

STRENGTHENING THE GRIP ON DOOPLAYA

Developments in the SPDC Occupation of Dooplaya District

An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group
June 10, 1998 / KHRG #98-05

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In early 1997, the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military junta ruling Burma mounted a major offensive against the Karen National Union (KNU) and succeeded in capturing and occupying most of the remainder of Dooplaya District in central Karen State. Since that time the SLORC has changed its name to the State Peace & Development Council (SPDC), but its occupation troops have continued to strengthen their control over the rural Karen villagers who live in the region. This report provides an update on the current situation for villagers in Dooplaya's farming communities under the SPDC occupation and for some of those who have attempted to flee to Thailand. It looks closely at the difficulties currently faced by the Dta La Ku, a Karen religious minority who have been targeted for persecution by armies on all sides of the conflict but who are almost completely ignored by the outside world, and at the formation of a new Army in the Dooplaya region: the "Nyein Chan Yay A'Pway", or "Peace Force", who call themselves the "Karen Peace Army" in English and are working closely with the SPDC regime. For further background on the 1997 offensive in Dooplaya and its immediate aftermath, see the previously released reports "Refugees from the SLORC Occupation" (KHRG #97-07, 25/5/97) and "Clampdown in Southern Dooplaya" (KHRG #97-11, 18/11/97).

This report is divided into two main parts: immediately following this introduction is a description and analysis of the current situation in Dooplaya supported by quotes from local villagers and refugees, and following that are the texts of several detailed interviews with those villagers. All names of those interviewed have been changed and some details omitted where necessary to protect people. False names are shown in quotes, while all other names are real. Notes: Some villagers refer to people as the 'English'; the actual word used is 'Gawlawaw', which means 'white foreigner' but is also used to mean British. One of the principal villages in central Dooplaya often referred to in this report is Saw Hta; many people know this village better by its Burmese name, Azin. It used to be a beautiful quiet village, but is now home to the biggest SPDC Army base in the area. The school football ground is now a helicopter pad; the Karen Women's Organisation office now houses the Karen Peace Army.

Abbreviations

SPDC	State Peace & Development Council, military junta ruling Burma
SLORC	State Law & Order Restoration Council, former name of the SPDC until Nov. 1997
KNU	Karen National Union, main Karen opposition group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army, army of the KNU
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, Karen group allied with SLORC/SPDC
KPA	Karen Peace Army, known as "Nyein Chan Yay A'Pway", or "Peace Force", in Burmese; set up in Dooplaya in 1997 after the SLORC occupation
Nga pway	"Ringworm"; derogatory SLORC/SPDC name for Karen soldiers
Kyat	Burmese currency; US\$1=6 Kyat at official rate, 300 Kyat at current market rate

Baht

Thai currency; US\$1 = approximately 36 Baht at time of printing

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The Current Situation in Dooplaya

Dooplaya District of central Karen State, a large region which stretches from the Myawaddy - Kawkareik - Kyone Doh motor road in the north to the Three Pagodas Pass area in the south, was largely controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) until 1995. In that year a major SLORC offensive completed SLORC's control of the Thai border from Myawaddy southward to Wah Lay and captured the northern part of the 'hump', a mountainous portion of Dooplaya which projects eastward into Thailand. In a much larger offensive in February-March 1997, SLORC succeeded in capturing almost all of the remainder of Dooplaya District. Over 10,000 new refugees fled to Thailand and are now interned in Noh Po refugee camp, but most villagers remained inside the district, either trapped by the speed of the SLORC advance or hoping to survive under the SLORC/SPDC occupation. Many of these villagers have subsequently fled or tried to flee to Thailand due to forced labour and other abuses by the occupation troops.

After occupying areas such as Dooplaya, normal SLORC/SPDC practice is to forcibly relocate all small or remote villages to garrison villages where they are under direct military control, then to use the villagers as forced labour building and servicing new military camps in the area and to build military access roads into the area. This has been the case during the one-year occupation of Dooplaya, though it has been enacted in various ways and to varying extents in different parts of the region. Under the newly-named SPDC regime the program of occupation is continuing.

"They came last April [1997]. They have been forcing us ever since they came. When they arrived in the village all the villagers fled, so they called the villagers back into the village. At first they did not use the villagers as porters, but after the villagers had all been back in the village for a while they started. First they forced us to build buildings for them, then when that was finished they started using us as porters." - "Saw Htoo Wah" (M, 35), Dta La Ku villager from Kwih Lat Der (Interview #2)

"Even when we were in our house they came to our house and demanded chickens. We let them take what they wanted, but when their Sergeant came with a big truck he saw our coconuts and took the coconuts without asking permission. Then he went and took his soldiers' gun and shot at the coconuts [in the tree] to destroy them. If you speak, they tell people, 'You are very clever to speak, so I will kill you'. ... They threaten people and say, 'Now you are in our hands. If we decide to kill you, you can't do anything.'" - "Saw Lah Htoo" (M, 24), K--- village (Interview #5)

Upon occupying most of the villages in the region, SLORC officers began calling villagers who had fled to come back to their villages, promising peace and freedom from harassment. When the villagers returned, many village elders and community leaders were immediately arrested and tortured while the SLORC officers demanded that they hand over weapons. Most did not even know the location of any weapons, but they were forced to try to obtain some anyway so that the SLORC units could report that they had captured weapons in battle. At the same time, most villagers found their movements severely restricted. They needed passes to leave the village and in most areas were only allowed to do so from sunrise to sunset, which made it very difficult for them to farm if their fields were far from the village. The troops immediately began looting the houses and fields of villagers who had fled without returning, and after this had been done they began stealing livestock and possessions and demanding money from the villagers who had returned. At first villagers were not used for much forced labour in hopes that more of them would come back, but as new Army camps were established the troops began using them more

and more. Currently, most villages in the region face constant demands for porters to carry supplies and ammunition for SPDC patrols, and also have to do rotating shifts of forced labour building and maintaining Army camps and as servants at those camps.

“I was a teacher. At that time the school had already closed. They arrested me and interrogated me about the places where the KNLA were hiding, and I answered that I had not seen them. Then they punched my jaw once on each side and asked me to wait there. ... Then they tied me up with rope. They tied my hands tightly behind me and made me lay on my belly, then they interrogated me again. This time only one person was interrogating me. He asked me, ‘Isn’t it true that you have guns and a radio?’ I said, ‘No, I’ve never had those kinds of things’. ... Then they tied me up for 10 days and beat me badly until I had to sleep with blood all over my body every night. They punched my nose twice, and blood was running down from my nose. They beat my body as well. They punched me in the chest, left, right, left... They punched me in my head and on my temples. Both of my shins were beaten with a big stick. They tied me up tightly, made me lay down and then beat me badly on both shins until both of my shins were completely bruised. That was the most painful thing I ever had to bear. ... Later they came back and told us that they would kill us because we had broken their law. They told us that if we could find just one gun for them then they would set us free at once.” - “Saw Lay Doh” (M, 33), Waw Lu village, who was arrested after his village was occupied; after 10 days during which even his family was not allowed to see him, he was finally released and fled (Interview #1)

“Every time the SLORC [SPDC] Army comes the men have to run away and hide, because they try to capture the men whenever they come. Every day 6 people must go to stay with them so that they can use them whenever they need them. Wherever they want to go those 6 people must go with them and carry their things, which are very heavy, sometimes until they cannot carry anymore. Sometimes they have to do other work, and sometimes it is dangerous. People who do not dare to go must give 1,500 kyats for 3 days [in lieu of 3 days of work]. If people don’t go then the Burmese will never set free the previous group. People must always stay with them and keep rotating.” - “Naw Eh Ghay” (F, 53), Meh Tharaw Hta village (Interview #6)

“They forced the people to carry cement from Ber Kler to Htee Hta Baw [over 20 km/12 miles as the crow flies, much farther on land], at night time in the rainy season when the river was flooded. So the people were in trouble. Some came back ill. Some coughed up blood, and some were vomitting with blood. Some had wounds on their backs and others had wounds on their sides. We had pity on them when we saw them.” - “Pa Bway Htoo” (M, 44), Dta La Ku village headman, talking about forced labour for #61 Infantry Battalion (Interview #4)

Currently an entire network of roads is being constructed and/or improved, primarily centred on the main trading village of Kyaikdon on the Hong Thayaw river in Dooplaya’s central plain. The principal roads being constructed include a road to Kyaikdon from Kya In Seik Gyi to the west; improvement of the bullock-cart roads northward from Kyaikdon to Kyone Doh and Kawkareik, a new road from Wah Lay southward across the ‘hump’ to Kyo G’Lee, then turning west to Po Yay and Kyaikdon, another new road from Kyo G’Lee eastward to Tee K’Pler through the mountainous southern portion of the ‘hump’, and a planned road from Saw Hta (a.k.a. Azin) southward to Htee Hta Baw, a site on the Thai border north of Three Pagodas Pass. Work is also ongoing upgrading the existing dirt road from Kyaikdon to Saw Hta and on to the Thai border at Lay Po Hta / Ber Kler.

