



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyone Doh Township, July to November 2012**

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*This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in December 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Dooplaya District, between July and November 2012. The report describes problems relating to land confiscation and contains updated information regarding the sale of forest reserve for rubber plantations involving the BGF, with individuals who profited from the sale listed. Villagers in the area rely heavily upon the forest reserve for their livelihoods and are faced with a shortage of land for their animals to graze upon; further, villagers cows have been killed if they have continued to let them graze in the area. The community member explains that although fighting has ceased since the ceasefire agreement, otherwise the situation is the same; taxation demands and loss of livelihoods has resulted in villagers being forced to take odd jobs for daily wages, while some have left for foreign countries in search of work. Villagers have some access to healthcare and education supported by the Government, the KNU and local organizations.*

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**Situation Update | Kyone Doh Township, Dooplaya District (July to November 2012)**

*The following situation update was written by a community member in Dooplaya 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 Dooplaya District, including one interview and two 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, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Dooplaya District can be found in the report, "Shooting in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2012.

I am reporting a summary of the civilians' situation from where I went, the campaign area<sup>3</sup> in Kyone Doh [Kruh Tu] Township. [Groups in the area include] Thein Sein Government,<sup>4</sup> the BGF [Border Guard Force],<sup>5</sup> DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army],<sup>6</sup> KPF [Karen Peace Force]<sup>7</sup> and KPC [Karen Peace Council]<sup>8</sup>. [The information in this report includes] how these groups abused politics, campaigns, healthcare, education and human rights from July 2012 to November 2012, as much as I know.

## **The Government and the BGF**

The battalion that is led by Battalion Commander Saw Pa Loo and the Battalion Deputy Commander Man Win Yaw from BGF Battalion #1012 is under the Thein Sein Government<sup>9</sup> from the campaign area of Kyone Doh Township. [Soldiers from] the battalion built a battalion

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<sup>3</sup> In this case, the 'campaign area' that the community member refers to is an area that, after the ceasefire agreement has been under the mixed influence of several different armed groups, including the Border Guard Force, KNLA and the Tatmadaw. It is referred to as a campaign area because the KNU has campaigned in the area to gain the support of villagers.

<sup>4</sup> The community member who wrote this report used the phrase Thein Sein Government and is likely to be referring to both the Tatmadaw government military and government officials.

<sup>5</sup> Border Guard Force 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. BGF 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, and, "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

<sup>6</sup> The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. The DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" in April 2012 to reflect its secularity.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Peace Force, which was formed in February 1997 after splitting from the KNU/KNLA, by surrendering to and signing a ceasefire with the Burmese military government. The KPF controls some administrative areas in Three Pagodas Pass and operates a number of road and river checkpoints in the area of Three Pagodas Pass. Following repeated rejections of Burmese government proposals to reform KPF into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, substantial elements have since reformed in the Tatmadaw Border Guard in 2010 while others remain independent. See Mizzima Election 2010 Factsheet: KPF.

<sup>8</sup> The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Gkaw Ko, Pa'an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2007 and subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform its forces into the Tatmadaw Border Guard; see: "KNU/KNLA Peace Council," Mizzima News, June 7th2010 and "KPC to be outlawed if it rejects BGF," Burma News International, August 30th2010.

<sup>9</sup> The villager who wrote this report used the phrase 'Thein Sein government' to refer to the current nominally-civilian government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (RUM) that came to power on March 31st 2011; see "The New Light of Myanmar: President U Thein Sein delivers inaugural address to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw," BurmaNet News, March 31st 2011.

main camp and are active in the Dali Forest Reserve, No Lon. Some of the buildings [for the army camp] have already been built and the rest of the buildings are still being built.

