



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## **Papun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, Papun District, March 2012 to November 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 Lu Thaw Township, Papun District during the period between July 2012 and November 2012. It describes how the Tatmadaw continues to resupply and repair military infrastructure despite ongoing ceasefire talks with the KNU, as well as make new preparations for gold extraction projects. The Tatmadaw also tried to build relations with civilians by providing free food placed beside vehicle roads, but fears of poisoned food and mistrust prevented the civilians from accepting the food. On March 19<sup>th</sup> 2012, soldiers from the Tatmadaw LID #66 killed two villagers, 30 year-old Saw K--- and 19 year-old Saw E---, and injured one, 28 year-old Saw N---, when they crossed a road in K'Kyay Hta; the Tatmadaw took the 160,000 kyat that the victims were carrying. The civilians in the internally displaced persons areas still do not dare to show themselves to the Tatmadaw, and continue to monitor troop movement along vehicle roads. The situation update also discusses villagers' concerns regarding the ceasefire, describing how civilians want peace so that they can return to work on their land. Currently, heavy rains in 2011 and crop maladies have caused food security problems for many communities. In response, communities support one another with food transportation and use of traditional medicine cooperatives, which are still developing local involvement and action plans.*

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### **Situation Update | Lu Thaw Township, Papun District (March to November 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 32 incident reports, 33 interviews, one other situation update, 274 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

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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 2012. In the meantime,

## Introduction

The situation report for northern Lu Thaw Township is from July to November. There are five village tracts in northern Lu Thaw Township and there are two SPDC [Tatmadaw]<sup>3</sup> vehicle roads. The situation of the civilians and SPDC are as attached.

## SPDC [Tatmadaw] army activities

This year, 2012, there are 11 places where the SPDC is based. The places where they base are:

- Hkay Poo village tract: T'Ler Hkoh, Hsa Law Daw Hkoh, Khaw Daw Hkoh and Htee Htaw Per [villages]; these places are between the boundary of Hkay Poo village tract and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade [Toungoo District];
- Ler Muh Plaw village tract: Htaw Muh Pleh Meh [village];
- Saw Muh Plaw village tract: Wa Klay Too and Hpah Ghaw Loh [villages];
- Hpla Hkoh village tract: Hpla Hkoh, Kuh Hkoh and Hpga Ghaw [villages];
- Kaw Loo Der village tract: Plaw Ka Muh Loo, Ler Say and T'Khaw Hta [villages]; and
- Hkay Poo village tract: T'Ler Ker Hkoh, Hsa Law Daw Hkoh and Khaw Daw Hkoh [villages].

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KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the report, "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June 2012," KHRG, October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> In 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 (SLORC) 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 4-10<sup>th</sup> 2011. The term Na Ah Pa was used by the community member who wrote this Situation Update and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this Situation Update.



The above photos were taken on September 7<sup>th</sup> 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG, and show the Tatmadaw Hsa Law Daw Hkoh army camp, which is located in western Hkee Tee Hkee village, in Hkay Poo village tract, Papun District. In the top two photos a hut with a white zinc roof can be seen in a compound with other buildings. According to the community member, Tatmadaw soldiers placed a wheel-operated walkie-talkie inside this hut, which is equipment that is described to be as large as a desktop computer, as well as bulldozers and other equipment. In this camp, soldiers repaired their garden with a double bamboo fence and a barbed-wire fence. They also repaired the bunkers in order to protect against heavy weapon fire, in the event the camp is shelled. More broadly, the photo on the top left shows the whole of Khaw Daw Hkoh mountain where the camp is situated. The photo on the bottom left was taken on October 2012, and is of a helicopter landing field in the Hsa Law Daw Hkoh camp. The photo on the bottom right shows the other side of the Hsa Law Kyoh camp.

In this year, 2012, the SPDC army, which is based in the places shown above, has sent more rations and they have repaired their army camp. They also repaired the bridges that cross the rivers, such as Hploh Loh and K'Hploh Loh rivers. The bridges that they have repaired are only for travelling and transporting rations, but people can travel on both levels.



The photo on the left was taken by a community member trained by KHRG on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, and shows a bridge constructed by Tatmadaw soldiers across the K'Hploh Loh river in the Ta Hkeh Der area, Hkay Poo village tract. The photo on the right is of the K'Hploh Hta Bridge, which is located on the Pgoh Loh River. Both bridges were built by the Tatmadaw and used for travelling and transporting rations, but civilians are able to use both levels of the two-story bridges. [Photos: KHRG]

Their other activity is, they place food beside the vehicle road where the villagers travel in order to build up relationships with the civilians. The food that they leave includes: milk, sugar, rice, pea, tinned fish and beef. They persuade the villagers to take it, but the villagers are not interested in that, because the villagers are worried that it is a trick and [full of] poison. They put the food in four places along Ler Muh Plaw vehicle road; one place in Saw Muh Plaw, one place in Ler Muh Plaw and two places in Hkay Poo. Sometimes, they also put [the food] on the Saw Hta vehicle road.