In mid-February 1998 two convoys totalling 50-70 military trucks loaded with convicts from prisons in other parts of Burma were brought to Kyaikdon and Saw Hta to begin forced labour on several of these roads. Each truck was packed tightly with 30-50 prisoners, so the total may be anywhere from 1,500 to over 3,000 people. However, villagers also continue to be used as forced labour on roads around Kyaikdon. The road in the east, from Wah Lay south to Kyo G'Lee and then west to Po Yay and Kyaikdon, has to cross mountainous terrain and is being built mainly with earth-moving equipment by soldiers under the direction of a battalion of Army Engineers currently based at Kyo G'Lee. At first this road appeared to be the only one not being built with the forced labour of villagers, but in May 1998 there were reports that villagers in Kyaikdon are now being forced to break rocks, lay the roadbed and work on at least one bridge near the Kyaikdon end of the road. The forced labour is being ordered and supervised by Frontline Engineers #904 Battalion. Bulldozers and forced labour are also being used to realign the streets in Kyaikdon itself, destroying some of the large betelnut plantations that are central to the landscape and the livelihood of the village. No compensation is paid, and the villagers even have to buy the fuel for the bulldozers.

“They have to build the main roads and also rebuild the streets in Kyaikdon. They have to improve the roads and streets, the Burmese are digging the earth with bulldozers in the betelnut plantations, they are destroying all the betelnut trees but they never pay anything to the villagers. The villagers even have to buy the fuel for their bulldozer! They never buy their own fuel.” - “Saw Lah Htoo” (M, 24), K--- village, talking about forced labour in Kyaikdon (Interview #5)

“Then they brought prisoners [convicts] up into the jungle on Army trucks. Along the way they tied the prisoners’ necks and hands tightly to the sides of the trucks and made them stand up straight. When they arrived at the T’Ku Kee church they let them get down from the truck. Some prisoners couldn’t stand up anymore and they fell down. The soldiers saw that and kicked them and hit them until they became unconscious. Then they picked them up and dragged them under a shady tree. I heard that they will use those prisoners to do road construction. The road will go from Kyaikdon to [Kya In] Seik Gyi. I know the prisoners are in Kyaikdon right now because I saw Auntie S--- at the bible school there and she told me, ‘Now Kyaikdon is full of Burmese military and prisoners.’” - “Naw Eh Ghay” (F, 53), Meh Tharaw Hta village (Interview #6)

The reason for bringing in convicts to do much of the manual forced labour on the road network is to reduce the amount of forced labour required of villagers so that fewer people will flee. This methodology applies particularly in villages right along the border with Thailand, and in the southern part of the ‘hump’ of Dooplaya. In some of these areas villagers are only used for forced labour as guides, occasional portering or light labour, while operations porters and people for heavy forced labour are rounded up and brought from towns and villages further inside Burma. However, this trend appears to be lessening as reports are that villagers throughout Dooplaya are now being used for more and more forced labour of all kinds. This may be because the SPDC knows that the Thai Army is now denying asylum to new refugees and forcing many of them back into Burma, so they no longer have to worry so much about people fleeing forced labour to Thailand.

“They love to live in their own villages. It is not easy for them to flee to Thailand. The problem if they come here is that the Thais will drive them back to Burma. The Thais already drove many of them back once when they came last time. So although they must live as slaves in Burma and they don’t like to live like that, they must live that way.” - “Saw Lah Htoo” (M, 24), K--- village (Interview #5)

In the central plain of Dooplaya, SPDC troops have a very heavy presence at Saw Hta, Kyaikdon and all other main villages, and the amount of forced labour imposed on villagers is increasing. All civilians with motor vehicles in central Dooplaya are now forced to use them to carry SPDC Army supplies, and the owner must even pay for the fuel. Army trucks are not used because they are possible targets for KNLA attack. On March 22nd a villagers’ car carrying SPDC supplies was blown up by a KNLA landmine on the road near Kwih Kler, killing a man and his child. No compensation was given.

“If a villager has a vehicle he must use it to carry rations for the Burmese. If the car is destroyed by a bomb the Burmese won’t do anything for him, he must take care of himself. ... A car was just destroyed by a bomb, just above Kwih Kler. It happened this week, on Sunday [March 22nd]. It was a bomb buried in the ground. I don’t know exactly whose bomb it was. The car blew into two parts. A child died and the driver was hurt in his chest. The child was about 9 years old. His village was Taw Wah Law. ... It was a villager’s car carrying rations for the Burmese. Now the Burmese use the villagers’ cars to transport their supplies because they think the KNLA will not shoot at the villagers’ cars but they would shoot at the Army’s cars. ... [T]he people who have cars must wait around to drive for the Burmese whenever they need them and wherever they need to go. But these car owners must buy the petrol themselves. The Burmese never buy the petrol for them.” - “Saw Lah Htoo” (M, 24), K--- village, talking about the situation in Kyaikdon (Interview #5)

SPDC authorities in Kyaikdon say they want to ‘develop’ the village, and have been realigning and reparcelling much of the land there. As mentioned above, the streets of the village are being realigned using bulldozers and the forced labour of villagers, in the process destroying some of the betelnut plantations which give the village much of its beauty and upon which the people rely for their livelihood. The villagers receive no compensation and even have to pay for fuel for the bulldozer. At the same time, the SPDC has divided the village into plots and ‘appraised’ each one, and every family has been forced to buy their own land from the Army or lose it, even if their house is already on it. Each plot is roughly the size of a small Karen house with a garden around it and is ‘appraised’ for 30,000 to 50,000 Kyat, more than the life savings of most villagers. However, if people wished to retain their property they had no choice but to sell enough of their belongings in February/March 1998 to pay the specified amount to the SPDC Battalions. Furthermore, those with plots appraised at a high value in the central part of the village were ordered to put zinc roofing on their houses at their own expense or lose their property. Previously most houses in the village had leaf roofing. This order is similar to those already issued to people living in many towns throughout Burma, as part of the SPDC’s ‘development’ campaign. Some villagers cynically comment that people from other areas get the best deal, because they can pay the same price to buy a plot in Kyaikdon as the people who already own it. Some people from other parts of the region have done so and moved to Kyaikdon.

“Every villager had to buy their own land. They each had to pay 30,000 to 50,000 Kyats. People had to sell their belongings to get the money to pay for their land. And on land which is 50,000 Kyats they ordered that the owners must put zinc roofing on their houses. As for the betelnut plantations, if the owner stays close by they can get the fruit, but if not then the KPA took all of it. They also demand taxes on all the crops. The KPA took all the houses and crops of everyone who fled to Thailand, and they sold those houses.” - “Saw Lah Htoo” (M, 24), K---village, talking about the situation in Kyaikdon (Interview #5)

In keeping with the SPDC’s usual strategy, small villages throughout the region have been forcibly relocated if they are too remote to be under direct SPDC control. All small villages in the Kya In / Kya In Seik Gyi area, along the Atayan River in the west of the district, have now been given orders to relocate to big SPDC-controlled villages or to roadsides. In eastern and southern Dooplaya, many small hillside villages have been ordered to move to larger villages. Muslims continue to be persecuted and banned from most areas where they previously lived, particularly the Kyaikdon area in the central plain of the district. According to villagers from Kyaikdon, SPDC troops there have threatened to kill any Muslims in the area, and there is a population of Muslims who have ‘converted’ (at least in public) to Buddhism because this is the only way they can still live there.

