



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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**Papun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, March 2012
to March 2013**

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in May 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Papun District mostly between March 2012 and March 2013, and also provides details on abuses since 2006. The report specifically describes incidents of forced labour, theft, logging, land confiscation and gold mining. The situation update describes military activity from August 2012 to January 2013, specifically Tatmadaw soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #96 ordering villagers to make thatch shingles and cut bamboo. Moreover, soldiers stole villagers' thatch shingles, bamboo canes and livestock. It also describes logging undertaken by wealthy villagers with the permission of the Karen National Union (KNU) and contains updated information concerning land confiscation by Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalions #1013 and #1014. The update also reports on gold mining initiatives led by the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) that started in 2010. At that time, civilians were ordered to work for the DKBA, and their lands, rivers and plantations were damaged as a result of mining operations. The report also notes economic changes that accompanied mining. In previous years villagers could pan gold from the river and sell it as a hedge against food insecurity. Now, however, options are limited because they must acquire written permission to pan in the river. This situation update also documents villager responses to abuses, and notes that an estimated 10 percent of area villagers favour corporate gold mining, while 90 percent oppose the efforts.

**Situation Update | Dwe Lo Township, Papun District (March 2012
to March 2013)**

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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Papun District, including three incident reports, one situation update and 88 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

Introduction

In the previous years 2009 to 2010, the civilians in Dwe Lo Township had to suffer from the DKBA's [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army's]³ and SPDC's [Tatmadaw's]⁴ forced labour and portering. Also when the DKBA came and mined gold in Baw Paw, Meh Kleh, and Meh Toh rivers, they confiscated the civilians' lands in order to mine gold. The civilians' vegetation, dog fruit⁵ plantations, farms and the environment were damaged a lot. Since 2011, the civilians have not suffered forced labour, looting or gold mining from the SPDC and DKBA anymore. Even though the things like forced labour, demanding and looting of peoples' chickens and goats from the SPDC army active in our area have decreased, some remains.

Since 2011 until now, the greatest difficulty that the civilians had to suffer was when the company came and mined gold in Meh Kleh, Meh Toh and Baw Paw rivers. The civilians' properties, vegetation, lands, trees and bamboos were damaged a lot. If the civilians, whose properties were damaged, asked for compensation, [the company] did not provide [it as] completely as the civilians had asked. Currently, since the gold mining has been carried out, the civilians have suffered from [a lack of access to] fresh water because the water is polluted all the time. Moreover, because the flowing of polluted water contains chemicals, when cattle, buffalos and fish drink the water, it causes disease and, as a result, some have died.

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, "BGF and KNLA grenades injure villagers and their children in Papun District," KHRG, July 2013.

³ 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 Burma 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. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

⁴ In Karen, the Burmese phrases Na Ah Pa (SPDC) and Na Wa Ta (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burma 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 4-10th 2011. The term Na Ah Pa was used by the villager who wrote this conducted this interview and interviewee and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

⁵ Dog fruit, also known as jengkol, is a bean containing sulphur and a mildly toxic amino acid. It is native to Southeast Asia and is commonly eaten with rice and fish paste.



The photos were taken on January 28th 2013 by a community member trained by KHRG in Dwe Lo Township, Papun District. The photos depict gold mining in Baw Paw River in Waw Mu village tract and show the work site and its workers. The gold mining stopped in 2011 to 2012 because there were insufficient machines and employees. Gold mining resumed in 2013. The gold miners dig the stones from the mountain, after which they crush the stone with machines and extract the gold. These photos show the extraction process. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Forced labour, demands

The SPDC army based at Waw Muh army camp is IB [Infantry Battalion] #96. On December 12th 2012, the Battalion Commander Yaing Ko Ko ordered Naw P--- to send one packet of letters for MOC [Military Operations Command] #44's camp commander. Naw P--- lives in Dr--- village, and the distance between Dr--- village and Meh Pree Hkee [village] is approximately five miles. Yaing Ko Ko ordered Naw P---, and Naw P--- went [as she was ordered] with fear.

