



Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Toungoo Interview: Saw H---, April 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during April 2011 in Tantabin Township, Toungoo District by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed a 37 year-old township secretary, Saw H---, who described abuses committed by several Tatmadaw battalions, including forced relocation, land confiscation, forced labour, restrictions on freedom of movement, denial of humanitarian access, targeting civilians, and arbitrary taxes and demands. Saw H--- provided a detailed description of three development projects that the Tatmadaw has planned in the area. Most notable is Toh Boh¹ hydroelectric dam on the Day Loh River, which is expected to destroy 3,143 acres of surrounding farmland. Asia World Company began building the dam in Toh Boh, Day Loh village tract during 2005. The other two projects involved the confiscation of 2,400 acres, against which the villagers formed a committee to petition for compensation and were met with threats of imprisonment. Saw H--- also described how 30 people working on the dam die each year. Also mentioned is the Tatmadaw's burning of villagers' cardamom plantations, and the villagers' attempts to limit the fire damage using fire lines. It is also described by Saw H--- how some villagers have chosen to remain in KNLA/KNU-controlled areas and produce commodities for sale, despite the attendant increase in the price of goods purchased from Tatmadaw-controlled villages, while others have fled to refugee camps in other countries. For photos of the Toh Boh Dam taken by a different community member in March 2012, see "Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh Dam construction site in Toungoo" published by KHRG on August ^{23rd} 2012.

Interview | Saw H---, (male, 37), B--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (April 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a community member in Toungoo District, and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.² This

¹According to government designations, the dam site is in Tantabin Township, Eastern Bago Region. "Toh Boh" is the Karen language name for the dam site and adjacent village, which is also known as "Tun Boh" in Burmese language.

² 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.

interview was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including one incident report and 201 photographs.³

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Baptist

Marital Status: Married

Position: Secretary of Township [Tantabin]

Can you tell me about the situation in your township area [Tantabin Township]?

There are five village tracts in our township: Khoh Kee, Kaw Thay Der, Maw Nay Pga, Per Tee and Day Loh village tracts. There are five regions.

There are five regions. Is there any region that you can't administrate and have lost?

All five regions, especially the Day Loh region; we can't completely administrate it because the enemy [Tatmadaw] fully controls the Day Loh area and there is a project there; they are building a dam in the area. There is a dam project and a dam will be built there.

When was the dam built?

The dam project was started in 2005.

Where did they [the Tatmadaw] plan to build a dam?

They planned a dam project, which will be in the Day Loh area, in a place is called Toh Boh.⁴ Toh Boh is located on the shore of the Day Loh River. Upstream from Toh Boh, there are



This photo, taken in April 2011, shows 37-year-old Saw H---, a secretary of Tantabin Township in the township office, while explaining a map of the dam project to a community member trained by KHRG. Saw H--- provided information about the situation in the village as it relates to the dam construction such as the number of displaced villages, land that was confiscated, as well as a detailed summary of the buildings that were constructed to accommodate the workers and equipment. [Photo: KHRG]

³ 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 Toungoo District can be found in the report, "Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh dam construction site in Toungoo," KHRG, August 2012.

two mountains; Hsay Shoh and Pa Nah Wah mountains. In Burmese, we call them Shan Taung and Kywet Pyu Taung [respectively]. The river flows between these two mountains and there is a bend there. The river bends to the west of the Day Loh area. It [the river bend] is close to Naypyidaw. There is a long bend, and they will build it [the dam] between the Shan Taung and Kywet Pyu Taung [mountains].

Have they started their project yet?

No, they haven't started yet. To build the dam, they will have to divert the waterway. They will divert the waterway through Hsay Shoh Mountain. The water will flow to the other side of Hsay Shoh Mountain and flow back to Day Loh River. They will construct buildings at the bend.

Why are they going to build the dam?

Their plan to build the dam is to produce electricity. They will build it in the place between the two mountains. They will excavate the mountain and let water flow through the mountain to the Day Loh River. They will build one dam there and another one downriver. It means they will divert and stop the water upriver, and build another one downriver.⁵

You said they will construct the buildings at the bend?

For the buildings, they will build them a little upriver. They will construct the buildings inside the village, which is inside old Toh Boh village.

The Day Loh River flows this way, toward Toungoo, Baw K'Lee comes up to here. It comes back to the Day Loh River. Here is the place they call P'Leh Wah, and there is a big bridge there. Then, there is Yaw Loh River on this side. Yaw Loh River flows downriver from P'Leh Wah, to a place called Kyauk Kon; there is no bridge or village there. The vehicle road comes to the other side of Day Loh River. Here is Taw Koh, and here is the entrance to Day Loh River. There is a big bend here. Here is Hsay Shoh, and P'Nah Wah Soh is here. They will build the dam from here to here. They will let water flow through Hsay Shoh Mountain

⁴ The site of the dam is near 18° 55'N, 96° 37'E and a satellite view gives some perspective on the amount of construction involved with this project.

⁵ The villager is likely describing plans to construct a hydroelectric dam and a power storage facility, rather than two separate dams.

and let water flow down river to Toh Boh village along Day Loh River, and they will block [the water] again, here⁶.

Can you explain to me the aim or objective for building the dam?

Their objective is to produce electric power.

Have they been successful?

No, they have not been successful at producing electric power. For this project, they planned very carefully. They started it in 2007, and it won't be until 2010 when they are successful with this project.

But now 2010 has already gone; do they still have a future plan to build the dam?