Some of the subordinate officers of the [BGF] military cooperated with a rich man from the town, divided up the land from the forest reserve and sold it to that rich man. One resident said that 100 acres of land was sold for 270,000 kyat<sup>10</sup> (US \$304) per acre in October 2012, by the BGF soldiers and some villagers: (1) Saw L---; (2) Saw M--- (3) Saw N---; (4) U P---; (5) Maung Q---; (6) Saw R---; (7) Saw S---; (8) Maung T---; (9) Maung U---; and (10) U W---. [It was sold to] a rich man, U X---, who lives in B--- village, Kyeik Ma Yaw Township, who bought [the forest reserve] for 270,000,000 kyat (US \$303,202). [Some of the money from the sale of this land was then distributed to six individuals named below]. We are not sure whether the money that they received was a bribe [paid in return for the sale of the forest reserve] or if they demanded the money. An anonymous villager reported that:

- (1) Lieutenant Htay Naing from the BGF got 5,000,000 [kyat] (US \$5,628)
- (2) Lieutenant Kyaw Aye from the BGF got 1,000,000 [kyat] (US \$1,126)
- (3) Battalion Deputy Commander Man Win Yaw from the BGF got 200,000 [kyat] (US \$225)
- (4) Lieutenant Chee Peik from the DKBA got 300,000 [kyat] (US \$338)
- (5) Maung Ne Pu from the forest administrative group from Kyone Doh Township got 300,000 [kyat] (US \$338)
- (6) Lieutenant Ye Nywun from Kyone Doh Township KNDO [Karen National Defense Organization]<sup>11</sup> got 200,000 [kyat] (US \$225)

Because these actions [the sale of forest reserve] are increasing, the civilians face many difficulties [in finding] wood, bamboo poles, thatches, land, firewood, and pasture land for buffalos and cows. Moreover, the one who bought the land and planted a rubber plantation and

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<sup>10</sup> As of April 29<sup>th</sup> 2013, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the [official market rate](#) of 888 kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>11</sup> The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) is the former name of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNDO is a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

the ones who take care of the plantation are from the town, not from the village, so they face some problems with the residents who live in the village.

### **KPF and KPC**

This group does not have any special activities. Some of them get involved in Dali Forest Reserve land trading.

### **DKBA**

In my area, Company Commander Lieutenant Aung Yin's Company army [are] based in D---village and, even though they do not conduct military activities, they collect rubber taxes and phone taxes from some villages like in previous years.

### **Civilians' situation**

The civilians mostly prioritize farming as their livelihood, and the places for finding wood, bamboo poles, thatch, firewood, charcoal, and hill farms are decreasing year by year [because more rubber is being planted]. Villagers are also faced with unstable weather conditions. Because new rubber plantations have been planted increasingly on the land from Dali Forest reserve, year-by-year the residents cannot do anything to preserve the [forest] reserve and one day, we might have to call it a rubber plantation reserve.

Dali forest reserve is the forest that the civilians from the east, north, west and south rely upon for their livelihood, for them it represents their life-blood, but now, because it is becoming a rubber plantation, the villagers are faced with a shortage of necessary things, including wood, bamboo poles, thatches, charcoal and fence poles, and they have to buy these things. There is also almost no pasture land for cows and buffalos and hill farms. For some civilians who have herds of cows and buffalos, because the pasture land have decreased, their cows have eaten rubber trees, and [the owners] have had to compensate 5,000 kyat (US \$5.63) and some cows have been killed [as a result]. So [the owners] have to sell their herds even though they do not want to. Some villagers who have no land have to work doing odd jobs for daily wages and some have to go to Thailand to work.

Because in the region different groups such as the KNU group, U Thein Sein group, BGF, DKBA, KPC and KPF are active, it is the region where the civilians are confused with which armed group to rely on. Whichever group asks for donations and taxes, [to go towards] celebration for days of significance, education, healthcare and religion, [villagers] have to collect

[money] and give it to them. The landless people and those who do odd jobs,<sup>12</sup> have to work very hard and finally, they have to go to other countries for work because they cannot go on. This year, weather conditions became unstable and while [people were] planting paddy, there was flooding and the paddy which could be planted on, because it was raining during the harvest, got wet and some paddy plants were destroyed.

