



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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Hpa-an Situation Update: T’Nay Hsah Township, November to December 2012

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in December 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Hpa-an District, between November and December 2012. The report details the concerns of villagers in T’Nay Hsah Township, who have faced significant declines in their paddy harvest due to bug infestation. The community member also raises villagers’ concerns regarding the cutting down of teak-like trees by developers, for the establishment of rubber plantations. The report describes how this activity seriously threatens villagers’ livelihoods, and takes place via the cooperation of companies and wealthy individuals with the Burma government. The report goes on to detail demands placed upon villagers by the Border Guard Force (BGF) to contribute money to pay soldiers’ salaries. Though the community member reports that these demands are not as forcibly implemented as in the past, villagers still face threats if they do not comply. Many villagers in the area, however, have chosen not to pay the money requested of them by the BGF.

Situation Update | T’Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District (November to December 2012)

The following situation update was written by a community member in Hpa-an 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 Hpa-an District, including 16 interviews, one other situation update, 155 photographs.²

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 writing situation updates, community members 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 Hpa-an District can be found in the report, “Demands for soldier salaries in Hpa-an District, October 2012,” KHRG, February 2013.

Situation report

On November 30th 2012, I travelled through T'Nay Hsah Township area, Hpa-an District,³ and the ground situation that I saw will be described in the following.

[I] would like to write up the issue regarding paddies that were destroyed: on November 30th 2012, I went inside the country [Burma] and arrived at T--- village and E--- village; then, I saw that villagers have been grieving over the paddies that were destroyed by paddy bugs. When paddy flowers grew, bugs ate them; when paddy flowers re-grew for the second time, they [villagers] had just a few paddy grains. A flat field farm, which usually produces 300 baskets⁴ of paddy grain, can now produce only ten baskets of paddy grain. Based on interviews with villagers regarding paddies that were destroyed, this has badly impacted three village tracts, which are Htee Wah Blaw, Htee Kyah Rah and Meh Pleh. Paddy fields owners who I met and interviewed include a T--- villager named Naw S--- who got 160 baskets from her paddy field last year, but this year, she could get only three baskets of paddy grain. Saw K-- received 180 baskets of paddy grains from his paddy field last year, but this year, he could get only 12 baskets of paddy grains. An E--- villager, Saw N--, received 430 baskets of paddy grain from his paddy field last year, but he could get only 45 baskets of paddy grain from this year. A T--- villager, Naw M--, previously received 250 baskets from her paddy field but she could get only 37 baskets of paddy grain from this year, and numerous paddy field [owners] in this area still remain to be interviewed by me.

³ As of January 2013, KHRG began to use the common spelling for “Hpa-an” District to reflect the standardized transliteration developed in 2012; past KHRG reports used “Pa’an”.

⁴ A Basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg. or 46.08 lb. of paddy, and 32 kg. or 70.4 lb. of milled rice. A basket is twice the volume of a big tin.



The above photos were taken by a community member on December 1st 2012⁵, in E--- village, T’Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District. The villager pictured in the left photo is pointing to flat field farms that have been damaged by insects, and thus produce significantly less rice now than in the past. There are around 20 flat field farms that villagers report to have been affected by the paddy bugs. [KHRG: Photos]



The above photos were taken by a community member on December 3rd 2012⁶ in Noh Kay village tract, T’Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District. The photos depict farmers working together to harvest paddy from the flat field farms. The community member who took these photos reported that insects have affected the paddy flowers, which grow in all of the villagers’ flat field farms. [KHRG: Photos]

⁵ It should be noted that the date displayed on the photographs above of 30th November 2012 is an error; the correct date on which the photographs were taken is 1st December 2012 as stated in the photo caption. This discrepancy is likely to have occurred due to the date being set incorrectly on the camera that the community member used to take these photos.

⁶ It should be noted that the date displayed on the photographs above of 1st December 2012 is an error; the correct date on which the photographs were taken is 3rd December 2012 as stated in the photo caption. This discrepancy is likely to have occurred due to the camera that the community member used to take these photos being set to the wrong date.