Yes, 2010 has gone, but according to their plan, they would finish the project in 2010. But, they can't do as they planned. Currently, they haven't been successful, but they have a plan. Now, they will excavate the mountain to make a hole through to the other side of the mountain, but they haven't done that yet. Their [main] plan will start if they finish excavating the mountain. They planned to excavate the mountain within five years, but it hasn't finished yet. I don't know if they just have a plan to produce electric power, or other purposes, because within five years, they haven't finished excavating the mountain. Some workers who have been inside said, *"the hole they make takes two hours round-trip by car."* They have excavated the mountain for five years. The miners include Chinese, Burmese, Shan and Karen. But they only allow Chinese workers enter to work inside the hole; no other ethnicities have been allowed to enter.

What about SPDC [Tatmadaw]⁷ army leaders, are they allowed to go?

⁶ At this point in the interview, Saw H-- explains the project to the community member by drawing a map. KHRG was unable to acquire a copy of the map for publication, and thus is not presented here.

⁷In 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 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.

No, they can't go, but I think they [the company] will let the people who cooperate with them [the company] enter.⁸

So, only Chinese people can enter the hole?

Yes, only Chinese people. They let Chinese [workers] mine the mountain and they have excavated it for five years. Even though they are mining carefully, some Chinese workers who went and worked inside, remained, and died because of a slippery landslide.

How many people died?

Sometimes, four or five people die [at once], and about 30-40 people die in a year. When outside [of the excavated mountain], they came out and fought; they blamed the people who were in charge [saying], *"Your plan is not well organized, so the landslide occurred, and people have died because of you; people have died."* They fought, cut and killed each other outside. Just in this hole, about 100 people have died.

They keep a place for the workers to stay in Toh Boh village. As I told you before, Toh Boh village is located in the place where they will build the dam, between Shan Taw and Kywet PyuTaung. Toh Boh village is located to the west of Day Loh River and close to the Baw K'Lee, Toungoo [town], and the vehicle road. They built a lot of buildings in Toh Boh village. I visited last year, and I know there was a graveyard for Toh Boh village. The companies and their workers came and forced the Toh Boh villagers to move all [the bodies]. They destroyed the graveyard, and they constructed four or five huge buildings in the graveyard. The graveyard was very large and the area is flat. There are only the workers' houses there. There are about a thousand workers.

Upstream from Toh Boh village, they constructed a very beautiful building. The leaders come and stay there. The highest ranks among the Tatmadaw leaders come and stay there. If a minister comes, they are welcome there. They come, stay, sleep and eat there. For the downriver part there [in Toh Boh village], there are many buildings. These buildings are for the people in charge, like managers or officers' staff, and others.

Toh Boh is located on the bank of Day Loh River. They [the company] set up a rope bridge. They connected it to the other side of Day Loh River. There is the other river on the other

⁸While it is not entirely clear, it is likely the villager is explaining that only the Tatmadaw soldiers in direct contact with the foreign company building the dam are allowed to enter the excavated mountain site.

side of Day Loh River. That river flows to the downriver side of Day Loh River. They constructed many buildings on the other side of Day Loh, like buildings to keep cars, trucks, petrol, rice, oil and machine tools.

The buildings they built in Toh Boh village for ministers are very beautiful. There is a big office. They stuck [a sign] in front of the office [showing] how much this building will cost. They stick those kinds of things in front of the office. They don't write in Burmese. They write in Chinese and English. The workers who go and work there see what they write down, [but] they don't understand the language because they did not go to school. Even though, they see [the signs], they don't understand them.

Is the project only for a dam, or are there any other activities that they plan to do?

There are three projects in this area. [The] first project is to produce electric power, [the] second is to plant teak and *pway* [Ironwood tree, and the last one is a rubber [tree] planting project.

Do they have a plan to mine gold?

For gold, in the workers' experience, they said it takes one hour to travel from the outside to the inside of the hole, and another hour to come back, even by car. So, we don't know whether they really want to produce electricity or if they want to go and mine gold at the other part of the mountain.

Are they still digging?

Yes, they are still digging.

How many cars can travel in the hole?

Only one car can go.

Do they use electric bulbs?

I heard they don't use electric bulbs. They carry light when they travel in the hole. They dig the hole and they don't do it carefully, so the earth slides from the top of the mountain. They cover the hole with *moeka* [a large tarp].

Will civilians face problems or difficulties if the dam is successful; for example, like flooding of the village or plantations?

It is too early to say. I think you already understand a lot about the dam from the information that I have told you. I will tell you. They will build the dam here, and here is Toh Boh village. Here is Day Loh River. There is flat land on both sides of the river, so people plant betelnut⁹ trees, dog fruit trees, coffee and many other farms, like betelnut plantations and banana plantations in the area. There are many kinds of plantations. Swah Loh village is on the other side of Day Loh River. Around Swah Loh village, there are farms and a lot of betelnut plantations, durian plantations, dog fruit plantations, lemon plantations, banana plantations and other farms.

Can you tell me step-by-step?

I will tell you one-by-one about the three projects. After one, we will go to another one. There are five regions in our Tantabin Township. Among the five areas, especially the Day Loh area, we definitely can't step down [from the hills] because the enemy [Tatmadaw] came and set up many camps. They brought companies to do projects such as producing electric power, and planting valuable timber and rubber [crops]. There are three projects, so they came and set up a lot [of structures]. We can't step down.

I will tell you exactly how many people are in each village, and how many houses are in each village. We know the number of villages in that area. I will tell you now the house numbers that I recorded in 2005. There are 15 villages in the region.

