



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, August to September 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 Bu Tho Township, Papun District, in the period between August and September 2012. The community member reports the use of villagers for forced labour by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013; from August 5<sup>th</sup> to September 28<sup>th</sup> 2012, the Battalion regularly ordered villagers to act as messengers and carry out work in Th'Ree Hta army camp; villagers were also forced to carry ammunitions and food for the soldiers without payment and to cut down bamboo canes. The community member goes on to describe BGF Battalion #1014 Commander Saw Maung Chit's failed attempt to recruit soldiers voluntarily in Meh Pree village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, leading him to demand a total of 33 million kyat (US \$37,437) from the two village tracts. Further, the report describes the arbitrary arrest, two-day detention and torture of S--- villager, Saw H---, by BGF Battalion #1014 Officer Saw Way Luh. This torture of Saw H--- left him with serious injuries; Officer Saw Way Luh is reported to have explained his torture of Saw H--- by claiming that the villager was a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) spy. Villagers' difficulties regarding health care, food shortages and education are also described in this report.*

## Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (August to September 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 along with other information from Papun District, including six incident reports.<sup>2</sup>*

### Various human rights abuses took place from August 18<sup>th</sup> 2012 to September 12<sup>th</sup> 2012<sup>3</sup>

I would like to report the problems that are human rights abuses, which have taken place in Meh Pree village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract. The problems happened from August 18<sup>th</sup> 2012 to September 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 in Meh Pree village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. L--- village and Y--- village are situated in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract. K--- village, B--- village, D--- village and T--- village are situated in Meh Pree village tract.

The actors that caused the human rights abuses are Border Guard Force soldiers from Battalion #1013 and 1014. This is the reason why they caused problems: the numbers of Border Guard Force soldiers decreased due to Border Guard Force soldiers retiring from their responsibility [of being soldiers]; therefore, Border Guard officers have recruited more soldiers. If they do not [try to] do this, the Border Guard army cannot survive in the future, so villagers' rights have been abused because of the need to recruit more soldiers.

We voiced that Border Guard Force soldiers have committed human rights abuses, but Border Guard Force soldiers themselves do not even understand whether they have committed human rights abuses or not. As a result, Border Guard soldiers commit human rights abuses regularly. If we need to point out the human rights abuses that

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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.

<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, July to October 2012," KHRG, April 2013.

<sup>3</sup> While the community member wrote that the abuses documented in this report occurred between August 18<sup>th</sup> and September 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, the incidents described in this report actually span August 5<sup>th</sup> to September 28<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Border Guard Force soldiers have caused to villagers in detail, we can point out the abuses that have been caused by Border Guard Battalion #1013 and #1014.

The abuses that have been committed by Border Guard Battalion #1013 and #1014 are: forced labour, demanding money from villagers and torturing villagers.<sup>4</sup> We can provide the details of human rights abuses and dates. Before we report on the Border Guard committing human rights abuses, we firstly would like to report on the condition of local villagers.

As we have mentioned above, most of the villagers from Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract believe in Buddha; [they are] Buddhist. People who believe in other religions are Christians and a few Muslims live there as well. The religious conflict has never happened, even though many religions are practiced. They live there well, but the health condition is terrible for them, for the reason that they do not have any clinics for health care and do not have any medics.

As for education, there is a low rate of literacy due to the Nay Pyi Taw government not having established any schools. The mother organization [Karen National Union (KNU)] has set up schools, which have received some support from the Karen Education Department [KED], but no Government organizations have provided any support to schools. In this area, it is not true that there are no schools for children to access education. Children do have some schools for their studies. The level of schooling is: villagers managed to set up primary schools that go up to fourth standard.

After children graduate from fourth standard in their village, they try to go to the Nay Pyi Taw government schools for further study, but Nay Pyi Taw government schools do not accept them. They can also go to KED schools and KED school teachers accept them.

As far as we know, they [villagers] have encountered bad health care and low education. In that area, concerning the transport links with other places, they just have a footpath to travel on foot, back and forth to K'Ma Moh town and K'Ter Tee village. There are no wide car roads or railways, plus economic development has not taken place yet.

Most of the people in this area are Karen people, so most of them farm flat field farms, hill field farms and plantations. As for farming flat field farms, the rain came too much;

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<sup>4</sup> Though the community member suggests that both BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014 have been involved in the torture of villagers, the incident of torture described in this report involves BGF Battalion #1014 only. In another recent KHRG report, BGF Battalion #1014 were also implicated in the violent abuse of a villager, described in the following report: "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, September to December 2012," KHRG, March 2013.

water flooded the farms; and stones and sand covered farms and riverbanks, which caused river erosion and the loss of paddy grain. Regarding hill field farms, paddies were destroyed due to abnormal [amounts of] rain, causing the [supply of] food [rice] not to match with numbers of people. As a result, this has become a very big challenge for villagers.

Villagers have encountered many problems. Some problems can usually be solved. This is the only problem that villagers cannot solve; Border Guard Battalion #1013 and #1014 cause human rights abuses. [I] first would like to report that Saw Maung Soh is under the control of Battalion #1013 Battalion Commander Saw Hla Kyaing and he has committed the human rights abuse that is the use of forced labour.

