



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012**

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*This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Papun District, during the period between July 2012 to October 2012. It specifically discusses forced labour, torture, the activity of major armed groups in the Bu Tho Township area, including the KNLA, DKBA, Tatmadaw and BGF, as well as villagers' healthcare, education and livelihood problems. The report describes how BGF Battalion #1014, led by Commander Maw Hsee, continues to demand materials and forced labour from villagers in order to build army camps. The report also provides details about a 50-year-old L--- villager, named Maung P---, who was arrested and tortured by the Tatmadaw Military Operation Command Column #2, which is under Battalion #44 and commanded by Hay Tha and Aung Thu Ra, because he asked other villagers to deliver a letter that the Tatmadaw demanded he deliver. The report includes information about the different challenges villagers face in Burma government and non-government controlled areas, as well as the ways villagers access healthcare from the KNU or the Burma government. According to the community member, civilians continue to face problems with their livelihood, which are caused by BGF and DKBA activities, but are improving since the ceasefire; also described are problems faced by villagers caused by natural factors, such as unhealthy crops and flooding. In order to improve crop health, farmers are using traditional remedies, but the community member mentions that those remedies do not address the problems well. Moreover, this report mentions how villagers pursue alternative livelihoods during intervals between farming and to cope with food shortages, including logging and selling wood.*

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**Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (July to October 2012)**

*The following situation update was written by a community member in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This report was received*

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

along with other information from Papun District, including six incident reports, 14 interviews and 238 photographs.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Starting from July 2012 to October 2012, there are still human rights abuses in Bu Tho Township region. The human rights abuses, such as forced recruitment, demanding money, torture, demands (*loh ah pay*),<sup>3</sup> are still [in the region].

### Matter: *Loh ah pay*

Related with the *loh ah pay*, the Burma military [Tatmadaw] orders the Border Guard<sup>4</sup> that when they [Border Guard] go and live in a place, they have to set up their place [properly]. Therefore, they demanded the bamboo and thatch from the villagers, and they required two villagers to go and live with them each day, in order to have the villagers do things for them if needed. Now, in T--- village, the Border Guard Battalion #1014<sup>5</sup> comes and stays in the village, and they live in the villagers' houses. [They] also asked two villagers to go and live with them. The Battalion Commander of the Battalion #1014 is Maw Hsee<sup>6</sup>, and they are active in Meh Pree and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts.

## Torture

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<sup>2</sup> 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 2013. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the report, "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012," KHRG, April 2013.

<sup>3</sup> *Loh ah pay* is a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

<sup>4</sup> Border Guard battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalized ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into 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. For more information, see "DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force," Democratic Voice of Burma, August 2010.

<sup>5</sup> KHRG has reported on the abuses committed by Battalion # 1014, including a June 2012 attack on two elder villagers who were travelling to provide money to one of their daughters who was giving birth at the time. Both villagers were severely beaten, and one died at the site of the attack. See "Torture and killing in Thaton District," KHRG, October 2012. See also, "Situation Update: Pa'an Township, Thaton District, June to October 2011," KHRG, November 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Commander Maw Hsee's name is sometimes spelled "Maung Chit."

In L--- village, Day Wah village tract, Bu Tho Township, in 2012, the Burma military Battalion [Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)] #102, Column #2, Light Infantry Division (LID) #44,<sup>7</sup> which is commanded by Commander Hein Htet Lin, and led by Hay Tha and Aung Thura, whose position is Battalion Commander, arrested one L--- villager, a 50 year old Buddhist married man named Maung P---, who earns a living by farming. [They] asked [him] to send a letter, but because [other] people would go [to the destination], and as Maung P--- would not go, he asked other people to send the letter. Since the other people did not arrive there [at the destination], Commander Hein Htet Lin took action towards Maung P---, where he asked [his soldiers] to beat him; [they] hit both his head and face with guns, and [Maung P---] was nearly killed.