No	Village Name	Households	Population		Total
			M	F	
1	Keh Doh Lu	44	102	118	220
2	Tun Boh	45	117	110	227
3	Ta Lay Loh	9	18	13	21
4	Kheh Der	17	27	30	57
5	Leh Pah Kway	33	72	90	162
6	Noh K'Maw	33	72	85	157
7	Zin P'Lay Gon	28	64	72	136

⁹ In Burmese, "betelnut" and "betel leaf" are referred to as "konywet" and "konthih," as if they are from the same plant. The Burmese names are also commonly used by Karen language speakers. "Betel nut" is the seed from an Areca Palm tree, areca catechu; "Betel leaf" is the leaf of the Piper betel vine, belonging to the piperaceae family. See "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

8	Hsaw Ee Hkee	7	12	16	28
9	Thay Khee Kla	17	30	38	68
10	Kler Mu Kha	27	49	61	112
11	Ywa Tah Hsin	9	29	30	59
12	K'Neh Tee Der	30	72	88	160
13	Pyon Chaw	27	52	61	115
14	Tee Ber Loh	33	82	98	180
15	Leh Pa Kway	27	56	70	126
Total	15 villages	388	844	984	1830

This is just in the Day Loh area. I will just tell you the villages in Day Loh area. I will tell you a little bit about the villages' histories.

The villagers' occupations are working on betelnut plantations, farms, banana plantations, lemon plantations, coffee plantations, dog fruit plantations and other farming. These villages are located in flat areas on the foot of the mountains. If you go down, the land is flat, and if you go up, it is mountainous. These villages are in the area close to the vehicle road near Toungoo and Baw K'Lee, between Day Loh, Toungoo and Baw K'Lee. These villages are located in this area.

As I recall, these villages were forced to move five times. In 1975, they were forced to move, but they were not told the place they had to relocate to, so they went and stayed close to other villages. They went and stayed at K'Yay Kon. They stayed there for one year and they came back [to their villages]. They came back and stayed for several years. They were forced [to relocate] again, and they had to go back and stay at an army camp. They had to stay there for four years. It would be until after 1980; it took four years. They came back again to their villages when the situation was okay. In 1985, they were forced to move again. In 1994, they came back and stayed in their village again. One year, after staying in the village, which was in 1995, they were forced [to relocate] again. They stayed in their village until 2001 and, in the beginning of 2002, all villages were forced to move. In 2004 or 2005, they came back to their villages again. There were several villages that came back.

For Toh Boh village, they can't come back to live in their village. They were not allowed to come back to live in their village. They were kept in another place downriver along the Day Loh. If you go down from Toh Boh, a little over one hour along Day Loh, you will see a village. The village is located on the bank of the Day Loh River; the village is called Noh

K'Maw village. Toh Boh villagers were ordered to live downriver from Noh K'Maw village. They had to set up their new village there. Some other villagers also came and stayed there.

[Villagers from] two villages, Toh Boh and Law Hsaw Loh, can't come back. They were not allowed to come back to live in their village. At that time [during the relocation], a group came and they checked the whole area here, but local people didn't know anything. After that, people in charge from the Tantabin [Township] office came and met with local people. They said *"Toh Boh village is located in the project area, so you can't come back to live [there]. Your properties, cultivations, plantations, land and other things are in the project area. All of your properties will be destroyed when their [the company's] project starts. Base upon on your ownership of properties or land, the government and companies will pay compensation. "The people in charge from Tantabin said: "The electric project [team] will come and build the dam upriver from the village. The project will take five years. After five years, villages here will get electricity for village use in many ways, for their business. Villagers' businesses will become better and [there will be] more options for income. So, we will build the dam upriver from your village. If the dam accidentally breaks, the villages downriver will flood, so we will build the dam soundly."*

They said they will give compensation for land or plantations, but later, the people in charge from Tantabin didn't send anything, and said nothing. There was no answer, so the local people formed a committee with 30 people. These 30 people signed [a petition] to receive compensation. They formed a committee with 30 people. They went to the Tantabin office and the people in charge said, *"This is not a Tantabin project. The project comes from headquarters, so we can't do anything. If you want compensation, you have to go to the Division. If you go to Division, I will tell you: this project is run by the military government. Even if you go to them, they won't give you [compensation]. Furthermore, they will arrest you and put you in prison."* The people in charge from Tantabin told the villagers this.

Based on what the people in charge from Tantabin said, the 30 people who formed the committee did not dare to pursue the case anymore. They were afraid and they stayed like that. They got nothing from losing their land and properties.

Now, the project has started. They surveyed the two mountains, Hsay Shoh and the other one. Hsay Shoh, called Shan Taw [in Burmese], is 1,800 feet (548.64 meters). They excavated this mountain. The other mountain, called Pa Nah Wah, is 2,100 feet (640.08 meters). The area that they surveyed to build the dam is 500 feet (152.40 meters). The dam will use 300 feet (91.44 meters). The area of the project that they decided [to use] is 2,600 acres. They have added 543 acres. If we combine it, there are 3,143 acres of land, which they have decided [will constitute] the project area inside and outside of Toh Boh village. It is very large.

The area included the Toh Boh betelnut plantations and banana plantations. As I know, one [plantation] is three or four acres. One person has a betelnut plantation, a banana plantation, and a lemon plantation. Some people have one, two or three acres. The total land that the village lost is 3,143 acres.

Based upon on what I know, this project [company] is called Asia World Company.¹⁰ In Burmese, they call it Shwe Swan Yin Co.Ltd. This is the company that comes and does the project.