This problem is [caused by] Saw Maung Soh and his soldiers under the control of Battalion #1013 Battalion Commander; their base at Th'Ree Hta base camp is situated in Meh Pree village tract. While they have been based there, they have ordered one villager to send a message to Th'Ree Hta base camp per day. Also, one villager per day [on rotation] was made to stay with Border Guard #1013 soldiers and had to work for the soldiers: cooking rice and curry for soldiers; carrying water for soldiers; cutting fire wood and finding vegetables for soldiers. In addition, [the villager] had to follow the soldiers; carry their ammunitions in baskets; and carry food in baskets while soldiers were patrolling. Each time, at least one person had stay with Border Guard soldiers each day. It took two or three days when they patrolled each time. [Villagers] had to carry things for them without payment, even though it took so long. As far as we know, Border Guard Officer Saw Maung Soh started ordering villagers to do forced labour from August 5<sup>th</sup> 2012 to September 28<sup>th</sup> 2012. This abuse was committed by Border Guard Officer Saw Maung Soh.

Border Guard soldiers have caused many human rights abuses to villagers. I would like to report that amongst villagers, Border Guard Battalion #1014 have been carrying out their plan. Many soldiers from Border Guard Battalion #1014 troop retired, so numerous soldiers were lost. Therefore, Border Guard Battalion #1014 Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit tried to recruit more soldiers from villagers without payment [of the hiring fee usually paid to new soldiers].

Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit tried to recruit more soldiers without payment, that was why nobody wanted to serve as Border Guard soldiers voluntarily and he did not get any new soldiers. If Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit has no more soldiers, his troop cannot survive, so he needs to hire as many soldiers as he can. We

know that he has to hire more soldiers, so he demanded money from villagers forcibly as he does not have enough money [for hiring fee].

As far as we know, [from the] detailed information regarding Border Guard Battalion #1014 making demands from villagers forcibly, this difficult incident has taken place since September 12<sup>th</sup> 2012. The incident happened like this: as Border Guard Battalion #1014 Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit did not have enough money to hire more soldiers, he released an order letter and spread it out among villagers. This letter is about demanding money from villagers forcibly.<sup>5</sup> Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit demanded: two million kyat (US \$2,266)<sup>6</sup> from K--- village; one million kyat (US \$1,133) from B--- village; three million kyat (US \$3,400) from P--- village and 12 million kyat (US \$13,597) from T--- village by using this letter. Those villages above are located in Meh Pree village tract.

We knew that in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, G--- village was demanded to pay 15 million kyat (US \$16,997). Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit has to spend 15 million kyat (US \$16,997) for a new soldier. Demanding money from villagers has been happening since September 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Border Guard soldiers did not commit only this abuse [demanding money forcibly], but also committed torture of villagers. Before [I] report this abuse, I first would like to report about the reason why they came and based [themselves] at the military base camp that is located in M--- village. Border Guard Battalion #1014 Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit and his soldiers plan to control the area from Hkaw Taw (Myaing Gyi Ngu) to Thu Mweh Hta, hence they had started moving from Myaing Gyi Ngu to M--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township. When they had arrived at M--- village, they ordered villagers to do forced labour. [They] paid 70 kyat (US \$0.08) for each bamboo cane [cut]. While they were ordering villagers to do things [cut down bamboo canes], they knew that they would order people to do things and it [the ordering of villagers to cut bamboo canes] turned into forced labour, as they did not ask any questions [about] whether workers were free and wanted to do it or not.

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<sup>5</sup> Demands for soldier salaries involving different BGF Battalions, #1016, 1018 and 1019, have also been reported in Hpa-an District, details of which can be found in the report "Demands for soldier salaries in Hpa-an District," KHRG, October 2012.

<sup>6</sup> As of March 25<sup>th</sup> 2013 all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 882 kyat to the US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012 to initiate a managed float of the kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1.

When they started making their base on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2012, Officer Saw Hpa Mee's troop, which is under the control of mother organization [Karen National Union], and Border Guard Battalion #1014 Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit's troop, attacked each other. A number of Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit's soldiers got injuries and died during the attack, which was why Saw Maung Chit's troop really got angry with Saw Hpa Mee. Officer Saw Way Luh and his soldiers are under the control of Saw Maung Chit and they looked for Saw Hpa Mee in order to attack him.

Saw Hpa Mee could not be found [anywhere]. Saw Way Luh and his soldiers reached S--- village and they could not find Saw Hpa Mee. When Officer Saw Way Luh arrived in Meh Hseh Seh village, he met with S--- villager, Saw H---, and he arrested and tied up Saw H--- right away before talking to him. [Officer Saw Way Luh of Border Guard Battalion #1014 and his soldiers] tied him [villager Saw H---] up under the trees, punched him, beat him and led Saw H--- to the forest. Two days after, Saw H--- was released at S--- village.

Saw H--- does not know what mistake he has made. He sincerely does not know any mistake that he has made against the Border Guard nor the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]. Saw H--- was tortured for no reason. One or two days after he was released, he heard Saw Way Luh say, "Saw H--- is a KNLA spy, so we tortured him"; this is what he said. Saw H--- did not know anything and he actually did not do anything.

When Saw Way Luh released Saw H--- after he had punched him, beat him and tortured him, Saw Way Luh did not look after his injuries. The human rights abuses will be ongoing in the future. We can say that because Border Guard soldiers cause the human rights abuses to villagers. They do not understand what villagers' rights are and abuses against the rights of villagers, so they will keep causing human rights abuses to villagers in the days coming. To be able to stop the human rights abuses, [we] need to conduct better human rights training for villagers who live in the area [Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract and Meh Pree village tract area]. We would like to conduct human rights training to Border Guard soldiers if Border Guard soldiers accept to join it.

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

- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012," (April 2013)
- "Incident Report: Violent abuse in Papun District, October 2012," (April 2012)
- "Incident Report: Forced Labour in Papun District #2, February 2012," (April 2012)

- “Incident Report: Forced Labour in Papun District #1, May 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)

