



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Violent abuse and forced labour in Bu Tho Township, November and December 2012

This news bulletin is based on information submitted by a community member in January 2013 describing events occurring in Papun District between November and December 2012, including physical abuse and forced labour. The community member reported that, in November 2012, Corporal Saw Maw Nay Say of Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014 beat Saw P---, a livestock trader, and confiscated money from him. The report also notes that, a month later, Tatmadaw BGF Battalion #1013 Commander Htee Theh Htoo ordered the investigating KHRG community member to perform forced labour, without knowing that he was affiliated with KHRG. The community member reported that he had to porter rations between BGF #1013 bases in K'Ter Tee village to Meh Mweh village. The community member also raised concerns that abuses were still occurring in the area as of late 2012 despite the January 2012 ceasefire agreement.¹

On November 2nd 2013, Corporal Saw Maw Nay Say from Border Guard Force (BGF)² Battalion #1014, led by Commander Saw Maung Chit, violently abused 45-year-old Saw P---, a cow and buffalo trader in D--- village, L--- village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. According to an eyewitness, *"He violently abused Saw P--- by giving him innumerable punches, and it [was] possibly because he didn't get a share of the tax, or*

¹ On January 12th 2012 a ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma government officials in Hpa-an Town. The preliminary agreement was based on '11 key points' and was due to be followed by more in-depth talks after 45 days. Negotiators from the two parties met for a 2nd round of talks beginning on 4th April, see "KNU and the Burmese Government Continued State-level Ceasefire Talks," Karen National Union, 4th April 2012 and held a 3rd round of negotiations from 3rd 4th September 2012, see "KNU Delegations Departs for the Third Round Negotiation of Ceasefire with the Burmese Government," Karen National Union, 1st September 2012. For more information on the ceasefire and how it has affected local villagers, see "Safeguarding human rights in a post-ceasefire eastern Burma," KHRG, January 2012 and "Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process," KHRG, November 2012.

² 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.

*maybe he didn't know that he had already paid [it] to the commander.*³ Saw Maw Nay Say also confiscated 300,000 kyat (US \$305.12)⁴ from Saw P---, despite the fact that Saw P--- had already paid livestock taxes to the area commander to travel and trade freely.

Furthermore, on December 5th 2012, forced labour occurred in Meh Mweh village, Meh Mweh village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. The person who was asked to labour was the KHRG community member researching abuse in the area. While documenting abuses, he visited K'Ter Tee village and encountered a BGF Battalion #1013 commander named Htee Theh Htoo near a river bank intending to transport milk, rice, oil and uniforms by boat. At first, the commander planned to rely on a local boat owner for transporting his rations, but he was unable to find him. As such, he found the KHRG community member nearby and turned to him for his demands.

"I think he didn't know that I am a KHRG researcher, so when he couldn't find the boat owner, he just thought of me as a villager and told me to porter his rations. I had no choice but to do as he told me, and I asked him where I should porter it to and he told me to porter it to Meh Mweh village where they [Battalion #1013] are based. I would smile alone whenever I think about it and I'm not even sure if it was a lucky day or an unfortunate day," the community member reported.

Normally the BGF would rely on area boat owners to transport their rations without compensation. The community member also reported that BGF soldiers were still conducting forced labour with villagers following his own experiences. Judging by this information, it is likely that the abuses of the villagers' rights were still happening as of late 2012, and it is likely villagers are still suffering because of it.⁵

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

- "Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, March 2012 to March 2013," (July 2013)
- "BGF and KNLA grenades injure villagers in Papun District," (July 2013)

³ This information was included in an unpublished incident report submitted to KHRG by a community member in Papun District.

⁴ As of July 15th 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 983 kyat to the US \$1.

⁵ This information was included in an unpublished incident report submitted to KHRG by a community member in Papun District.

- “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)