On the same day, IB #96 Waw Muh Camp Commander Yaing Ko Ko demanded and ordered Dr--- villagers who have boats to transport their [army] rations to Meh Pree Hkee army camp. Again they ordered 10 of Dr---'s villagers per day in order to carry the sacks of rice, oil, peas and other supplies from the army camp to the boat. It [the order] started on January 24th 2013 [and was enforced] to January 28th 2013 until their [Tatmadaw] rations were all delivered.

On August 28th 2012, the SPDC army based in Kay Kaw army camp, IB #96 Company and Camp Commander Lin Htet ordered his followers [soldiers] to cut bamboo and [collect] thatch shingles in A--- villager Saw T---'s [garden]. [They took] five giant bamboo canes and 20 thatch shingles without asking permission from the owner of the bamboo and thatch shingles. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] just went and cut [the bamboo canes] forcibly. Saw T--- planted and kept those bamboo canes and thatch shingles to use for building a house.

On August 25th 2012, IB #96's Camp Commander Lin Htet ordered his followers again to go and take Maung E---'s thatch shingles in order to repair their location [army camp]. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] also forcibly took it and stole it, but Maung E--- dared not go to talk to Lin Htet, so he had to suffer like that.

On August 29th 2012, officer Lin Htet ordered A--- villagers to cut 50 *wa thoh*⁶ in order to repair their army camp.

On September 1st 2012, Zaw Lin Htet ordered and demanded A--- villagers to make 100 thatch shingles in order to repair the roofs in their army camp.

On October 26th 2012, IB #96 army's Zaw Lin Htet ordered A--- villager Saw H--- to go to get alcohol, oil and beer in Hkoo Thoo Hta [village]. The distance between A--- and Hkoo Thoo Hta [village] is four miles.

Stealing and dog attacks

IB #96 Camp Commander Zaw Lin Htet raises one dog and, on August 24th 2012, his dog bit and killed one goat belonging to A--- villager Saw B---.

On August 27th 2012, Zaw Lin Htet's soldiers stole one rooster belonging to an A--- villager Naw M---.

On September 4th 2012, Zaw Lin Htet ordered his soldiers to go to steal 30 thatch shingles and cut 20 *wa thoh* belonging to A--- villagers.

⁶ *Wa thoh* is a smooth species of bamboo with long joints and medium-sized leaves.

On September 16th 2012, Zaw Lin Htet's soldiers stole one goat belonging to an A--- villager Saw G---.

On September 26th 2012, IB #96's Camp Commander Zaw Lin Htet's (who is based in A-- [village]) soldiers stole one pig belonging to Saw U--- on this day.

On November 26th 2012, Kay Kaw's Camp Commander Zaw Lin Htet's dog bit and killed one goat belonging to SPDC's⁷ village head.

On November 27th 2012, Zaw Lin Htet's soldiers stole one rooster belonging to an A--- villager Naw S---.

On November 28th 2012, Zaw Lin Htet's soldiers stole three families of fowl, including a hen and chicken belonging to A--- villager Naw W---.

On November 29th 2012, Zaw Lin Htet's soldiers stole one family of fowls belonging to an A--- villager Naw K---.

As of 2013, the armed group that was based in Kay Kaw army camp, IB #96 Company Commander Zaw Lin Htet, is not based in Kay Kaw [army camp] anymore, and there is a new battalion that has come and is now based there.

Logging

Logging is still ongoing in Dwe Lo Township. Forest administrator Kyaw Hpoh said that headquarter [KNU] and district [leaders] forbid the logging decisively. When I compare what he said and what he did, it does not match. He said logging is forbidden, but when rich men, Maw Ra and Kay Mee Kaw, requested to do logging, he gave them permission to do logging since November 10th 2012. Until now, they continue to log [trees], which are ironwood and teak [trees] in Meh Way village tract, and they said [they are allowed to log the trees because they] are [unclaimed]. They send the logs that they [cut] to Ma Lay Ler and Kwee T'Ma [villages], then they transport [them] with a truck and go to sell [the logs] in the town. This still happens continuously. Some civilians said that the leaders said to develop the forest, but what the leaders said and did do not match. As the proverb says, the villagers say that the leaders are now just "writing by hand and erasing by leg." One villager said, *"Is it good to develop the forest or not good? I hope*

⁷ The community member used SPDC here to indicate that the village head was either appointed to his position by the SPDC during its existence or more recently by Tatmadaw authorities.

many leaders decide it collectively. If they would develop the forest, they have to forbid it decisively. The logging and sending the logs to the town should not occur anymore.”