## Healthcare problem

In Bu Tho Township region, related with the situation of the healthcare problem during this time, there are fewer organizations that come in and help for healthcare problems in four village tracts, starting from Day Wah, Kyaw Pa, Meh Pree, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts. Starting from July to October, because of the plan of the KNU [Karen National Union] and the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], there were two medicine distributions during these four months; once was by the *[organization name censored for security]* and once by the branch of the health department [of KNU], but it is not sufficient. The civilians hope that in the future, these kinds of programs will increase more. In the past, when the KNU and the KNLA could not come in [to the region], [villagers] just relied on the Burma government side, and also needed to give money for the cost for [medicine]. If they did not pay, they could not get medicine to take for their disease. The three village tracts, which are Pa Heh, Hkaw Puh, Bgah Der village tracts, have clinics, so they are being treated for free as much as possible.

For the four village tracts, which are Meh Klaw, Meh Nyoo, Meh Hkoo, Meh Mgeh village tracts, because the KNU leaders arrange *[organization name censored for security]*, they always come and check [villagers] once every six months. If the disease is serious, some of them [villagers] rely on the Burmese government hospitals. For the ones who go to the Burmese government hospital, if the Burma government medic told them to go and buy medicine from outside [the hospital] for their disease, they have to pay the cost with their own money to buy the medicine. The medics give treatment for them, and before they [patients] go back home from the hospital, they have to offer small amounts

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<sup>7</sup> Although the community member wrote the unit numbers in this order, the Tatmadaw hierarchy is that Column #2 is a part of LIB #102, which is itself a part of LID #44.

of money. They were told to give as they want, but all [patients] have to pay between 5,000 kyat (US \$5.87)<sup>8</sup> [and] 10,000 kyat (US \$11.74).

## Education problem

In the Bu Tho Township region, there are different kinds of schools, which are private schools, [organization name censored for security] schools, religious schools, public schools and Burma government schools. The support for these individual schools comes from [different] sources, but for the Burma government school, it becomes difficult for the villagers because the villagers [students] have to buy their own notebooks, pens and sports [equipment]. Another thing is, for teaching the Karen language, we see that the Burma government mostly does not give permission. School attendance [of teachers] is also not regular. For the students, after they finished the school, fourth standard, from the area, and if they go to the other places such as K'Ma Moh, Papun or to K'Ter Tee, it costs a lot for each year like at least 400,000 (US \$454.03) or 500,000 (US \$567.54) per year.

## Land problem

Related to land confiscation, in previous years, the Burma government confiscated [the land] beside the road in Y--- town, U---, V---, and X---, W--- [villages]. Until now, the land owners cannot get their land back. In another region, one land problem is that the villagers rob land amongst each other in order to plant rubber plants, so that they can sell the sap and earn money. For this case, the ones who are rich mostly prevail, so that it becomes problems for the people who do flat field farming and hill farming, as they do not have any place for farming. Currently, for the companies coming in, no group [company] has come in yet, because some of the villagers do not like it and the KNU and the KNLA also do not allow them.

## Civilians' situation

In Bu Tho Township, there are two types of civilians. One is the people who are not under control of the Burma government or the Border Guard, and the second one is [people who are] under the control of the Burma government or the Border Guard, or also of the KNLA. These two groups have to suffer different kinds of rights abuses, but they might also face the same [type of abuse].

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<sup>8</sup> As of March 22<sup>nd</sup> 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.

The civilians who are under Burma military control have to suffer, because when the soldiers are active, they have to porter or show them routes. Additionally, if [the military] has to encounter [censored for security] KNLA's activity, and if there is a fighting, the village heads or the villagers have to suffer if the Burmese military demands something, or does something to them.

For the villagers who are not under Burma military control, if they hear that the Burma Military is heading towards their village, they have to flee to a very far place because, if the Burmese military catches them, they hurt them and [villagers] have to porter for them. If there is fighting, and if they cannot escape, they will be killed; they have to face these kinds of abuses. Currently, as the leaders made the ceasefire<sup>9</sup> like this, these forms of work [abuse] have decreased a little.