“...now Kalay Kee and Kyaw Kay Ko have to move because the Burmese accused them of feeding the KNLA, so the Burmese won’t allow them to stay there anymore. The people of Kyaw Kay Ko have to move to Kya In and the people from Kalay Kee have to move to T’Ku Kee. I heard that relocations will also occur in many other places. Even the villagers in Kya In [western Dooplaya] must move to the roadside. I also heard one village headwoman say, ‘If I’m going to build a house I will build it at the roadside, because we must move there anyway.’” - “Naw Eh Ghay” (F, 53), Meh Tharaw Hta village (Interview #6)

“...all the Muslims around Saw Hta and Kyaikdon must become Buddhists, because if they don’t the SPDC says they will kill them. ... Many Muslims used to stay in Pa Klaw Nee village, near Kyaikdon, but now they’ve had to move. They can stay near Kyaikdon, but they have to become Buddhist. So now there are many Muslims pretending to be Buddhist.” - “Pa Lah” (M, 35) from central Dooplaya (Interview #5)

The situation in Dooplaya is now growing more complex due to the formation of a new army, the “Nyein Chan Yay A’Pway”, literally “Peace Force”, led by Thu Mu Heh. In English they are calling themselves the KPA (Karen Peace Army). Thu Mu Heh was the commander of the KNLA’s 16th Battalion until February 1997, when he shocked the KNLA by surrendering to SLORC without a fight at the start of the offensive. The surrender had clearly been prearranged, and made the SLORC’s rapid capture of Dooplaya possible. As a KNLA officer Thu Mu Heh was notorious among villagers of the region for his corruption and mistreatment of villagers, and he is known to particularly despise the Muslim population of Dooplaya. However, since his surrender he has been paraded in the SPDC media, given gifts by SPDC leaders and publicly handed authority over several townships of Dooplaya. He formed the KPA with the support of the SLORC/SPDC, declared himself a General, and according to villagers from the area he has now been given authority over the entire region from Kawkareik in the north to Three Pagodas Pass in the south. In the process, the SPDC has ordered all DKBA forces in Dooplaya back to Pa’an District further north, with the exception of those in the ‘hump’ jutting eastward into Thailand and along the Thai border north of the ‘hump’, from Wah Lay to Myawaddy; the KPA does not yet operate in these areas.

The SPDC appears to favour the KPA over the DKBA, whom they have never trusted; this is understandable, given that the DKBA was originally formed with the idea of Karen autonomy in Karen State, whereas the KPA has been formed by a corrupt officer with no interests except money and power. Villagers from Dooplaya have already reported that the KPA and the DKBA cannot stand each other, and it is possible that the SPDC will pit the two groups against each other in the future. With so many groups now tangled in the struggle in Dooplaya the villagers feel more confusion and less hope than ever, and the SPDC is trying to use this feeling to strengthen its control over them.

After Thu Mu Heh surrendered, most of his troops fled and either returned to the KNLA or deserted. At present villagers report that he only has 200 or 300 troops. These are mainly untrained villagers who joined because the KPA is now promising that the families of all KPA members will be exempt from forced labour, extortion and other harassment by the SPDC (a similar promise was used to expand the DKBA when it was first formed). Villagers report that in at least some villages, once a person joins KPA a mark is made on his house to indicate that people in that house are exempt from forced labour. The KPA has now completed training of its first group of recruits in Kwih Kalay, but it has yet to organise itself very well on the ground. At the moment its main activity is recruiting. It maintains an office near the major SPDC base in Saw Hta and its officers and members who are already trained are acting only as adjuncts to SPDC Battalions, 2 or 3 of them assigned to each large SPDC unit. All KPA material supplies, including arms and ammunition, reportedly come from the SPDC.

“Last month they gathered the people and divided them into two groups. One group was to be a people’s army [i.e. regular KPA] and the other group was to be village defenders who would be sentries in each village. They took their training in Kwih Kalay and the leader told them that they could stay in their own houses after the training, but after they finished they were not allowed to stay in their own homes. There were 50 of them in that training. The leader sent them from Kyaikdon to Kya In Seik Gyi, so then they knew that their leader did differently than what he said and many of them tried to escape. They ran away and hid themselves, they didn’t want to go to other villages, they couldn’t agree with their leader because he’d said they wouldn’t have to leave their homes. We don’t know how to help the people who are in this trouble now.” - “Pa Bway Htoo” (M, 44), Dta La Ku village headman (Interview #4)

Thus far the group hardest hit by the KPA’s recruiting drive are the Dta La Ku (a.k.a. Telekoo) people. The Dta La Ku are a Karen religious minority who have very strict beliefs and practices which in some aspects resemble Buddhism, in others Christianity as well as Animism. They are very devout, following strict codes regarding food, dress and lifestyle, and many other Karen regard them as being particularly holy and having special powers. The men are easily recognisable because they wear solid-colour sarongs (unlike other Karen men) and grow their hair long and wear it in a top knot, held by a kerchief or bandana. The Dta La Ku number an estimated four or five thousand, living in certain villages of Dooplaya and a small part of Thailand adjacent to the Burma border. About 1,500 of them fled to Thailand in September 1997 due to forced labour after the SLORC/SPDC occupation of their villages. Many of them returned to their villages at the beginning of 1998 after their elders reached an agreement with DKBA representatives that they would not be used for forced labour or otherwise harrassed by SPDC troops if they returned. However, just after that the DKBA disappeared from the area when the SPDC replaced them with the KPA. In April 1998, 187 Dta La Ku families fled across the border into Thailand again after being abused and threatened by SPDC and KPA forces.

“Many Dta La Ku fled to Thailand but they stayed together near here, not at the refugee camp. They fled because the Burmese forced them to do labour and portering. They fled from #44 and #356, then they went back again but #61 came and forced them to carry heavy things so they fled again. Then the DKBA came and told them if they became DKBA they would be free from harm by the SLORC, so they waited for the DKBA’s help. But the DKBA disappeared. Then the KPA appeared and ordered the Dta La Ku to become soldiers, but the people didn’t want to carry weapons because they knew that even if they didn’t use them to shoot at others, those others would shoot at them.” - “Pa Bway Htoo” (M, 44), Dta La Ku village headman (Interview #4)

Over the decades the Dta La Ku have been caught between many sides in the struggle all trying to coerce or force their support, including the KNU, the DKBA and the SLORC; they usually manage to stay independent, though they have often paid a heavy price for this in the form of retaliations by the Armies of all sides. Now the KPA is trying to force their support; this may be at the instigation of the SPDC, as a way of dividing the Karen population even further. After the KPA was given authority over the area early this year, the four main villages of the Dta La Ku (Kwih Lat Der, Kwih Kler, Maw, and Kyaw Kwa) were ordered to provide family registration lists which had to include the numbers of all Dta La Ku men aged 40 and above, and all those aged 15 to 40. After receiving these lists, the KPA informed the Dta La Ku that they were actually KPA signup lists and that all boys and men aged 15 to 40 would be trained as KPA militia for their villages. Joining an armed group goes directly against the religious beliefs of the Dta La Ku and against their desire to remain above politics, so they refused. It appears that the local SPDC commander stayed out of any open participation in the dispute, but he did not prevent the KPA from increasing the pressure on the Dta La Ku until many of them fled once again to Thailand in April 1998, both from KPA threats and forced labour for SPDC troops.

“To get people into the KPA they didn’t say that people must become KPA, they just said that they wanted to know how many families there are in each village and how old the people are. After that, they said that men 15 to 40 years old must become KPA. Only the Dta La Ku. They will take all, because they already know our number and our ages.” - Dta La Ku village elder (Interview #3)

Since February 1998 Dta La Ku elders have sought a solution to this problem; first they approached the Thai authorities with a proposal to allow the Dta La Ku to stay as refugees in Thailand if life became impossible in Burma, but were answered only with Thai threats and absurd accusations that it was the Dta La Ku who had attacked and burned Huay Kaloke refugee camp. Then they approached the SPDC with a proposal to let them live all together in one or two villages in Burma under a promise that they would take no part on any side of the struggle if the SPDC would only leave them alone; the villages they chose were adjacent to the Thai border, so that if the SPDC should break its promise they could flee to Thailand. At first the local SPDC commander spurned their offer, stating that he is the commander and it was not the place of the Dta La Ku to tell him how to use his power. However, the elders still remain hopeful of this option, perhaps because there is no other, and in the meantime they have convinced the local KPA representatives to stop threatening them and pressuring them to join for the time being. Despite this, it appears that as the situation in Doooplaya becomes more complex the position of the Dta La Ku can only become more and more difficult.