The top left photo was taken on January 28th 2013 by a community member trained by KHRG. The photo was taken in Waw Muh village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Papun District and shows a truck carrying logs to town for selling. According to the community member, the truck belongs to businessman Maw Ra. Maw Ra has been sending logs to Ma Lay Ler since Dwe Lo Township KNU Forest Administrator Kyaw Lay Hpoh opened the forest for logging. The logs are then cut it into planks and sent to Kyaik Hto town. The top right photo and bottom four photos were taken on April 3rd 2013 by the riverside of Kwee T'Ma village, Meh Chaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township. One photo shows an elephant dragging logs and others show the logs piled by the riverside. The logging business is active in Mae Thoo, Mae Way village tract in Dwe Lo area where they make the logs and then gather them at Mae Wah Hko, near Kwee T'Ma village. Afterward they are sent to the city by truck. [Photos: KHRG]

Confiscation

In Dwe Lo Township, there are two places where the BGF [Tatmadaw Border Guard Force]⁸ confiscated civilians' lands, farms, rubber plantations, thatch plantations and bamboo plantations in order to set up their residence [army camp].

The first place is in between Kh--- and Bc--- [villages]. Since March 2012, the BGF built up a barrack and finished some [buildings], and until now they continue build up more [buildings]. The group of BGF that came to set up the residence is Battalion #1013's Battalion Commander Htoh Loh. It is led and constructed by Battalion Deputy Commander Hla Kyaing. The BGF set up a barracks and confiscated villagers' lands, rubber plantations, farms and many other lands as reported in this update.

Victim Name	Village Name	Acre of lands
1. Christian cemetery	Kh--- village	--
2. U D---	Kh--- village	Two acres of farms and four acres of rubber plantation
3. Saw C---	Kh--- village	One acre rubber plantation and 10 acres of farms
4. U J---	Kh--- village	One acre of farm
5. U Ky---	Bc--- village	One acre of rubber plantation
6. Daw N---	Bc--- village	Five acres of rubber plantation
7. U Th---	Bc--- village	Two acres of farm

The BGF set up this residence and they plan to have a 360-acre-wide residence. They confiscated these civilians' lands, and they did not consult with the civilians [to see if] civilians agreed or did not agree. They came directly and cleared the land then set up the residence. They confiscated it [the lands] and provided compensation as they

⁸ Border Guard Force (BGF) 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 formalised 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.

desired to the civilians. Even though the civilians did not agree, they [civilians] had to take it [compensation] quietly because they were afraid.

Because the civilians' lands and plantations were destroyed [confiscated] the problems that it will cause in the following year are that there are no more farms to plant paddy. There are no more rubber trees to drain.

The second place is BGF Battalion #1014's Battalion Commander *Bo* [Officer] Maung Chit with 30 soldiers. They set up barracks in Kha Hpa Doh Koh place in eastern Tha Aw Klay village on February 10th 2011. The structure of their residence that they finished constructing is 10 households for the officers, 20 buildings with four living spaces in each and 40 buildings with six living spaces in each. They planted a lot of rubber [trees] in the vicinity. The BGF set up this residence and confiscated civilians' properties, thatch plantations, bamboo plantations and the other wide places. In Pc--- [village], two acres of Saw R---'s *k'haw la*⁹ plantation [were confiscated]. [In] Z--- [village] [there were] two acres of Saw Y---'s *k'haw la* [that were confiscated]. [In] Z--- [village], [there were] 20 acres of bamboo plantation that villagers protected to use for building houses [that were confiscated]. 50 acres of bamboo plantation that villagers protected to use for house building [were also confiscated]. One hundred acres of *t'la aw*¹⁰ hill in the three villages, which are Z---, Pc--- and Ng--- [villages], [that were being] protected to use for roofing [were confiscated]. Now, they cleared that *t'la aw* hill and planted rubber [trees] so in the coming year, the civilians from the three villages will have to deal with the problem that they will not have any place for roofing their house's roofs. Another thing is [civilians] do not have any bamboo to cut in order to build a house and make a fence.



