your village in the last few months?

I think it has been already two months that they haven't come here.

Do they still order anything from you even if they don't come to your village?

No, they don't order anything from us. We also don't go to them.

How do you feel as a village head?

I just feel like if they call us we will go to see them, but if they don't call us we won't go.

How did you feel when the KNLA came to your village and the Tatmadaw and Border Guard moved to another place? Do you feel good about this or are you worried about this?

I'm happy about this. But if the Tatmadaw and Border Guard come to our village, we will also have to accept them.

Do you think you will have any problem caused by them when they come to your village?

I don't think there will be any problem, because we already agreed about this in the meeting.

Where was the meeting conducted?

The meeting was conducted in K'Ter Tee.

How many armed groups were at the meeting?

There were Tatmadaw and Border Guard.

Which month was the meeting conducted?

It was during the period where the people plough the fields.

Do you think you have less worries, more worries, or still the same as before?

I think it's still the same as before.

Is there any difference?

Yes, it is a little different.

How is it different?

It is different because when the Tatmadaw and Border Guard don't come here, it's a lot better.

Why is it difficult for you when the Tatmadaw and Border Guard come?

If they come, they will ask us for rice. If we don't have any, we will have to go and buy it somewhere for them. But they gave us money to buy for them.

How much did they pay for a big tin of rice?

They paid 8,000 kyat (US \$9.00) for a big tin of rice.

How about in the past? Did they also pay for what they took?

In the past they didn't pay for what they took, just after the Border Guard was founded.

How many years have the Border Guard been separated from the DKBA?

It has been over a year since they separated from each other. But I'm not sure because I didn't note this down.

Is there anything that you want to talk more about in regards to the Tatmadaw and the Border Guard?

No, I think that is all that I want to say.

Have you ever seen the Border Guard and Tatmadaw come and make development projects in your village?

No, I have never seen that.

Did they ever support the village with anything?

No, they also didn't support us with anything.

Did they also pay the villagers when they asked them to porter?

No, they didn't pay them.

Why didn't they pay them?

I also don't know why.

How many villagers did they ask to porter or do forced labour at once?

Most of the time, they called only one villager to show them the way.

How about when they called for forced labour?

If they called for forced labour, five or six, or sometimes even 10 of the villagers have to go.

When did you last go for portering?

Last year.

Has it already been a year?

Yes, it has already been a year.

Did you get a payment?

No, I didn't get a payment.

To where did you carry the equipment which they asked you to carry?

We had to carry their stuff almost as far Kyoh Loh village.

Has a battle ever happened while you were portering?

No, it has never happened.

Were you allowed to take a rest on the way while you were travelling?

Yes, they allowed us to take a rest.

How many soldiers followed each villager while they were travelling?

Three soldiers followed each villager while they were portering.

Did they also shout at you during that time?

No, they didn't shout at us.

Did you know their battalion number?

No, I don't know their battalion number.

Did you know them in person?

I knew some of them in person.

Was he a battalion commander?

I think he was a battalion commander.

Does he get paid?

Yes, he gets paid.

How much does he get for a month?

I'm not sure about that but I think his salary might be really high. I think round about 100,000 kyat (US \$ 113).

Who was the leader among the villagers who went to porter?

We didn't have a leader.

Do you know the names of the soldiers who led you while you were portering?

No, I don't know.

How many households do you have in K--- village?

There are [*censored for security*] households in the village.

What about the population?

I haven't confirmed about the population yet.

What are the villagers doing for their livelihoods?

Most of the villagers are farming flat fields, hill fields, and planting sugar cane and sesame for their livelihoods.

Is there any other business?

No, there isn't any other business for our livelihoods.

Does each family receive enough daily income from their work?

No, we don't have enough daily income.

How much do you have to pay for a basket of rice in your village?

We have to pay 8,000 kyat (US \$9) for a basket of rice [20.9 kg. / 46.08 lb.], which is the maximum, and the minimum is 5,000 kyat (US \$5.65).

How much do you sell a viss of chicken for?

We sell a viss of chicken for 5,000 kyat (US \$5.65).

How about pork?

A viss of pork is 2,000 kyat (US \$2.27).

Do the villagers also sell these kinds of things?

Yes, sometimes.

Does every villager get enough food annually?

Some people don't get enough food, but they don't need too much, so we can lend each other food if we have more. But in the past, most of the villagers don't get enough food, so we couldn't lend [food] to each other.

Can the villagers go to work freely?

Yes, they can go freely.

Have they faced any interruptions while going to work?

No.

How is the weather for this year?

This year, the weather is nice. But last year, the weather was really bad. We couldn't get much paddy because of that.

As a villager, do you feel like you have any enemies?

No, I don't feel like I have any enemies.

Do the other villagers from other villages have the same feeling as you?

Yes, I think so; I think they have the same feeling as me.

Have you ever heard of the Border Guard coming into your village and torturing the villagers and raping women recently?

No, I haven't heard anything about this.

How about the killing of villagers?

No.

Are there any Border Guard soldiers staying secretly in your village?