“Now the problem is for the Dta La Ku people. Dta La Ku can’t carry weapons and become soldiers. Everyone knows that we do not make good soldiers. First they came to make the family list [of all families in his village]. But after we gave them our family information, they changed our family list to the KPA list. So we bravely stood up to them and told them that we would never enter into the Peace Army. We told them, ‘If you want to kill us, we agree to die, but we can’t do their “peace” work’. They needed us to become soldiers. They would teach us through their training, they would give us guns. So we said that we couldn’t do work which involves carrying weapons and shooting people. ‘If you kill us we agree to die.’ So they got angry with us and told us that they will report us to Than Shwe and the UN. We said do as you like, if you want to report to Than Shwe, we don’t mind [Than Shwe is Chairman of SPDC]. If you want to kill us we will let you kill us. That is our problem. ... [Another villager added:] Lone Shwe [a KPA officer] said that if we don’t do as the others do, it means we are their enemies. Yes, he said that.” - “Pa Hla Myint” (M, 30+), Dta La Ku villager from Kwih Kler village (Interview #3)

“If you have a gun then others will think you are their enemy, and everyone wants to shoot you. That’s why we don’t want to carry guns. I want to say this. If you are not carrying weapons and I’m not carrying weapons, we see each other and sit together and talk to each other in peace. If you and I are both carrying weapons, then it is not easy for us to sit together. We will have to be afraid of each other and stay far from each other. If neither of us have weapons, we don’t need to be afraid of each other, we will sit closely and talk to each other. So it is not easy for us to answer [to groups which ask them to take sides]. If we carry weapons, the other groups will think about us, “Are they our enemy?” And then they dare not come to sit with us. So we don’t want to do bad things like that. Real peace is to sit together like this.” - Dta La Ku village elder describing the dilemma of the Dta La Ku, who are always being pressured to take up arms for one side or another (Interview #5)

Just how powerful the KPA will become will depend on its usefulness to the SPDC. Currently each village in central Dooplaya has been ordered to provide 2 or 3 KPA recruits or face heavy fines. In recruiting, the KPA refers to some people becoming KPA soldiers and others becoming a KPA ‘people’s militia’. It appears that it plans to operate largely on a village militia basis, sending many of its trainees back to their home villages to exert direct KPA/SPDC control. One of the inducements offered to villagers who join is that they will be posted back in their home villages, although there have been reports that this promise is already being broken. In March some recruits already fled the KPA when their training ended and they discovered they were being sent away from their villages. If the KPA attempts to post soldiers in every village this would probably make life much more difficult for the villagers in terms of forced labour and extortion (particularly given the known corruption of Thu Mu Heh himself), though it may also reduce the number of villages in the central part of the district which SPDC troops would otherwise force to relocate. For example, Thay Pa Taw village was initially forced to move by SLORC/SPDC, but later the KPA told them to return to their village. The SPDC and KPA may decide to impose a system whereby any village which fails to provide KPA recruits is forced to relocate.

Regardless of the KPA’s existence, the number of SPDC troops occupying Dooplaya continues to be very high. Observers and villagers in the area state that the number of SPDC troops has greatly increased since February at Lay Po Hta, directly across the border from the Thai Karen trading village of Ber Kler, and that enough supplies have been brought in for a year or for a significant operation. Until March 1998, the SPDC officers had an agreement with the Thai Border Patrol Police and Thai Army that they and their troops could walk into and out of Ber

Kler village anytime during daylight hours, as long as they wore civilian clothes and were unarmed. Many of them came every day bringing charcoal, stolen cattle, looted furniture and other items to sell, then used the Thai money they obtained to buy alcohol, clothing, and dry or tinned foods to augment their insufficient rations. Ber Kler shopkeepers complained that the soldiers constantly tried to steal small items and slip them into their bags, and that the officers always wore pistols in the backs of their sarongs. Groups of soldiers also crossed the border to steal betelnut from the plantations surrounding the village. A Thai villager's gun was stolen out of the back of his truck, and a Ber Kler shopkeeper was beaten up by a drunken SPDC officer for refusing to sell him more alcohol. The Thai Border Patrol and Army take no action in response to such incidents, "because they are afraid", according to the villagers. Instead, the Thai Border Patrol Police regularly drink together with the SPDC officers. Thai forces have only one post in Ber Kler and they have no post at all on the road which the SPDC forces use to walk into the village.

"We can't trust in Thai soldiers. They do not dare to shoot. They will never shoot, even when their duty is to shoot. ... [At the checkpoint] They are border police. They just sit at their gate which is by the border. They don't dare go into the forest. They're even afraid to stay here in the village! They're not brave." - "Saw Lah Htoo" (M, 24), K--- village, now a shopkeeper in Ber Kler (Interview #5)

Due to fear among the villagers and growing tensions caused by the SPDC's threat to attack and burn Noh Po refugee camp, the Thai forces finally told the SPDC troops not to come into Ber Kler village anymore. However, they can still be seen there, though in smaller numbers, and the Thai forces do nothing about it. There are still no Thai security forces posted on the side of the village closest to the SPDC base. Many villagers and shopkeepers in Ber Kler are very nervous, feeling that the SPDC may want to take Ber Kler and that the Thai Army and the Thai Government have no will to defend it. Half of one hill just outside Ber Kler has already been given to SLORC/SPDC by local Thai forces as an appeasement offer, but this and the other concessions by Thai forces are most likely only seen as signs of weakness by the SPDC commanders across the border and the junta leadership in Rangoon.

Many villagers from the central plain of Dooplaya and the areas closer to the Thai border report that given the choice they would rather flee to Thailand than stay in their villages because of the forced labour, harassment and insecurity under the SPDC occupation. However, they say they are staying in their villages because they are afraid of losing their land and houses if they leave, and because they have heard that no new refugees are being allowed in Thailand. For several months now, SPDC officers have deliberately fed these fears by telling villagers in central Dooplaya that they will soon attack and burn Noh Po refugee camp, particularly if the KNLA attacks them anywhere in this part of Dooplaya.

Noh Po refugee camp lies west of the Thai town of Umphang, about 200 km. south of Mae Sot. It was created in early 1997 to shelter new refugees fleeing the SLORC offensive and subsequent occupation of Dooplaya District. It currently has a population of approximately 10,000. The camp has not yet been attacked, but after attacks on other refugee camps in March 1998 tensions were very high, and this was made worse by the SPDC's open threats to villagers in Dooplaya that they would attack the camp. In the area around the camp in the week leading up to March 27th, Thai soldiers reported that SPDC troops were entering Thailand every day to look for weaknesses in the border defences; each time, the SPDC patrols would continue into Thailand until they were seen by Thai soldiers, then withdraw. The SPDC has ordered the DKBA out of the area across the border from Noh Po; there are a few KPA members there, but not enough to

attack Noh Po. Therefore, if an attack comes it will have to be conducted by SPDC troops using the KPA as a front, or possibly by a DKBA group brought in from elsewhere specially for the attack, as was done in the March 23rd attack on Maw Ker refugee camp.

“The method of the Burmese is that even if they attack, they will always say it was the KPA or DKBA who did it. They will never say it was the Burmese. Even if KPA or DKBA won’t go with them the Burmese will still say it was KPA or DKBA, because they will just mimic the DKBA or the KPA when they attack.” - “Saw Lah Htoo” (M, 24), K--- village, answering who he thinks will conduct the attack on Noh Po (Interview #5)

Thai soldiers in the area have admitted that they cannot effectively defend Noh Po camp, yet the refugees continue to be held in this fenced camp like prisoners, with no permission to leave or reenter. Thai authorities told the refugees in the camp to dig bunkers, and they have done so. Since the end of March, tensions have lessened somewhat as no attack has been forthcoming. However, the camp could still be attacked at any time, and it is important to note that many of the past refugee camp attacks have come just when tensions are at their lowest and people are not expecting them.