Local people here don't know, but I know that the chair person of this company is the grandson of Kung Za. He is from Shan state. He is a descendant of the kings. He has many companies everywhere in Yangon and others. He has a ship for travelling abroad and he has hundreds or thousands of workers.

The manager of this project is U Wan Maung. He has a healthy body. He is big and tall. He is the current manager, and his assistants are U Aung Maw, U Aung Sein, U Sein Win, A'Ban Wa, U Wan Maung and U Wan See; there are six assistants. They have a big objective. They constructed the buildings for workers in old Toh Boh village;¹¹ there are thousands of workers. They constructed a beautiful building in Toh Boh village. They house ministers when ministers visit there. The manager and office staff are all housed in there.

They connected Toh Boh to the other side of the Day Loh [River] with a rope bridge. The river is big. You can't cross in the rainy season. Machine boats used to travel in this river. They constructed a lot of buildings on the other side. Those buildings are only garages, like an ice garage, oil garage, and car garage, including all other tools that are necessary for completing the project.

They constructed a vehicle road for this project. The vehicle road runs between Toungoo [town] and Zin Ya Gyi. The road diverges at Toungoo and Baw K'Lee. This road comes from Toungoo, but it diverges with one side going to Baw K'Lee and another one to Zin Ya Gyi.

¹⁰Asia World Co Ltd is a division of Asia World Group, and is one of Burma's largest and most diversified conglomerates with interests in industrial development, construction, transportation, import-export and a chain of local supermarkets; see "One the march to do business in Myanmar," *Asia Times*, August 26th 2009. Founded in June of 1992, Steven Law is the managing director of Asia World Co Ltd and is also the son of Lo Hsing Han, the infamous drug lord and chairman of Asia World; see "Burmese Tycoons Part I," *Irrawaddy Magazine*, June 2000, Volume 8, No. 6, pp. 2-3.

¹¹ The community member sometimes refers to the dam construction site as "old Toh Boh village", as this is where the village was located before the project began.

You have to come back to Zin Ya Gyi. If you continue on the separate road from Toungoo to Baw K'Lee for a while, you will arrive at one place; this place is not a camp, it is a place of worship. They call it Myat Swan Nyi Naung P'Ya. If you go down from there a little, there is a place they call Shu Kin Tha; there is a police checkpoint there. They call the checkpoint, 'Number 11 Checkpoint'.

Beginning in Shu Kin Tha, they [Tatmadaw] constructed a new road. The road goes to the project site, in old Tun Boh village. The road started from Number 11 Checkpoint to the project site. They placed several army units along the road to the project site. They divide *baka* [checkpoints]¹² 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7; this is along the road to the project. There are seven *baka*. They keep a checkpoint at the entrance of old Tun Boh village; they fully-man the army camp there. Some army camps are big and some are small.

They set up a big army camp close to these two mountains, P'Nah Wah Soh and Hsay Shoh specifically, which is on the mountain that is closer to Hsay Shoh. They set up a big army camp there; the battalion deputy commander stays there. They set up another big army camp close to Kya Phyu Mountain and the battalion commander stays there as well. They go and carry water from the Day Loh River and there is another camp there.

I will tell you details about the army camp. Number 11 Police Checkpoint is in Shu Kin Tha, and there are seven *baka* between Shu Kin Tha and the Toh Boh project site. There is one sentry place in Toh Boh. There is one big camp in the Shan Mountain and another one at Shwe Mountain; Karen people call Kywet Pyu Mountain, P' Nah Wah Soh; there is a big army camp there. There is another big army camp at Swah Loh village. Swah Loh village is located on the bank of Swah Loh River. The river flows to the Day Loh River, a little downriver from Toh Boh. There is a big army camp at Swa Hta and another camp in Wah Loh village. Then they constructed another road. They constructed it from the other side of the rope bridge [in Toh Boh village] to Swah Loh. There are two small camps on the way.

There is another big army camp beside old Toh Boh village. The enemy who conducts security is the local army. In 2009, [Tatmadaw] IB [Infantry Battalion] #73 conducted security [operations]. It joined with some units from LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #440. I have heard that Battalion [IB] #39 conducts security now, but I am not sure whether that is correct or not. In Tantabin Township, there are groups of enemies, which are battalion numbers #39 and #73. Battalion #73 is based in Z'Yat Gyi and #39's base is located in 4-Miles [army camp].

¹² *Ba ka* means 'military camp' in Burmese.

I will tell you a little about who came to our area in the beginning. Local people had no idea who came to the area first. After they came, the people in charge from Tantabin came. They disappeared for several years after they came [initially]. Then, the Shwe Swan Yin Company came to the area. The Shwe Swan Yin Company came on June 8th 2007. Before, they reported a different plan for their project, but when they came and drafted the project, their project was to end in Wah Hta. Wah Hta is located farther [to the East] than Swah Loh. There is a big mountain range there. At the foot of the mountain range is Day Loh River. The other side of the mountain range is a field.