Despite [the fact that] there is the ceasefire talk and peace talk,<sup>4</sup> there are killings and torture. They [Tatmadaw]<sup>5</sup> killed two people in Hkay Poo village tract. The first one is [a member of the] home guard;<sup>6</sup> [the perpetrator was] SPDC based in Hsa Law Daw Hkoh

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<sup>4</sup> The ceasefire agreement signed between the KNU and RUM officials on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 in Hpa-an Town, was an agreement in principle on '11 key points', to be followed by more in-depth talks after 45 days. Senior KNU officials had since announced that the deadline of 45 days was unlikely to be met; see: "KNU ceasefire meeting with government behind schedule," Karen News, February 23rd 2012. Meanwhile, as-yet-unpublished KHRG information received on February 19th 2012, suggests that there have been clashes between government forces and non-state armed groups in Hpa-an District in February 2012 and that recent re-supply operations carried out by Tatmadaw forces in Nyaunglebin District exceeded the amount of supplies usually sent, and included heavy artillery. Local media sources have also reported ongoing fighting in Hpa-an and Nyaunglebin Districts since January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012; see: "Killings and attacks between DKBA and BGF drives villagers from their homes," Karen News, February 24th 2012; "Ceasefires, Continued Attacks and a Friendly Encounter Between Enemies," Free Burma Rangers, February 3rd 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The Tatmadaw is the Burma state military.

<sup>6</sup> 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organized locally in parts of northern Karen State threatened by Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians, and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that *gher der* were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable. For more on the *gher der* see: *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.88-95.

and the column is LID [Light Infantry Division] #66. The home guard [member's] name is Saw K---, he was 30 years old. The other victim's name is Saw H---; he was 19 years old. They were killed in K'Kyay Hta on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, at 10:00 am. [The Tatmadaw] also took their money 160,000 kyat (US \$187.79).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, they also shot and injured Saw N---, who is 28 years old and lives in Y--- village, while they were walking together to cross the Burmese vehicle road, but [they were shot] before they crossed the vehicle road. This is when the other home guard [members] went to see the situation and found their corpses.<sup>8</sup>



These two photos were taken on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG. The photo on the left shows Saw H---, a villager from Y--- village who was 19 years old when the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Division (LID) #66 shot and killed him on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, in the K'Kyay Hta area. After killing him, the soldiers took the 160,000 kyat he carried and, as can be seen in the photo, removed one of his legs. The photo on the right shows Saw N---, a villager from Y--- village who was 28 when LID #66 shot him in his hip and his waist on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2012 as he travelled with Saw H--- in K'Kyay Hta. The local home guard found Saw H--- at the site of the shooting on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2012. [Photos: KHRG]

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 2012, they [Tatmadaw] also shot three shells from heavy weapons in to the Ta Hkeh Der area. The home guard gave us the news, that now they [Tatmadaw] also sent heavy weapons to Hsa Law Daw Hkoh. On October 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, their [Tatmadaw] two bulldozers came up in order to repair the road. They started [repairs] from Brigade 2 [Toungoo District], then they entered Hkay Poo village tract to Ler Muh Plaw village tract. We received the radio messages from the [identity censored for security] village tract secretary that the SPDC, which is based in Htaw Muh Pleh Meh, were ordered to send rations.

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<sup>7</sup> As of November 28<sup>th</sup> 2012, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 852 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.

<sup>8</sup> During March and April 2012, the KHRG office field Director visited the area separately from the community member who wrote this report. During that visit, it was reported to KHRG that the home guard members had discovered Saw K--- and Saw H--- on March 9<sup>th</sup>, but were unable to access their bodies until March 16<sup>th</sup>, because Tatmadaw soldiers remained in the area where the shooting occurred.

Currently, the SPDC army sends their equipment, such as wheelbarrows, gold pans and machines in order to pan gold. People saw that this equipment arrived in the Khaw Daw Hkoh area. They also cleared their airport [a helicopter landing field]. There are two bulldozers, which are always hidden in Khaw Daw Hkoh. If they need them for work, they take them out. We got this information accurately from the home guard and villagers; they are alert while they cross the vehicle road. Their purpose of sending the equipment is to pan gold in the Hkay Poo village tract area.