Current Thai policy is to deny asylum to all new refugees, and many groups of refugees from Dooplaya have already been forcibly repatriated at gunpoint by Thai troops. In November 1997 one group of new arrivals was refused entry into Noh Po camp by Thai authorities, so they camped out in a remote area of fields and forests at Thay Pu Law Htwee. The Thai Army then camped near them, and before daylight on the morning of November 15th they fired M79 grenades among the refugees, wounding a 60-year-old couple. They then fired small arms, and when the refugees panicked and fled a six-month-old baby was dropped by his mother and died of a broken neck. When it was light, the Thai troops appeared and tried to claim that someone else had done the shooting, even though it had come from their camp. They ordered the refugees to march back toward Burma, and when some refused several of the headmen were tied up and beaten in front of the others. The group was then force-marched all day to a site right on the Burma border and very close to the major SPDC camp at Lay Po Hta. Finally, many of them were allowed into Noh Po much later. However, they were not allowed to build huts and several hundred new arrivals had to live for months through the hottest season of the year in long open shelters with bamboo slat floors, no walls or dividers, and plastic sheeting for a roof. With the current rainy season approaching, they were finally allowed to start building proper huts in the camp.

“When we were sleeping at about 5:40 a.m. they fired their big gun at us. An M79 shell [grenade] fell on a hut and 2 old people about 60 years old were injured. All the innocent people were shocked, ran out of the area and hid in fear. A newborn baby died because he fell to the ground while his mother was running with him. Then we heard the noisy sound of bullets [small arms] being fired. When the daylight came we found out that it was the Thai soldiers who were shooting at us. We looked all around our shelters and cleaned things up. After a while they came to see the place too. They asked the villagers, ‘Who was shooting at you last night?’ The villagers told them that it was them who were shooting at us. Then the Thai soldiers were quiet and didn’t say anything. ... [T]he senior commander arrived at our place and called me and the other headmen. He told us to prepare our things and be ready in one hour to move to another place ... Then the Thai soldiers were angry with the people who wouldn’t obey. They forced them, they tied some of them up and hit some of them. After that they called the villagers together and told us to be quiet. They told the villagers, ‘Now all of you see these three people we have tied up because they were not obeying us. This will happen

to people who do not obey us.’ Then they kicked some people. Finally they called the headmen to come out in front and then ordered them to go in front of the people to lead them. So the villagers were following us. ... The Thais guided us by car but we had to walk. We were walking along like that until noon, and by then we could see that the children were walking with difficulty and they seemed very tired. Some were crying sadly. The women were weeping sadly.” - “Saw Lay Doh” (M, 33), Waw Lu village, describing the shooting by the Thai Army at Thay Pu Law Htwee on November 15th 1997, and the forced move to a dangerous site just a few minutes from the SPDC base at Lay Po Hta (Interview #1)

The situation in Dooplaya appears anything but promising for the villagers. It appears that the SPDC is succeeding in using the KPA as a proxy army, both to exert further control over the villages and to fragment the Karen people. The option of flight to Thailand has been essentially cut off because of forced repatriations by the Thai Army and the threat of attacks on refugees already in Thailand. For most villagers, this means they have little choice but to try to survive under heavy restrictions and an ever-increasing burden of forced labour, extortion, and forced military recruitment. For religious minorities, primarily the Dta La Ku and the Muslims, survival will likely be most difficult of all; not only do they have to carry the same burden as all other villagers in Dooplaya, but they face a long uphill struggle to prevent their lifestyle, culture, and people from being completely wiped out.

“What I really want to say is that I want our brother Burmese to keep the Dta La Ku together in a safe place which is free from portering, forced labour and battle. We don’t want to be soldiers. I can’t understand why they don’t let us have a place like that. Burma is very big and I think that in such a big land there must be a safe place for us somewhere. But we can’t ask them for it because there are no educated people among us who can go and ask them. I hope our English brothers will help us by saying that for us. We are hoping for help from our English brothers.” - “Pa Hla Myint” (M, 30+), Dta La Ku villager from Kwih Kler village (Interview #3)

Index of Interviews

Note: All names of those interviewed have been changed; FL = Forced Labour.

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1	16	"Saw Lay Doh"	M	33	Waw Lu	Fleeing after initial occupation, return to village, SLORC promises, arrest of headmen, FL as porters and at Army camp, demands for weapons, his experience being arrested and tortured for 10 days, release and flight to Thailand, present at Thay Pu Law Htwee shooting by Thai soldiers, forced to move back close to SPDC, conditions in Noh Po
2	19	"Saw Htoo Wah"	M	35	Kwih Lat Der	Dta La Ku villager describes forced labour since occupation, portering, building barracks, DKBA replaced by KPA
3	20	"Pa Hla Myint"	M	30+	Kwih Kler	Dta La Ku villagers reading their notes on events since the occupation, with further explanations by a Dta La Ku elder; destruction of belongings, FL cutting bamboo and making roads, SPDC demands for bullock carts, FL carrying rice, extortion to rebuild a school, arrest and ransoming of cattle traders, SLORC soldiers shooting up the village, FL as sentries and making fences, forced to haul supplies across flooded rivers and carts and bullocks swept away, FL carrying cement, flight and forced repatriation by Thais, villager killed by landmine, forced recruitment of Dta La Ku to KPA, KPA setup and training, convict labour on roads, destruction of villages
4	25	"Pa Bway Htoo"	M	44	xxxx	Dta La Ku village headman describes flight of villagers after occupation, increasing repression after villagers returned home, arrests and demands for weapons, extortion, looting, FL portering cement and resulting injuries and sickness, second flight of more people from villages, promises of DKBA to improve things, disappearance of DKBA, forced recruitment of Dta La Ku by KPA, desertions of KPA soldiers, decision of Dta La Ku elders to seek a safe place in Burma, extortion and threats by KNU/KNLA, threats and slander of Dta La Ku by Thai official

<u>#</u>	<u>Pg.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Village</u>	<u>Subject</u>
5	30	"Saw Lah Htoo" "Pa Lah"	M M	24 35	K--- xxxx	Shopkeeper in Thai Karen border village of Ber Kler tells news from Dooplaya villagers and traders; SPDC forcing all villagers in Kyaikdon to pay for their own land and many to put on metal roofing, bulldozing betelnut plantations in Kyaikdon, looting of betelnut, coconuts, and chickens, FL on roads, extortion of fuel money for road-building bulldozers, forced relocations, restrictions on movement, arrest/torture, persecution of Muslims, KPA recruitment, KPA vs. DKBA, SPDC troops in Ber Kler, stealing betelnut and shop goods in Thailand, SPDC officers carrying pistols and beating a shopkeeper in Thailand, commandeering of villagers' cars to carry SPDC supplies, destruction of a car and death of a child due to KNLA landmine, SPDC threats to attack Noh Po refugees, lack of Thai security, desperation of Dooplaya villagers
6	36	"Naw Eh Ghay"	F	53	Meh Tharaw Hta	Noh Po refugee who repeatedly returned to Dooplaya; rotating forced labour of villagers, brutal treatment of convicts brought for road labour, forced relocations, arrest and ransom of Kya In villagers, extortion of food and money
7	37	"Pa Boe"	M	30	Kwih Kler	Dta La Ku villager; FL as porters and sentries so often that they fled, discrimination against Dta La Ku in Kwih Kler
8	39	"Saw Beh Htoo"	M	28	Kwih Kalay	Flight to Thailand after occupation due to problems, KPA entering Thailand to convince people to return
9	39	"Saw Lay Ghay"	M	30+	Noh Dah Kee	Flight from his village due to daily FL carrying rocks to build a SLORC base and carrying SLORC rations, mistrust of KPA
10	40	KHRG monitor			Dooplaya	Field reports from KHRG human rights monitor, obtained from villagers and KNLA intelligence; arrests of villagers, 5 villagers beaten to death on 17 and 18 May 1998, FL on a road bridge near Kyaikdon, capture and beating of villagers to be porters, demands for money, forbidding villagers from going to fields, hunger and rising meat prices due to looting

Interviews

#1.