In total, the first and second decision to take the land includes over 3,000 acres. They entered and took the area up to Wah Hta. The [original] 3,000 acres does not reach to Wah Hta. They extended it [the acreage] more. They gathered and met local people in the area. The villages there are Noh K'Maw, Thay Khee Kla, P'Leh Wah, Tun Boh. They met with those villagers. They said, *"We will build the dam and we will build it sustainably. If the dam breaks, Noh K'Maw and Tun Boh will be under water. In my project, I will build the dam and the water will flood over 30,000 acres."*

I skipped a little about the project that I am telling you about at the moment. The Shwe Swan Yin Company met with local people and said they will take more [land], and they said that there are over 30,000 acres that will flood. They said they will finish the project within four years. *"We will do it until it is successful."* So we watched it from 2007; they said they will do it until they have succeeded. Now it is 2011; they are close to success? When we look at what they have done, they just dug a tunnel for the waterway under the mountain, but they haven't reached success yet. They said they will do their project within four years, but now they haven't completed even a tunnel, so I think they won't be successful within the next several years.

What they planned, and actually do, is it the same project? Do they try to do anything else?

It is a thought for us. It is on the minds of local people because when they came, they just said they would build the dam and produce electricity. But over several years, they have just excavated the tunnel. The tunnel is not successful yet.

Will they finish if they focused on digging?

They can finish if they focussed on digging because the mountain is not so big. They dug it for several years, but it doesn't go through to other side. The mountain is not big. The mountain is *babapoe* [medium sized], so it became a thought to local people; *"maybe they said they would build the dam, but they have another secret plan to mine the mountain."*

Do they hide themselves when they come?

Different people have different opinions. Maybe they will try to make underground communication [lines] or store weapons or remove valuables from under the ground, like gold or precious stones. Local people have different opinions. The mountain is small. They have been digging for several years, but they haven't finished it. They don't let other ethnicities besides Chinese enter the tunnel. They don't allow Karen, Burmese or Shan ethnicities to enter. The mountain is short and small, but it takes two hours to go in and return, so it causes suspicion in local people and they provide different opinions.

As you are a person in charge; do you have a plan to find this out?

It is our responsibility to find this issue out. I think there will be a plan. But it is not good to say, because if we say, it can harm our security.

Can we come and find out more about these kinds of issues in the future when we want to know more?

Yes, you can. As we [the villager and the community member trained by KHRG] are associated, you will know what we know. When we travel in the area, [it will be like] you are travelling in the area. We need to know what they are doing and we have a plan to find out. As we are working together, we can let you know more when we get more information.

How is the suffering of villagers in the area? Can you tell me about that?

Before the Shwe Swan Yin Company came to the area, the people who came first were the army [Tatmadaw]. The army came and the villagers were faced with different kinds of problems. They came and they were people [soldiers] who have money; they bought things like chickens or pigs from villagers, with money. But some people forcibly took villagers' pigs and chickens. Then, it harmed villagers' livelihoods. So, the villagers have to go to the Day Loh River bank. But, to travel to work in their farms at a different place or other villages, they have to get a permission document. They have to pay 1,000 [kyat] (US \$1.13)¹³ for a

¹³As of July 12th2012, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 883kyat 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.

permission document. They go and work, but they can't sleep at their work place; they have to come back and sleep at their home. Even if they have a permission document when they go and work, they only get a permission document from one army group, but there are several units of army [Tatmadaw units] active [in the area]. If another army group comes, they sometimes find villagers. Sometimes, they need people go with them as a guide and show them places. It has become a disturbance for them [villagers]. At that time, local people have had to suffer a lot. They can only work for three or four days in a week.

Can all 15 villages return to their villages?

Before, they had to move. Some villagers went back in 2011. Only Hsaw Loh and Tun Boh [villagers] can't return. Others villages returned. For Hsaw Loh villagers, they have to go work in their old village to work in their betelnut plantations. I met with a Hsaw Loh villager who returned to work in his plantation. He was given a permission document. One permission document is 5,000 kyat (US \$5.66). The frontline army lets them return to work, but as I told you, there are many army units in our area. When the troops enter, they demand rice or tell villagers, *"You come back and work on the frontline. If you see us patrolling and you tell the KNU [Karen National Union] about us, it will be a problem for us. Since you have come back and work on the frontline, you have to pay me money, like 5,000 or 6,000 kyat (US \$5.66 or US \$6.80."* The Hsaw Loh villager whom I met, said *"I have to pay 5,000 kyat for a [travel] permission document, and [when] I returned and worked in my betelnut plantation in my old village, there were many troops. They came and demanded things. I do betelnut [farming] and I get 100 to 200 viss¹⁴ (160 to 320 kg. / 352 to 704 lb.) of betelnut, and they ordered about over 100 to 200 viss. Since then, I know that it [economic input and output] does not match, so I never go back and do betelnut [farming] again."* So, villagers from there [Hsaw Loh] have had to leave all their land; some villagers go and work at Shwe Swan Yin Company, where they were given even less of a salary.

How much do they [Shwe Swan Yin Company] give per month?

They give 2,000 kyat (US \$2.27) per day.

What do they have to do?

They have to carry *hta* [metal objects], and cut logs to use in the tunnel. All jobs involve heavy [labour], so it [the wage] is not much because they just pay 2,000 kyat. Just a few people go and work with the company, but mostly they [villagers] go to Per Tee and do wage jobs, in Burmese villages and in Toungoo town, like working in restaurants and in other

¹⁴ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg./ 3.52 lb.

places. Some people find fish and sell them. Some people find bees and sell honey. Most people work on their own.

What about the rubber project? Has their plan been successful?

As I told you, there are three projects in this region. For rubber, they started [planting tree] from the new road built for the Tun Boh project. This project was done by the Kaung Myat Company.¹⁵

What about the other project?