Situation report

I am inclined to report about [the] cutting down [of] trees, bamboos and *t'la aw la* trees [a teak-like tree with large leaves, which fall in dry season and are collected by villagers for roofing thatch], which has caused the biggest negative impact to the place where villagers do livelihoods and find food [forage for vegetables and hunt wild animals].

On December 8th 2012, I stayed in A--- and Y--- villages and travelled through village-by-village; then, I heard that many villagers have been grieving because people have cut down *t'la aw la* trees, which are used for roofing thatch. As far as I saw when I went through villages, only ten percent of people use zinc roofing for their houses, that is why they want people to lend a hand to them in order to stop it [the cutting down of *t'la aw la* trees]. Some people make a living by collecting *t'la aw la* [leaves] and selling them. The price of one hundred sheets of thatch is 5,000 kyat (US \$5.82)⁷ to 7,000 kyat (US \$8.15), so, from my point of view, *t'la aw la* [leaves] have a huge benefit to villagers. I travelled around and saw villages and village tracts as well as wide *t'la aw* tree hills. People cut them down and replaced them [*t'la aw* trees] with agricultural plantations, which are full of rubber trees. Company workers are people who cut down *t'la aw* trees and have planted rubber trees because they cooperate with Burma government. The Burma government sold the land to the company. Rich people have built a relationship with leaders, and then leaders sold those hills [to them].

I would like to report the information about what I have witnessed and villagers reported the information to me, concerning Border Guard soldiers who have been recruiting soldiers in T--- and E--- villages, T'Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District.

On November 30th 2012, I met with two villagers from T--- and asked them about the recruitment issue; they voiced that E--- and T--- village heads went to Koh Ko [army camp] and the Border Guard ordered each of them to contribute money for soldiers who choose not to quit but continue serving in the military, even after they have completed military service. After that the village heads came back and started collecting money from villagers with three levels: 1,000 baht (US \$33.48) was collected from people who work and get enough food; 800 baht (US \$26.76) was collected from people who work and have not quite enough food; 500 baht (US \$16.74) is collected from people who are in the worst condition. They did not collect the money as before, instead village heads

⁷ As of February 21st 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 859 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.

wrote down people names on small pieces of paper. For instance, villagers gave me two pieces of paper, which I attached with this report's papers: "*Naw W---* pay 500 baht (US \$16.74); *Naw H---* pay 1,000 baht (US \$33.48)." Border Guard soldiers call the way they recruit soldiers a 'contribution'. I interviewed villagers from many villages and many village tracts, but most of them refuse to pay money. They [Border Guard soldiers] threatened villagers and village heads, that they would arrest people who did not pay anything to them. People [villagers] told them that it is peaceful,⁸ so we do not need to pay it to you anymore. Village heads, who get benefits from them [Border Guard soldiers], have the opportunity to do it [collect money from villagers] and they want to do it, but they do not dare carry it out. In addition, Border Guard soldiers worry that the news will spread out [of the local community], so they have carried it out, but they did not dare to accomplish it forcibly. This year, 2012, T--- and E--- villages have to support 13 soldiers and pieces of paper were distributed to them in September, but not everyone has paid it to them yet.

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

- "Demands for soldier salaries in Hpa-an District, October 2012," (February 2013)
- "Landmine death and injuries, old mines continue to make travel unsafe in Pa'an District," (December 2012)
- "Woman raped and killed in Pa'an District, October 2012," (December 2012)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: T' Nay Hsah Township, September 2011 to April 2012," (July 2012)
- "Villagers return home four months after DKBA and Border Guard clash, killing one civilian, injuring two in Pa'an," (June 2012)

⁸ Here, the community member is referring to the period following the January 2012 Preliminary Ceasefire agreement. For more information on the January 2012 ceasefire agreement see: "Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process," KHRG, November 2012.