NAME: “Saw Lay Doh” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 33
Karen Christian farmer/teacher
FAMILY: Married, 6 children aged 8 months to 6 years
ADDRESS: Waw Lu village, Dooplaya District
INTERVIEWED: 4/98

[“Saw Lay Doh” arrived in Thailand in late 1997 and was present when the Thai Army fired on refugees at Thay Pu Law Htwee. He and many of the others were finally allowed into Noh Po refugee camp, but at the time of the interview they were still living in long open shelters because Thai authorities had not allowed them to build proper huts.]

Q: Can you tell me about the situation of your village?

A: In February 1997, SLORC troops from #22 [Division], Battalion #206, camped in Waw Lu village and they called the villagers who had fled from the village during the fighting to come back to the village. They said to us that they had not come to kill or make problems for the people, that they had come to make peace. Then the villagers all came back. After that they held a meeting with the villagers in the monastery of Waw Lu, and they said “Come and give us your arms; we won’t do anything to those who give us their arms.” They pressed the villagers to hand over some weapons. So finally the villagers had to show them the guns of the village defence force [*villagers armed by the KNLA to defend their village*]. But after that they still accused and pressured the people to give them more arms. They said to some village headmen, “You have guns and walkie-talkies, so you must give us all of them.” They frightened those village headmen until they had to give up whatever they were hiding. After that they asked the village headmen to build a new school. The villagers cut wood and bamboo and built the school and fenced it. After that they called for teachers and let them teach there for a month in April. There were 4 teachers, I was one of them.

Q: What about the villagers who had no guns to give them?

A: After they made their camp, they forced the villagers who had no guns to carry their things as porters. They had to carry bullets and rations when the soldiers went from place to place to find their enemies. Each person must carry 3 big tins of rice. We saw some people who got wounds on their backs. Their backs were bruised. Sometimes they had to carry for 3 days, sometimes 4 days. While they were carrying the heavy things the soldiers forced them to run. If they could not run the soldiers kicked their buttocks. If people couldn’t understand their language [*Burmese*] when they gave orders the soldiers hit them too. The villagers who came back from portering explained that it was very hard for them to suffer it. I know a person who had to carry to Po Theh. The Burmese soldiers asked him a question but he could not understand Burmese language, so they hurt him. They hit him with the butt of their gun.

My nephew once came back from portering for the Burmese soldiers, and at my house he told me how the soldiers had forced him to carry heavy things for 4 days. He showed me

his wounded back which was really badly bruised. His name is Saw E---. He told me that he had to climb up the mountains while carrying heavy things, and that when they went to Meh K'Waw it made him cry because it was such hard work. There was another man from Po Yay village whose name was Saw Eh Wah, and he had to climb up the hills with heavy things for the Burmese soldiers to pass through Maw Law Ee way. While he was going he became sweaty and exhausted from carrying the heavy things. At last his foot slipped and he fell down to the foot of the mountain. His load was still up on the path. He was going to die but nobody took care of him. Everyone passed him by. That's why we can say that their behaviour is terrible toward the villagers. Saw Eh Wah is about 40 years old. He is better now.

Ever since they started to settle down in Waw Lu they've forced the villagers to do labour every day. There is no payment. They never give food, and they never give medicine. They force the villagers to dig bunkers and to work for them in Kyaikdon, but the villagers must take along their own rice. If they don't take their own rice then they have to go hungry. And they always ask the villagers, "Have any of you seen any of the arms that people are hiding?"

Q: Why did you have to flee the village?

A: As for my situation, while they were staying there they accused me of working for the outside people [KNLA]. They said I was breaking their law so they would arrest me. I was a teacher. At that time the school had already closed. They arrested me and interrogated me about the places where the KNLA were hiding, and I answered that I had not seen them. Then they punched my jaw once on each side and asked me to wait there. Later they said to each other that they would keep me to pressure me some more and would tie me up. Then they tied me up with rope. They tied my hands tightly behind me and made me lay on my belly, then they interrogated me again. This time only one person was interrogating me. He asked me, "Isn't it true that you have guns and a radio?" I said, "No, I've never had those kinds of things". Then he told me, "Your education supervisor Kaw Mu surrendered to us with weapons, and he told us that you have guns and a radio." I answered to him, "No, that is not right. If you don't believe me then you can ask everybody in the village. This is all I have to say. When you ask everyone you will hear the truth." Then they tied me up for 10 days and beat me badly until I had to sleep with blood all over my body every night. They punched my nose twice, and blood was running down from my nose. They beat my body as well. They punched me in the chest, left, right, left... They punched me in my head and on my temples. Both of my shins were beaten with a big stick. They tied me up tightly, made me lay down and then beat me badly on both shins until both of my shins were completely bruised. That was the most painful thing I ever had to bear. Finally they told me that if my friends and I could show them just 5 bullets then they would surely set us free at once. We said, "There is no way we could show you that", and then they left us.

Later they came back and told us that they would kill us because we had broken their law. They told us that if we could find just one gun for them then they would set us free at once. We answered again that we could not find them anything like that. Then they said they would put us in jail if we could not find one. We were quiet because there was

nothing we could say. Those 10 days they never let the village headman or elders come to vouch for us. Even our relatives could only give us rice through their soldiers. The soldiers brought the rice to us and then took the plates back to our children or wives. After ten days they allowed the headman to vouch for us. First they called T--- [*the other villager being held*] and untied him. They called him out for a while, then they came again and untied me and asked me to get up into the house there. They asked me, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yes I am okay." Then they wrote on a piece of paper that they were setting us free under the assurances of the village headman. They asked the village headman to put his signature on it and then they set us free. We arrived home at night and my body was filthy. Then I saw my mother who had come and been waiting for me for four days already, worrying about me until she could not even sleep or eat. She was very happy to see me.

I saw that since I had been taken there [*since his arrest*] they were forcing the villagers to work harder and harder all the time. I knew it wasn't possible for me to stay, so I had to prepare to come here secretly. When I came, the problem was that I couldn't bring any food or belongings like cookpots because I had to carry my children who are too small to run.

Q: Did you have any trouble when you arrived in Thailand?

A: The trouble when I arrived in Thailand was that we camped in an area and suddenly the Thai Army came and camped right near us. A Thai Army officer came to me and asked me, "Don't you think you should dig bunkers here?" I answered him, "If we need to dig them we'll dig them tomorrow". He told me that the DKBA or KPA may attack so we should be cautious. Then they went back to their place. We talked about it with each other in our huts until late, and then we slept. When we were sleeping at about 5:40 a.m. they fired their big gun at us. An M79 shell [*grenade*] fell on a hut and 2 old people about 60 years old were injured. All the innocent people were shocked, ran out of the area and hid in fear. A newborn baby died because he fell to the ground while his mother was running with him. Then we heard the noisy sound of bullets [*small arms*] being fired. When the daylight came we found out that it was the Thai soldiers who were shooting at us. We looked all around our shelters and cleaned things up. After a while they came to see the place too. They asked the villagers, "Who was shooting at you last night?" The villagers told them that it was them who were shooting at us. Then the Thai soldiers were quiet and didn't say anything. [*This is the shooting that occurred at Thay Pu Law Htwee on November 15th 1997.*]

Shortly after that they asked the villagers to fix up a bridge which leads to Kwih Hta, so the villagers built up the log bridge. When we had finished building the bridge we went home and ate our meal. After that the [*Thai Army*] senior commander arrived at our place and called me and the other headmen. He told us to prepare our things and be ready in one hour to move to another place, which we would reach by passing through Kwih Lat Taw. I told the people to get ready, but some people were not obeying me and they asked me "Why are you doing this?" Then the Thai soldiers were angry with the people who wouldn't obey. They forced them, they tied some of them up and hit some of them. After that they called the villagers together and told us to be quiet. They told the

villagers, “Now all of you see these three people we have tied up because they were not obeying us. This will happen to people who do not obey us.” Then they kicked some people. Finally they called the headmen to come out in front and then ordered them to go in front of the people to lead them. So the villagers were following us.