For their other project, they take the plants from here; they plant teak and *pway*. They just plant trees. The land they take is all from Noh K'Maw land. All betelnut plantations, farms, and banana plantations are included. All the land the Kaung Myat Company takes belongs to Noh K'Maw. In total, there are 2,400 acres. The owner of Kaung Myat Company is U Kin Maung Aye. We just know U Kin Maung Aye and his assistant is Aung Zaw. They took 2,400 acres of land.

The other company, they call MSP;¹⁶ I don't know what it stands for. This company's project is only to plant rubber. The rubber project is in the upstream area [on the Day Loh River]. The project-area is 800 acres. They forcibly took all their land. The land includes some from Noh K'Maw and Toh Boh [villages], 800 acres.

Do you know the chairperson of the MSP Company?

No, we don't know the owner of the MSP Company.

Is the information that you have reported to me complete? Is there anything remaining?

In the 2,400 acres that Kaung Myat [took], and the 800 acres that MSP took for the projects, they have planted teak, *pway* and rubber. They also constructed buildings in each place. People always come and work as *set tha*.¹⁷ They have given opportunities to civilians for the construction and clearing of the rubber plantation. Local people can come and plant peanut in the place where they [the companies] planted trees. When they [villagers] clean the

¹⁵ For information regarding the Kaung Myat Company, its website is: <http://www.kaungmyat.com/>

¹⁶ Although the villager does not know the name of this company, it is likely that it is Myan Shwe Pyi Limited, which operates in the area; its website is: <http://msp-limited.tradenote.net/>

¹⁷ *Set tha* is a Burmese term for forced labour duty, such as with messengers stationed at army camps or bases, serving as an intermediary to deliver orders from army officers to village heads, but also involving other menial tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.

ground to [plant] peanut, it is the same as if they are clearing their [the company's] plantations. They don't pay anything to the landowners, but the owner can plant peanut on the land that the company had confiscated and planted trees. They [villagers] go and plant peanut and other [crops], while at the same time clearing the plantation for the company. They don't even pay some villagers to go and work, because it is a benefit to them [villagers]. They plant different kinds of beans. It benefits them in some way. You enter and work there and it kind of helps the Burmese [the company].

The suffering which locals experience here is, if I have to say, a lack of education. There are schools but they demand many things from a student to enter the school. They ask for a school entrance fee for a school fund and other things like sports. They ask for many things. Villagers are not doing well in their livelihood, so they can't afford to send their children to school. So, just a few people can send their children to school. They face a big problem with education.

The other one is, the place where they stay is not sanitary. The place [where] they live is on the foot of the mountain. It rains, and the place here is like *kyo weh bpu* [a flat land]. The water that flows into the river is *htoo tee* [with unseen debris]. So there are many kinds of diseases that appear. But among the diseases that they suffer, TB [tuberculosis] is the most serious. As I know, one can have TB and it transfers to many people. They need to cure it first, but some people don't have money. They just stay like this and the disease becomes serious. They go to a hospital for a cure when they have money. Some people are curable; some people, even though they have money and they go for treatment, they are incurable. Some people die in the hospital. This kind of disease has many kinds of consequences. One or two people in a family can be affected by the one who has [TB] in their family. In this case, the government has set up a clinic.

Did the SPDC army set up this clinic?

Yes, the SPDC army set up this clinic.

Do they provide enough medicine to civilians?

They don't give [enough]. They appoint one person to be in charge and work for villages here, like villages in Noh K'Maw village tract. The person's name is U Htay Min. He has attained a high level of education. He knows everything about here. He is working with local people who understand a little about medicine. He tricks villagers from going to a hospital, in many ways. They have to work with U Htay Min and they have to pay many things.

Yesterday, I discovered his treatments. He injects medicine to one person and he asks 4,500 kyat (US \$5.10); it was just glucose and [vitamins] B1, B2 and B6. For one medicine injection, he asks 4,500 kyat. Some people can't afford to pay anymore, and they think "whatever," whether they die or not; they don't care. They think dying is better than being alive. Some people stay until they die. They don't have money to pay for their treatment but if they don't give money [for the treatment], their disease can't be cured. The medic has to give the treatment for free, but now when the villagers pay money for their treatment, it just benefits the medic. They were not allowed to go and buy medicine to bring back to their village. It is all collected when they get to a checkpoint. If you have money and go to hospital in Toungoo or Yangon, the medicine that you bring back, if it includes the prescription, they allow you bring it back. They won't allow you to bring it back if you buy medicine for your family. They don't give you trouble; they just take your medicine when they see it. Some people said you have to pay them money if you don't want them to confiscate it.

What is the MOC [Military Operation command] or LID [Light Infantry Division] of SPDC [State Peace Development Council] army who are stationed in the Toh Boh area?

[It is the] army [Tatmadaw] who is stationed here, there is no MOC or others. They just give responsibilities to locals, like IB# 73 and 39. There are two battalions. IB# 73 entered the area in 2007 and 2008. There are 10 battalions under MOC #7; I will have to check back to find out where they are from.

Do you have any other things that you want to tell me about the projects?

There are things that I hear, but it is not concrete so I think I will have to find out later. There are new projects that will start and they have done only the old projects so far.

Did your villagers have to suffer with forced labour, *set tha*, all the time during 2011?

In my area and other areas, it happens every day. Like in the Per Tee area, it never stops. One group [Tatmadaw battalion] enters and one group goes out all the time. Another area is Maw Nay Bwah; they always have movement in the area. They rotate and are active again and again, and sometimes, small columns of soldiers enter the area.

How many Tatmadaw army camps are in Tantabin Township, currently?