This undated photo from 2013 was taken by a Di--- villager in Dwe Lo Township, Papun District. The photo

⁹ *K'haw la* is a kind of palm tree with leaves that can be fashioned into thatch shingles.

¹⁰ *T'la aw* trees are teak-like trees with large leaves, which are traditionally collected by villagers and used to make thatch shingles for the roofs of houses.

shows the BGF barracks in Kha Hpa Doh Koh in eastern Dt--- village that was set up by BGF Battalion #1014 Commander Maung Chit. The buildings with the white zinc roofs belong to the BGF. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Gold mining

The gold mining in Dwe Lo Township has been carried out since 2006 and, until now, it has damaged a lot of lands, trees, bamboo, natural resources, the source of the river and civilians' lands. Because the gold mining was carried out, the civilians have had to deal with [problems] such as damaged properties and, moreover, the polluted water that contains chemicals coming from the gold mining¹¹ flowing in the river, so [that] when the civilians drink [water] it causes sickness. Moreover, there were many cattle, buffalos and fish that got sick after they drank water and [as a result] they are dead. The gold mining started in Baw Paw River. The civilians from the town came and asked permission from headquarter [KNU] department Baw Lah, and Baw Lah gave them permission and they could do it. At that time, there was no truck [bulldozer] that was used in the gold mining.

While the gold mining continued to 2009 and 2010, DKBA Lieutenant Chit Thu¹² came and carried out gold mining with many of his soldiers. They mined gold in Meh Kleh, Meh Toh and Baw Paw rivers. At that time, the civilians had to suffer and carry things [for the DKBA]. They [civilians] had to work for the DKBA without resting. Moreover, when they [DKBA] mined gold, civilians' lands and vegetation were damaged but they [DKBA] did not pay compensation.

The civilians were very happy after the DKBA came and mined gold and left. Again, starting in 2011 and until now, many companies have come, including a Chinese [company]. They came and asked permission from the headquarters of the metal [mining] department Governor Baw Lah, [KNLA] Battalion #102 Battalion Commander Kyaw Thein and Military Intelligence Commander Toh Nyoh. They gave them permission and the companies entered and [mined gold] in Meh Kleh, Baw Paw and Meh Toh rivers

¹¹ It is possible the chemicals referenced here might be a consequence of gold cyanidation. This process involves placing crushed ore into piles where a cyanide solution is poured over it to dissolve the gold and allow it to "leach" out of the pile and also into the ground. This process risks contaminating the surrounding area and is heavily regulated by many nations.

¹² Maung Chit Thu was the operations commander of the then-Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) Battalion #999 prior to the DKBA transformation into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, which began in September 2010. His role has grown considerably since the transformation, and he is now second in command of BGF forces. Abuses committed by Maung Chit Thu have been cited in previous KHRG reports, including ordering the forcible relocation of villagers from eight villages in Lu Pleh Township in July 2011, while acting as a Border Guard commander, see, "Pa'an Situation Update: June to August 2011," KHRG, October 2011.

until now, and have damaged a huge [part] of the natural environment of these three rivers, civilians' lands and vegetation.

Moreover, if we look at the current leaders, they have to improve in everything, right? When I look at Dwe Lo farm department in charge Win Maung and his follower Nyut Win, [they] supported the traders [businessmen] and arranged the gold mining places for them. He [Win Maung] forced the civilians who did not want to sell [their lands] to sell. If they could arrange one piece of land for the people who came to mine gold, people gave them three million, four million [kyat] (US \$3,0657.50, \$4,090).¹³ When gold mining happened they got a lot of money and they became rich. In my opinion, since the gold mining happened there is no benefit for the civilians. It will be for the best if it is decisively forbidden.