## **Military situation**

In Bu Tho Township region, regarding the current military situation, there are (1) the KNLA and (2) the Burma government military [Tatmadaw].

For the KNLA, it is active according to [how] the KNU leads it. It travels around to the civilians and they try their best, in order to protect the civilians so that the civilians do not face human rights violations. The KNLA uses their power and tries their best to protect themselves and also the civilians so that any military troops, which are coming in [the area], cannot act against the civilians.

For [villagers] under the Burma government military control, there are two military groups, which are the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army] and the Border Guard; their activities are not the same. For the DKBA, they [Tatmadaw] do not give the salary openly but they suggested a way [earning money]. If we look at them, [the DKBA], the Burmese government controls them like puppets. For the Border Guard, they [Tatmadaw] give salaries. Because they [Border Guard] receive salaries, they were asked to be active when they [Tatmadaw give] orders, and they were given duties to guard and check the country's border road.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the 2012 ceasefire between the KNU and the Government of the Union of Myanmar, see the following KHRG publications: "Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process," KHRG, November 2012; and "Safeguarding human rights in a post-ceasefire eastern Burma," KHRG, January 2012.

Presently, in the four village tracts, from the southern part of the Bu Tho Township region, which are Day Wah, Kyaw Pah, Meh Pree, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts, the military which is active and violates the human rights abuses the most, is clearly the Border Guard, which is used by the Burma government military. The Border Guard [battalions] active in the region are Battalion #1013 and Battalion #1014. This military is active and also sets up their gates [check points] in order to collect taxes. When the Border Guard is active, three of the Burma government soldiers are included among them in one company; it seems like a soldier from a [communications] signal unit is also included.

## **Livelihood**

For livelihoods in this region, most of the people earn their living by farming in flat field farms and hill farm cultivation areas, and some are working on plantations according to the season. In previous years, for the civilians' livelihoods, the Burma government military and the Border Guard disturbed the civilians' travelling and also their livelihood. There are changes for these situations starting from [the beginning of] 2012 until now, as the KNLA enters and is active [in] some [parts]. The KNLA limited the area in the places where the Border Guard was active, so it cause difficulties for them [the Border Guard], but it has become a little bit easier for the civilians to travel and do their livelihood. At the same time, as the KNU leaders had a meeting and [ceasefire] discussion, each military group has to follow the orders of each of their leaders.

Presently, difficulties for the livelihood which occur most are caused by the natural environment. It is not going well and the paddy dies because insects eat them, [paddy fruit] ripens imperfectly, rats eat them, and [they] become withered. Sometimes, because of unpredictable flooding, the flooding destroys the paddy fields. Because the paddy is being destroyed, the villagers cannot find any pesticides. For some people, they use [pesticides] the way that their ancestors used to use, but it is also not concerned [address the problems].

For livelihood, when there is an interval between farming, [people] cut and sell bamboo; they use cows to pull bamboo to earn money to use for their family when there is not enough food. When there is a food [shortage] problem, for some people, they work to send the woods from the top of the mountain to a place for selling wood at the base of the mountain, when people hire them. These forms of work are not permanent jobs; they are just for one time.

## **Conclusion**

The information that I have written above is the things that certainly happened, and I have known [the situation] when I collected the information, as some of the villagers mentioned in the interviews. Moreover, the villagers have to face and suffer by themselves.

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

- "Incident Report: Violent abuse in Papun District, October 2012," (April 2013)
- "Incident Report: Forced Labour in Papun District #2, February 2012," (April 2013)
- "Incident Report: Forced Labour in Papun District #1, February 2012," (March 2013)
- "Incident Report: Looting in Papun District #2, May 2012," (March 2013)
- "Incident Report: Looting in Papun District #1, May 2012," (March 2013)