During [period after the] ceasefire, some people have said that apart from no fighting, the other things remain the same as before. The administrators from the villages have to attend regular meetings once per month in the Township office as in the past. In the meetings, the township administrator asks [about] each of their village's situation, education, healthcare, and transportation and after they [village administrators] present [the information to him, he] tells them the requirements [for the villages], then they have to go back [to the villages] and do it. When they come back, each administrator has to bring a package of [government] newsletters back and they [the village administrators who go to attend meetings] have to buy the newsletters for 100,000 kyat (US \$113).

In my village, they [township administrators or the Government] make ID cards for the villagers who do not have ID cards and them. It cost villagers at least 10,000 kyat (US \$11.25) per person for the ID card and travel costs. In 2012, a motorbike license for one motorbike cost 100,000 kyat (US \$113) and they said that they will take the motorbike [if it does not have a licence] and [the owner] will be punished.

## **Healthcare**

Now, civilians from the region use modern medicine, but in some villages, they use herbal medicine and spiritual practices including calling spirits and wrist tying<sup>13</sup>. For the civilians who can afford it, they go and take medicine from the public village medics and if they are not feeling better, they have to go and get treatment in the town clinic.

In some villages, the government and the NGOs cooperate so that the villagers can access maternal and child welfare [associations], malaria counter-action, child polio vaccination, and midwives. Similarly, in villages where the KNU and NGOs cooperate, the Backpack [Health

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<sup>12</sup> When villagers have no land or means to secure a steady income, they have been known to do 'odd jobs' in the village to earn wages from day to day. These odd jobs can include activities such as clearing plantation land or working on other people's farms.

<sup>13</sup> 'Wrist tying' refers here to a cultural practice whereby the wrist is bound with white thread in order to rid the individual of spirits which are believed to be the cause of their illness.

Worker Team], FBR [Free Burma Rangers], malaria counter-action, midwives and the rural healthcare groups come [to the villages] twice a year.

## **Education**

The civilians knows that education is centrally important; they understand that if there is no education, we are blind, so they prioritize education, but there are only few students' parents who can send their children [to school] up until the middle school or to 10<sup>th</sup> standard. During one year, a primary student has to pay at least 100,000 kyat (US \$113) and that does not include the cost for uniform. The parents have to struggle to be able to send them to school.

In 2012, some of the government primary schools from some villages provided school documents [books] and people from the village had to help the teachers with full rations and salary. From the KNU side, the KED helps the schools that they area able to reach and the 'self-help'<sup>14</sup> schools with school materials and sport materials, once a year and they provide 2,000 baht (US \$68) to each of the government teachers and 4,000 baht (US \$137) to the teachers [hired by villagers]. We estimate that in the region, about one third of the school-age children have to help their parents' with their work as their parents cannot afford to send them to school.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I want to report that, in my campaign area in Kyone Doh Township, even though there is ceasefire, they [villagers] are only relieved from war, and they are faced with a lack of wood, bamboo canes, thatch, plantation land, pasture land and fence poles. Villagers are short of wood, bamboo canes, thatch shingles, charcoal, plantation land, rice and paddy, [and face] forest fires, flooding and water shortage. The coming children [generations] are [set to] face more than these problems if the Burma government builds an economic zone [and an] Asia main road<sup>15</sup> from Mawlamyine to Thailand. Then the civilians from some villages from the township will also face with relocation and land confiscation problems.

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<sup>14</sup> Schools that are run and staffed by villagers.

<sup>15</sup> The community member is likely referring the East-West Economic Corridor, a road planned to connect Mawlamyine to Myawaddy as part of a larger network between towns in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Plans for the road are discussed in the following articles: "The East-West Economic Corridor," EarthRights International; "East-West Economic corridor still in planning stage: ADB official," Myanmar Times, 8-10 November 2010.

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

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kya In Seik Kyi Township, September 2012,” (June 2013)
- “Shooting in Dooplaya District,” (November 2012)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update Kawkareik Township and Kya In Township, April to June 2012,” (September 2012)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Saw L---, June 2011,” (May 2012)
- “Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Dooplaya District, December 2011,” (March 2012)
- “Incident Report: Dooplaya District, August 2011,” (March 2012)