The Thais guided us by car but we had to walk. We were walking along like that until noon, and by then we could see that the children were walking with difficulty and they seemed very tired. Some were crying sadly. The women were weeping sadly. We kept on going, then we took a rest for a while and then we kept on going again. When we reached the foot of the mountain near the place where they were going to keep us, the sun was already going down. We settled down there and started cooking some food to eat. Some people had not brought any food but others had, so we shared with each other what we had. By the time we finished cooking the children were crying because they were so hungry. After we fed them they went to sleep under the trees for the night because it was already late.

Q: When you arrived in Noh Po did you have any more problems?

A: There was no problem except that we could not build houses *[the Thai authorities would not allow it]*. Those of us who had no houses had to live in a barracks. *[A long bamboo shelter with no walls, covered in plastic sheeting; the Thai authorities forced them to live like this for 4-6 months.]* I think that now we will get a chance to build houses because one or two days ago they allowed us to go and get bamboo for flooring from Thay Pu Law Su. I believe that we will be able to build houses soon.

Q: Is it different here than in your village?

A: It is a little different. When we stay here we receive good care and good food, we don't need to do forced labour and we can help each other however we're able. When we were in our village the SLORC Army persecuted us and forced us to do labour without any payment, we even needed to bring our own food. We have already decided to go back when there is peace in Burma, but we will never go back before there is change there.

NAME: “Saw Htoo Wah” #2. **SEX:** M **AGE:** 35
Karen Dta La Ku farmer
FAMILY: Married, 2 children
ADDRESS: Kwih Lat Der village, Dooplaya District
INTERVIEWED: 20/2/98

[When interviewed “Saw Htoo Wah” was staying in a hut near a Dta La Ku village in Thailand.]

Q: When did you arrive here?

A: Five months ago. We came because the Burmese persecuted us until we couldn't stay in our own village anymore, so we came to live here near our religious centre.

Q: How did they persecute you?

A: They forced us to work for them. They told us that they would go just over there [*a short distance*], but then they made us go for 2 to 3 days. They forced us to carry very heavy things. Although we could not carry the things, we had to try hard until we could. We had to carry bags of cement, or bullets, rice and other food. We had to carry anything that they needed us to carry for them. They came and commanded the headman, and the headman called us. Because we love peace and we wanted to live in our village peacefully, we went and obeyed their orders whenever our village headman told us to go. Thirty people from Kwih Lat Der village had to go to do that. One person from each family.

Q: How many houses were there in Kwih Lat Der village?

A: About 30 houses I think. If people had not run away, there would have been more than that. For portering, not only the people from Kwih Lat Der had to go; the people from Kwih Kler, Kwih Chit Mu, Meh Tharaw Hta, and Maw had to go together. There were more than 100 porters on the trip. That trip was the very worst. I didn't count the times I had to go, but it was many times. Sometimes it took one day, sometimes one day and one night. When I was there I had to go 2 to 3 days at a time, or 3 to 4 days at a time. It was never the same. They told us they would only go for one day, and sometimes they really went for one day. Sometimes they spoke the truth, but often they did not. They always said to us that they would go to a nearby place, but sometimes they went to very far places. From Kwih Lat Der to Htee Hta Baw, from Maw to Kwih Lat Der, K'Yeh Theh to Kwih Lat Der, Kyaw Kwa to Kwih Lat Der.

Q: When did they start ordering you to be porters?

A: Since they started to come. They came last April [*1997*]. They have been forcing us ever since they came. When they arrived in the village all the villagers fled, so they called the villagers back into the village. At first they did not use the villagers as porters, but after the villagers had all been back in the village for a while they started. First they forced us to build buildings for them, then when that was finished they started using us as porters.

Q: Where was the Burmese battalion camp?

A: Their main camp is in Saw Hta [*Azin*]. They also had a camp in Kwih Lat Der and a camp in Ber Kler. And another in Pu Kler. The big men [*senior officers*] are living in Saw Hta. Their troops are changing often. One group comes up for 2-4 months and then they change. Right now [*Infantry*] Battalion 62 is living there.

Q: Are they building a road in Kwih Lat Der area?

A: Not yet. They're not building a road yet.

Q: Are there any DKBA soldiers in your village?

A: No, the DKBA has already left by now. There are KPA living there. When I was in my village they hadn't come yet, but now they are living in my village. Some people

who go back and forth to our village told us that the KPA are in our village, walking around together with Burmese soldiers.

Q: I've heard that more than 2,000 people from Kwih Lat Der and Kwih Kler came to live here, but now more than 1,000 of them have gone back again, so why don't you go back?

A: Some people are still living here and some have gone back. My whole family is here. I won't go back yet, because we are worried about the problems they will make for us. That is why we dare not go back. I'm not sure how long I'll be here.

#3.

NAME: "Pa Hla Myint"
Karen Dta La Ku farmer

SEX: M **AGE:** 30+

ADDRESS: Kwih Kler village, Dooplaya District

INTERVIEWED: 20/2/98

[This interview was conducted with a group of villagers who had just left Kwih Kler village a few days earlier. In the first part of the interview, "Pa Hla Myint" read from his notes on events that had happened, which he had written on very small and concealable index cards. He kept his notes in the form of a 'Ta', a traditional Karen poem. The rhythm of the Ta does not translate into English, so we have translated his words without the rhythm.]

Listen from the beginning to the end please.

At the end of January 1997 we had to flee, we lost our things and our things were destroyed. We became poorer until we were not happy to farm to earn our livelihood. The things we had lost were: 5300 pounds of salt; 13 baskets full of rice; 3 big tins of rice; a new bullock cart. After that we came back to our village to live again. When we lived in our house again, we again lost one mat; one big tin of rice; one pot; a pair of slippers; a bottle of kerosene; one basket. Moreover, we had to go and cut bamboo, and dig the road with our own hands. We had to dig out the mud on both sides of the road. We had to cut a lot of bamboo until there was enough to use *[to build the SLORC camp]*; we had to find bullock carts until we had enough carts. The carts, the cars, the elephants and motor-carts *[small 3-wheeled tractors]* could never rest. After that, in the second week of April they again needed four bullock carts with four people for one week to go to get the sand and brick to build pagodas. After that they could go back home. We must write down about every occurrence in our notes to tell our neighbours and friends. In Ber Kler which is near the border, they ordered 20 people from Meh Naw Dah to go and carry rice for the Burmese three times. The last time, there were about 300 small sacks of rice which were carried by 48 people. In each sack there were three big tins of rice *[50 kg/110 lb]*. They used us to carry rice as their slaves.

When #231 *[Infantry Battalion]* arrived in our place, they forced the people to build their bunkers, and to carry stones before building the bunkers. They ordered 40 bullock carts

from us. We couldn't give 40 bullock carts because we never had them. So we had to gather our money and hire a truck. The weight of the big stones was 1800 pounds. So it was not easy to carry.

The school was still good but they were not satisfied. They ordered us to take off all the zinc [*roofing*] to build the school in another place. Then the zinc was not enough for the new school. So they ordered every villager to give money to them for the zinc. Each family had to give 400 kyats. The poor people who have no money had to borrow from their neighbours or sell their things to give 400 to them. So it was a difficult thing for the poor people.

Another thing had to do with the farm-animal traders. They like to buy and sell farm animals because they get a good income, but their problem is that the SLORC disturbs them. At night the SLORC soldiers would arrest the traders. Some traders were clever and hid with their animals in the deep forest, so the soldiers could only arrest some of the traders. The traders who were safe were happy but the traders who were captured by the SLORC soldiers had to give a lot of money: 10,000 kyats to the SLORC soldiers to be free. At night time the traders would not sleep, they would eat *myin say* [*an amphetamine-type drug*] and think about what they could do to earn a living. The SLORC stopped them from trading their farm animals. If the SLORC could capture them, they would have to pay 10,000 kyats to save themselves. So I don't want my people, my friends, to do this job.

13th of May [1997], Tuesday night.