No, no Border Guard soldiers are here.

How about in the past?

Yes, in the past they lived here but now they already left.

When they were here, did they have good relations with the villagers?

Yes, we had a good relationship with them.

Did they ever threaten the villagers?

No, they didn't threaten us. But there was a soldier in the battalion, not only did he threaten us to get food, but he also hit the villagers when he asked for food.

What is his name? What is his real name?

His army name is Thaw Kweh.

How about his real name?

I can't remember his real name anymore.

Is he a Border Guard soldier?

Yes, he is a Border Guard soldier.

Is he married?

Yes, he is married.

Where is his family?

His family is in Boh Gaw Kwee village.

Do you know about his family situation?

No, I don't know.

Is there any school in your village?

Yes, there is a school, which is just in front of my house.

What is the highest grade in the school?

The highest grade is Grade 4.

How many teachers are there?

We have only one teacher.

Is the teacher in your village a government teacher?

No, she is not. She is just a teacher that the villagers hired.

Where did the villagers get her from?

She is a villager of K---. Her native village is K---.

Is it a female teacher or a male teacher?

It is a female teacher.

Is she married?

Yes, she is married.

How much does she get paid a year?

We collected 5,000 kyat (US \$5.65) from each student in a year for her.

Is there anything else that you gave her?

No, nothing else.

Don't the villagers provide oil, fish paste and salt for her?

No, we don't provide anything like that.

How many students are there?

There are 40 students here.

Do you think the payment that you give her will be enough for her in a year?

I think it'll be enough for her. Even if it is not enough for her, she still has her parents who have flat field and hill field farms.

Is there any support from any organisation for her?

No, she doesn't get any support.

Does the Burmese government give her any support?

No, they don't give any support.

Where do the students continue their studies after they finish Grade 4?

Most of the children go to Kaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu] town for further education.

How much do you have to pay for the school enrolment fee in Kaw Taw town?

We have to pay 1,500 [kyat] (US \$1.70) kyat for the school enrollment.

Do any of your children go and study there?

Yes, but my child goes and stays with his grandmother so, I don't really know how much I have to pay for him in a year. I can remember only that I bought one or two-dozen notebooks for him.

Does the school in your village get any support from any organisations?

No, we don't get any support.

Not even the school stationary?

Yes, it is because we just proposed this, this year.

Whom did you propose this to?

We proposed this to the KNLA.

Did you also propose this to the Tatmadaw?

No, we didn't propose it to them. They already saw that we had a school in our village but they don't want to provide any support so, we didn't propose [anything] to them about this.

Can the students in your village study freely without worries?

Yes, they don't have any worries and they can study freely.

Does the teacher also teach Karen language?

No, he doesn't teach Karen language.

Where did he finish his school?

He finished his school in Kaw Taw town.

Is the school in Kaw Taw a religious school or a government school?

It is a religious school.

Who is the school controlled by?

I think it is controlled by the monks.

When your children go and study at Kaw Taw, do you have to buy the school stationary for them, or do they get it for free?

No, we have to buy it. The government also provides some but it is not enough so, we have to buy it by ourselves.

Can the students in Kaw Taw study when either KNLA soldiers or Tatmadaw soldiers come?

Yes, they can study freely.

Have KNLA soldiers ever come and threatened the students?

No.

Do you have any hospital in your village?

No, we don't have any hospital. We only have people who are trained and understand a little bit about sickness and medicine.

Is there anything left that you want to report?

No, I don't have anything to say.

You said the Border Guard is controlled by the Tatmadaw right?

Yes, they are controlled by the Tatmadaw.

Have you heard of any current activity of Border Guard?

No, I don't hear anything.

How about the Tatmadaw ?

No.

How about in other villages?

In other villages, also I don't hear anything.

Have you gone to Kaw Taw recently?

No, I haven't gone there in a while.

How about K'Ter Tee village?

No. Since the Border Guard was founded, I have not been there.

What do you want to wish for your family in the future?

I only hope for the development of our country.

Only the development of the country? What do you need for the development of the country?

We need money for that.

What do you need, to get money?

We need to buy food.

What do you need to be able to buy food to get money, to work freely and to travel freely?

I don't know.

Is there any land in your village that was being confiscated by the Burmese government?

No.

Do they build any vehicle roads here?

No, they don't build any.

Do you hear anything concerning development projects in your village?

No, I don't.

How about the [Hatgyi] Dam?

I heard about the dam last summer but not anymore now.⁸

What do you think will happen in your village if the dam is built?

I don't think it can destroy our village. It can destroy Meh Pree village and other villages but not our village.

What do you think you need to be able to go to work freely or travel to other places freely?

We need many things for that. We need our rights and the freedom to be able to live, in the future.

Further background on the current situation in Pa'an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Papun Interview: Saw K---, June 2012," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw D---, January 2012," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw Kr---, October 2010," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw T---, December 2011," (July 2012)
- "Photo Set: Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam," (June 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, received April 2012," (June 2012)

⁸ For additional information on the Hatgyi Dam, see "Photo Set: Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam," KHRG, June 2012.