## **Civilians' situation**

There are two SPDC vehicle roads in Northern Lu Thaw Township. One vehicle road goes from Hpga Ghaw to Saw Hta, and another vehicle road goes from Hpga Ghaw to Hkay Poo and also arrives in Brigade 2 areas. There are six village tracts, which are Hpla Hkoh village tract, Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Naw Yoh Hta village tract and Hkay Poo village tract. But, until now, these civilians dare not meet with the SPDC army. The SPDC also does not persuade them to live under their control. Even though they [civilians] have to deal with food, shelter, livelihood and health problems, they have a strong mind for their people. They never say give up or cooperate with the SPDC. The biggest thing that they usually say is that they want peace, in order to be able to go back and work in their own village. When there is no peace, they want walkie-talkies<sup>9</sup> in order to communicate with each other and to be able to avoid the SPDC army.

## **Civilians' livelihood**

This year, 2012, the biggest thing that the civilians in Northern Lu Thaw Township have to deal with is food problems. Because there was a lot of rain in 2011, they could not burn their hill farms. The water also flooded and damaged many flat farms. People also were caught in the current and died, because they were not careful; it was [usually] a small stream, but because there was extreme rain and also it was night time [when their homes flooded]. In 2012, the civilians have to find the way by their knowledge in order to get food. Some trade [goods], some people who have pigs or chickens sell them, then [use] the money they get to buy rice. Some people hire themselves out by carrying other people's things, and buy rice with the profit they get. They have to go to buy rice in Muh Theh, Wah Hkee, Moh Hkee and TKhaw Hta [villages]; it takes three days to go and come back. In these places, some Burmese soldiers are based in some areas, but in some areas they are not based. But among the villagers, they do it [care for one another]

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<sup>9</sup> Not only the soldier use walkie-talkies but also the villagers use walkie-talkies to contact one another in order to be able to avoid the Tatmadaw.

by understanding each other; day by day, there are approximately 100 people who go to carry rice. One big tin of rice costs 10,000 kyat (US \$11.74). Some village tracts, like Hkay Poo, the whole village tract may not access the support; it is only one out of three who can access rice support for one month. Some village tracts do not have access to support, and there is also no income. In this year, 2012, the paddy insects, such as *ta wah kee baw meh* [insect that eats paddy] and mice have increased [and destroy paddy], in some village tracts.

### **Lu Thaw Hpaw Day *thay ghee wa seh*<sup>10</sup> group**

This group was founded two years ago, and they have treated more than 100 patients. There are 24 members, including females and males, and there are nine committees [33 total members]. There are ten kinds of medicine [that they make], which cure diseases. The medicine is cooked and made in the Hkay Poo village tract area. The medicine that cures diseases are: two types of malaria medicine, [medicine for when] hands and feet get cold [poor circulation to extremities], and a carminative [for digestive gas]. They still need colouring agents, including black, white, green [to give medicine capsules their colour]; plastic bottles which are the same size as a medicine tin, which can fit 100 tablets of medicine, to be filled with medicine; and also support from the leaders and parents. This is one thing that supports people in the area with income. Moreover, it becomes a big advantage for the [community] health in the area. But there is no plan from the authorities for the volunteers to do farms [to cultivate medicinal plants] and they also need suggestions and guidance. One of the *thay ghee wa seh* committee reports that they need more suggestions from the parents and leaders in order to develop *thay ghee wa seh* work.



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<sup>10</sup> *Thay ghee wa seh* is a Karen phrase that directly means “tree and bamboo roots,” but in this situation update *thay ghee wa seh* means traditional medicine.



These photos were taken in October 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG. They show Lu Thaw Hpaw Day *thay ghee wa seh*, which is a traditional medicine group that makes ten types of medicine in Ta Yuh Per Hkoh T'Bee Hta place. This group has 24 men and women as general members, and has nine committee members. They make their medicine in Hkay Poo village tract, and need leaders and teachers to provide suggestions and guidance for them to assist with making their work run smoothly to benefit local people. One committee member told the community member trained by KHRG, that the organization specifically needs more colouring agents to give medicine capsules their colour, which helps with identification, and also containers that can fit 100 tablets, in order to distribute the medicine. [Photos: KHRG]

## Conclusion

The situation report of Northern Lu Thaw Township is from July to the end of November. The report includes the SPDC army activities, civilians' situations, their livelihood and also about Lu Thaw Hpaw Day's *thay ghee wa seh* group.

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

- "Papun Situation Update: Dwe Loh Township, July to October 2012," (November 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June 2012," (October 2012)
- "Villager shot and killed in Papun District," (September 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update Dwe Lo Township, February to June 2012," (September 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Northern Lu Thaw Township, March to June 2012," (September 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw E---, June 2012," (July 2012)