They are based along the Toungoo vehicle road to the Bu Hsa Hkee vehicle road, on the border of 5th Brigade [Papun District]. Because the enemy is based along the road, villagers

in the lower [part] of the road have less space to work for their livelihood. They have to go and stay in different places. Yesterday, they [Tatmadaw] came and burned things down. They burned all the plants. They do it almost every year. Yesterday, they [lit fires] but the fires stopped because of the rain. They [lit fires] again, and it rained again. The last few years were the most serious. As I heard from a villager, he was told by a Burmese soldier that *“the order comes from above, and it said ‘the KNU can exist because of the support from civilians, by giving them a tax like on cardamom¹⁸ and other plants’.”* The important thing is cardamom. It supports KNU a lot. Cardamom is the most important for the KNU, so the leaders [Tatmadaw] from above ordered [local units] to burn cardamom. They came and burned [cardamom plantations] everywhere in the area. Some villagers went and stopped the fire. I myself have a cardamom plantation in Kaw Thoo Der. I went and made a fire line¹⁹, and I came back. After few days, the fire consumed my entire plantation. They didn't do this in just one area. It happened in Maw Nay Bwah, Bu Hsah Loh and other areas. They did the same thing.

How many kinds of villagers do you have in your area? Do you have villagers living in SPDC army-controlled areas and outside of the controlled areas?

Yes, it has both. They live inside controlled areas and outside of controlled areas.

Can those villagers associate with each other?

No, they can't associate. They can't contact each other for relationships like buying things. Sometimes, they order things and they send [them] to each other.

Do you have things that you want to tell or explain more to me about the [censored for security] [Tatmadaw] plans that will seriously harm civilians, and what the companies do?

I think I don't have a lot to tell you. I told you the details. There are many abuses. The other thing is, especially villagers who don't stay under the [Tatmadaw] control, they face a big problem with their livelihoods. They can't stay together in the same place. If they stay together in the same place, the target [for the Tatmadaw] will be clear. The Burmese army will heavily fire mortar shells at them. They dare not stay together for this reason. They have

¹⁸ Cardamom seeds come from a plant belonging to the ginger family, and are recognized by their small seed pod, papery outer shell and small black seeds. Cardamom is typically grown on the jungle floor in South Asian countries.

¹⁹ A “fire line” refers to a number of ways to create a buffer to prevent a fire from spreading. It can be a trench, an area cleared of vegetation and combustibles, or any other linear obstruction between the fire threat and the protected area.

to stay one there, and one here, and another one there. They have to stay separately in the valley or river source They have to hide their ways so the enemy will not see it.

For their livelihoods, they face problems like the area becoming limited. It means they are close to a Burmese Army camp. Some villages are very close to army camps but some have a little distance. Their working area became limited because they are close to an army camp. They are afraid of army activities so their area becomes limited. The other thing is they [Tatmadaw] plant landmines after they enter and are active in the area. So villagers aren't go. That is one thing, and if I am honest about their occupation before, they did hill field [farming], and if the hill field produced 5 baskets²⁰ of paddy grain (104.5 kg. /352 lb.), they could have enough food for their family during good times. Because of limited working space, [caused by] the enemy planting landmines and an army camp located close to their place, they can't do hill field farming as they did before. They can get just one (32 kg. /70.4 lb.), two (64 kg. /140.8 lb.), or three (96 kg. /211.2 lb.) baskets of paddy grain from their hill field. For this reason they face a food crisis.

Is it easy for them to go and buy food, like rice and other things?

They go and buy food from different places, areas and villages. They have contact with people inside. The problem they face is sometimes they meet with the active army [patrols] on the way when they go and buy food. Sometimes they have to go and buy things, but the enemy closes the road and meets them on the way. They face this kind of problem. Sometimes they have to travel for several days on the way. If the enemy arrests them on the way and calls them to follow, the family who was left behind in the village don't know anything about it and it becomes a big problem.

Does the KNLA help them by providing security for them while on the way to get food?

Mostly, the places where they go and buy food are close to the enemy camp. There is also a group of people who are in charge of providing security. So, before the villagers leave to cross that place, they will need to contact that group first. After that, the security group will advise whether the situation is good for the villager to go and buy food or not. If they advise them that the situation is good, they will go; if not, they won't go. Even if they can't buy enough food for a [full] year, at least they get half of the food for their family. But the problem is they have to carry it secretly.

²⁰ Unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg. / 46.08 lb. of paddy or 32 kg./ 70.4 lb. of milled rice.

How much do they have to pay for a viss of salt?

People from [Tatmadaw] controlled areas come and sell things here. If you go and buy in a controlled area, one viss of salt is 2,000 kyat (US \$2.28). If they bring salt here, they will sell for 2,500 kyat (US \$2.85). It depends on the distance they come. If it is far, they will sell for 3,000 kyat (US \$3.42) or more.

How much is a sack of rice?

Rice is a higher price. If the rice comes to us, one sack of rice is 45,000 kyat (US \$51.25). The price is cheap inside [controlled areas]. For example, if we have to go and buy it from Kaw Thay Der or Kler La. Between Kler La and here, there are ten SPDC checkpoints on the way. They ask [for money] at each checkpoint. Like with one motorbike, they demand 500 kyat (US \$0.57) at each checkpoint. One sack of rice, they ask [for money] and you have to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$5.69) [extra]. We have to pay several thousand [kyat] on the way, and we also have to pay the carrier. The Military Government doesn't allow people to bring rice outside the [controlled] areas. If the military government sees anyone, then that person has a big problem; they killed some people before. They accuse them of going to carry [rice] for the KNU. Some soldiers, you can bribe but some people you can't bribe; they kill you. You have to pay 45,000 kyat outside [controlled] areas. Our area is close to a trading place. For Hsow Kee village tract, they have to pay 45,000 kyat or more, because they are far.