This year, civilians who [mine] gold requested to headquarters, brigade, battalion, district and township [KNU/KNLA leaders that] they work for themselves this year. But, when they requested to mine gold and people [including those from headquarters, brigade, battalion, district and the township's leaders were going to allot them land on which to mine gold], they were [instead] looking [out for the interests of] the rich people in the town and sold [the land to them instead]. They got a lot of money. Moreover, some people in charge suggested to them that [since] they did not get a truck [for mining] this year, they write up a letter [using the civilians' names in order to secure a truck for their own mining purposes, which the civilians would not be able to use]. They wrote up a fake letter and betrayed the civilians.

Is the gold mining forbidden? No way. On March 7th 2013, the leaders from the [KNU] metal [mining] department gave [permission] to mine gold with a truck [bulldozer]. There are approximately 90 percent of the civilians who do not want gold mining [occurring in their area] and whose lands are damaged. There are 10 percent of the civilians who are good at speaking and lie to the leaders, and leaders trust them. In our grandparents' era, if the civilians did not have food to eat, then they could go to pan for gold as they wished. Now, if civilians go to pan for gold they have to go get a permission letter from the people in charge of the gold mine. For one permission letter for one month they have to pay 15,000 kyat (US \$15.33).

¹³ As of July 10th 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 978 kyat to the US \$1.

Currently, [regarding] the gold mining which has happened, the consequences and problems that will occur in the following year to the civilians are [that] lands will be damaged, vegetation will be damaged and [villagers] cannot pan gold anymore. These consequences and problems will still occur in the new generation.

Conclusion

The human rights abuses that I have reported are included in the pages in this update. The human right abuse in this update is about the events happening in my area and the civilians having to suffer from it enormously. The information that I collected and sent truly occurred and is reliable. The things like ordering, demanding and stealing are still happening at the current time. I think that the things the civilians have to deal with [like] problems and their rights that are abused will decrease and lessen in the coming year.

Currently, the recent abuse of civilians' rights that they have to suffer is that BGF Battalion #1013's officer Htoh Loh set up a residence in between K'Ter Tee and Noh Hpaw Htee [villages]. [Regarding] the civilians who live near to the residence of the BGF construction, the problems that they have to suffer are land confiscation, [the confiscation of] rubber plantations and [the confiscation of] farms. In the coming year, the problems that the civilians will have to suffer are that they do not have farm to plant paddy and they do not have rubber plantations to drain. The new generation will deal with many difficulties.

Another thing is the BGF Battalion #1014's Battalion Commander Maung Chit set up their residence in Kha Hpa Doh Hkoh beside Tha Aw Klay village, and the civilians have to deal with the problems such as the confiscation of bamboo plantations and *t'la aw* plantations from the three villages, which are Z---, Ng--- and Pc---. They go to get thatches for roofing their house roof in that place. Now, there are no *t'la aw* trees. The civilians have to deal with the problems [including that] they cannot find thatches to roof their houses. They cannot find bamboo to cut. The new generation will have to deal with many problems in the coming year.

Since the gold mining in Meh Kleh, Meh Toh and Baw Paw rivers has existed the difficulties that the civilians had to deal with are lands that are damaged, vegetation that is damaged and water that is polluted. When cattle, buffalo, fish and humans drank the polluted water some got sick and [some cattle] died. Since the gold mining was implemented there has been no benefit for the civilians' buildings. In my parents' era, the civilians who lived near to the rivers where gold exists, the gold mining was not mined with machine or truck [bulldozer]. The indigenous people there worked in the swidden

[agriculture] and, sometimes, if the paddies were dead or the mice ate all the paddies, they made their livelihood from these three rivers. They went to pan gold, and after they sold it they bought rice. But now, the gold mining is done with machine and truck, therefore the places and rivers are all damaged. In coming years, if the civilians' paddies are dead, they will not have place to pan gold in order to buy rice, and there will be many consequential problems.

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

- “BGF and KNLA grenades injure villagers and their children in Papun District,” (July 2013)
- “Incident Report: Villager tortured by Tatmadaw commanders in Papun District, December 2012,” (June 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to March 2013,” (June 2013)
- “Demands for labour and money by religious leaders in Papun District, January 2013,” (June 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2012 to January 2013,” (May 2013)