Do you still have other issues that you want to tell me?

Another issue is that, the areas which are not under the [Tatmadaw] control don't have good topsoil or subsoil because of the weather. People who live there have to face the most problems. They have to work hard for their livelihood. The area where we are close to is the worst. Even if you plant [anything], it doesn't grow. The soil is not good. So, people living in the area find bees and sell honey. Some people weave mats. They weave and they sell them. For some people, they do different things. Some people carry things and some people do plantation [work]. They do different things. If they get less income, they eat porridge, but it is very hard, especially in Hsee Daw Koh. Their life is poor.

The other problem is travelling. It is very difficult for them to go and buy food. The price is expensive if people go and sell things to them. The soil is not good in the area. Problems like insects destroying paddies or others plants occur.

I will ask you one thing. People in your area face many problems; in this case, do any families move to refugee camps in Thailand?

There are many people who went to refugee camps and third countries, in the areas like Khoh Kee, Kaw Thay Der area and Maw Nay Bwah and Kloh Hkee. These four areas had to face [that] problem since 2006, when LID #66 went to the area. It was the time when they planned to do an offensive in 2nd Brigade. They came and we couldn't do our work, so many had to go to refugee camps. Some people went and some people stayed. Some whole villages went. There are three army bases in some areas; you can't travel. Some villages move everybody to refugee camps. Some villages stayed close with the army camp and some far. They stay alert. Then, in 2006 - 2007, most of the villagers from Kloh Hkee area moved to refugee camps.

I want to know one thing. You still have four areas, and one is totally under the *Tatmadaw* control. How many villages were destroyed in the areas?

If I have to say honestly, all villages in Khaw Thoo Der area were destroyed. Especially Kaw Thay Der, Kler La, Kaw Hsow Koh, Wah Tho Koh and Ler Koh villages on the upper side of the vehicle road. Villagers in the upper side of the vehicle road can stay but especially, Kaw Thay Der, Kaw Hso Koh and Wah Tho Koh it is very difficult. Only Kler La villagers can stay stable in Kaw Thay Der area. All others were destroyed. Even if it [a village] was destroyed, some villagers went back and stayed, and some went to different places. From Kler La to Bu Hsa Kee, the road that the military government constructed was on Pleh Mu Der, Hsuh Kheh Der, Thay Khuh Hso and Bu Hsah Hkee. The road goes through the villages. Those were destroyed in 1995. Villagers spread everywhere, and later they went to refugee camps. Finally those villages totally disappeared. People who lived in Maw Nay Bwah area dare not go back and stay in their village. Only Pleh Hsa Loh villagers can stay in their village. All other villages were forced to move in 2006. They have to come back and stay in secret places.

Do you have anything that you want to say?

The other problem that they have to face is weather. Last year, the weather was so hot. When people do paddy field farming in the places where the soil is good, they must get 100 baskets (3,200 kg. / 7,040lb.), but they only got 40 baskets (1,280 kg. / 2,816 lb.) – a 60-basket (1,920 kg. / 4,224 lb.) decrease because of the weather. In the Per Htee area, they come and plant peanut. They come and plant it at the foot of the mountain. The [Tatmadaw] military operation is strong. The villagers were not allowed to come [to their plantations] or they aren't come because of the military operation. For example, the time when the peanut

[crops] are going to provide seeds, the villagers were not free to go and check their peanut plants or they dare not go to their peanut plants because of the operation, or many other reasons. As a result, the plantations were destroyed by pigs or other animals.

However, this kind of problem that they had to face in the past, is happening a little less now. In Maw Nay Bwah area, especially Klaw B'Der village, the villagers go and buy things from P'Leh Wah. There is an Army camp and sometime there is a military operation. They have to go and it takes three or four days. In the past, they went and the distance took just three hours; going was three hours and returning was three hours. They went in the morning and came back in the afternoon. [Now] they have to come back when there is a military operation. They have to go again, and if they meet the enemy again, they have to come back again. They sometimes have to carry 10 viss (16 kg. / 35.2 lb.) of betelnut three times back and forth. It depends on the operation situation.

Are there villagers who have to take a two or three days-long walk to go and sell things in other villages?

There will be some villagers. Some villagers, they will have to sleep on the way. Each area is different. [Villagers from] Maw Nay Bwah go and buy things from T'Pay Nyaw, and [villagers from] the upper areas go and buy things from 3rd District [Nyaunglebin]. All is far. They have to go and sleep one or two nights on the way. They went yesterday. They met with enemy [Tatmadaw] and they ran. They enemy shot at them but no one was hit.²¹

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

- "Photo Set: More than 100 households displaced from Toh Boh dam construction site in Toungoo,"(August 2012)
- "Tatmadaw soldiers fire at four villagers carrying rice, order forced labour in Toungoo District," (July 2012)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: Tantabin Township, January to March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: Received in November 2011," (April 2012)
- "Toungoo Interview: Saw E---, September 2011," (April 2012)
- "Toungoo Interview Transcript: Saw L---, December 2011," (April 2012)

²¹For information on another similar attack on villagers by the Tatmadaw, see "Tatmadaw soldiers fire at four villagers carrying rice, order forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG July 2012.