At 10 o'clock the Burmese showed a movie for the villagers to watch. A few minutes passed by and they turned off the movie projector and shot their guns, and they shot their heavy weapons four times. The shells fell in the village. Two shells exploded but the other two did not. Then they fired Chinese rockets many times [*107mm Chinese ground-fired rockets*]. Then they said that the villagers were trying to attack them, but actually the villagers didn't do that. They were just looking for a way to lay fault with the Dta La Ku.

They force four people to take turns doing sentry duty. The people have to make fences for the SLORC; have to porter and have to do the work that the SLORC orders them to do. In rainy season Mae Naw Dah river was flooded. They ordered people to go and carry things with their bullock carts. They forced the bullocks to cross the river with the carts, through the flowing river. So the cart and the bullocks started floating away with the water. The people had to cut off the rope tied around the necks of their bullocks. It took 100 people to help those bulls and carts. In August 1997 Karen people, both Sgaw and Pwo, had to suffer big problems. The problem was going from Meh Tharaw Hta monastery to Htee Hta Baw village. One bag was 1 *mer* 8 *viss* heavy [*1 viss=1.6 kg, 1 mer = 10 viss; i.e. 18 viss, a total weight of 28.8 kg/63.3 lb*]. We had to carry those cement bags. Then we ran away to escape from the problems. So we ran over to Thailand. The Thai soldiers drove us back to Burma which filled us with despair. We went back the first time and it got worse for us. We went back the second time and we

reaped our paddy [*refugees in this area were forced back to Burma several consecutive times by the 9th Division of the Thai First Army*]. Some were finished but some were not finished yet. After three days a land mine exploded and Paw Eh Pa died. He was Dta La Ku. We honoured his body by cremating him. He stepped on the landmine when he went to his own crop early in the morning, about half past five on the 3rd of January 1998. Everyone in the village knew about that. His coconut crop became the Burmese soldiers' crop. He had to die for his crop, so we pitied him a lot.

After every harvest the SLORC [*SPDC*] soldiers don't allow us to dry our paddy, so we villagers are in trouble because we have no rice to eat. We have to be hungry. In 1998 on the 5th of February, we cooked *yah hu* in the big wok [*a mixture of 'beh ee' sticky rice, sesame, coconut, oil, peanuts and other ingredients turned slowly in a wok until crispy brown as a festive snack; usually done by the whole community together at this one time each year*]. But a problem occurred. The monk told us that we all must not eat *Yah Hu*. He said, "If you want to eat it, go back and cook *Yah Hu* in your own house". He ordered us to put water on the fire, to blow out the fire and to beat the big jars and pots into pieces. He told us that everyone must bring the food to the monastery. Anyone who did not bring their food would get his name written on a list by the monk. [*The SPDC troops had probably ordered the monk to hand over all the 'yah hu' to them.*] That is the end of my notes.

[*Note: in the continuation of the interview below, the 'second man' is another villager from Kwih Kler, and the 'third man' is a village elder in the area.*]

Q: When did you leave Kwih Kler and come here?

"Pa Hla Myint": Three days ago. Right now the Burmese are doing nothing. It is better than it was in rainy season. Now the problem is for the Dta La Ku people. Dta La Ku can't carry weapons and become soldiers. Everyone knows that we do not make good soldiers. First they came to make the family list [*of all families in his village*]. But after we gave them our family information, they changed our family list to the KPA list. Thirty-one households of Dta La Ku put their family names on the list but later they said that it was not a family list but a Peace Army list. They said the families who are on their list must become soldiers. So we bravely stood up to them and told them that we would never enter into the Peace Army. We told them, "If you want to kill us, we agree to die, but we can't do their 'peace' work". They needed us to become soldiers. They would teach us through their training, they would give us guns. So we said that we couldn't do work which involves carrying weapons and shooting people. "If you kill us we agree to die." We don't want to go into battle. So they got angry with us and told us that they will report us to Than Shwe and the UN. We said do as you like, if you want to report to Than Shwe, we don't mind [*Than Shwe is Chairman of SPDC*]. If you want to kill us we will let you kill us, but we must not go into battle in our lifetimes. That is our problem.

Second man: Lone Shwe [*a KPA officer*] said that if we don't do as the others do, it means we are their enemies. Yes, he said that.

Third man: First the KPA told us that they wanted to know how many families of Dta La Ku are in each village: Kwih Kler, Maw, Kwih Lat Der and Kyaw Kwa. They needed to know how many men 40 years old and above there were, and how many men and boys between 15 and 40 years old. After they knew this information they told us that every male person between 15 and 40 years old must become a KPA soldier. They hadn't told us that at first. That is why we are not happy.

"Pa Hla Myint": To get people into the KPA they didn't say that people must become KPA, they just said that they wanted to know how many families there are in each village and how old the people are. After that, they said that men 15 to 40 years old must become KPA. Only the Dta La Ku. They will take all, because they already know our number and our ages.

Third man: After that when they started to collect the names for soldiers they lied to us by saying that many Dta La Ku people from Maw already joined the KPA, and when they came to Kwih Lat Der they said that many people from Kwih Kler had already joined. The people from Kwih Lat Der and Kwih Kler couldn't understand anything that was going on. Only when we met each other and talked together did we know that no one had wanted to join and that they had lied to us. They said, "People who won't obey our orders must become our enemies".

Second man: Because of this 43 Dta La Ku people from Maw and 12 people from Kwih Lat Der joined the KPA at first. The KPA said that people who did not join KPA as others already had must be their enemies.

Q: Do you think that KPA and KNLA are fighting with each other now?

Third man: If the KNLA comes and shoots them, I'm sure that they will shoot the KNLA back. If you have a gun then others will think you are their enemy, and everyone wants to shoot you. That's why we don't want to carry guns. I want to say this. If you are not carrying weapons and I'm not carrying weapons, we see each other and sit together and talk to each other in peace. If you and I are both carrying weapons, then it is not easy for us to sit together. We will have to be afraid of each other and stay far from each other. If neither of us have weapons, we don't need to be afraid of each other, we will sit closely and talk to each other. So it is not easy for us to answer *[to groups which ask them to take sides]*. If we carry weapons, the other groups will think about us, "Are they our enemy?" And then they dare not come to sit with us. So we don't want to do bad things like that. Real peace is to sit together like this.

Q: How many KPA soldiers do you think there are now?

Third man: The KPA is really quite new so there are no more than 300 soldiers who have passed the training. Most people are not interested in the KPA. There were 12 people from Ker Kee village who joined. The KPA recruits have already gone for training now, but none of the Dta La Ku people have gone. We already held a meeting with them and told them that the Dta La Ku can't become soldiers. They reported it to the Burmese operations commander, but he told them, "I won't crush the Dta La Ku by forcing them to join the army, because they are practicing their religion which prohibits

holding arms”. But the KPA leader said that the people who live in this area must not remain separate from the KPA. He never agrees with the operations commander. So the Burmese commander told him, “I can’t do it, but if you can do it, go ahead”. The KPA commander said he would go ahead. We are angry with him because he is our own nationality. When we went for a meeting with him the other day, they talked about the militia, nothing else. They said the Dta La Ku must join the KPA or its militia.

Q: How do the KPA get bullets and food?

Third man: They get all of it from the Burmese. They have their own camp at Saw Hta [Azin]. Their headquarters used to be the Saw Hta women’s office [*the Karen Women’s Organisation, connected to the KNU, had its office there before the SLORC occupation in February 1997*].

When they called the first meeting to build up the KPA, they explained that the villages along Ser Yah Kloh and Ta May Kloh [*rivers*] belong to the KPA and Burmese, so they said they will develop the villages there to become towns. They will develop the road so they can travel in all seasons. They will do logging, and they said they will share the money with the villagers. They said they will destroy the KNU because it gives problems to SLORC and makes villagers become soldiers. They said if there is no KNU there will be peace in the area, so if we see some KNU people we must send them to the KPA to become KPA.

Q: Are the Burmese or KPA working on the motor roads?

Third man: In Saw Hta they’re working on the car road, but they haven’t finished it to Kwih Kler yet. They came up from Rangoon and Moulmein to Kya In Seik Gyi, then on to Ber Kler and the border. The children counted 31 trucks but we heard that the number is really more than that. We heard 50 to 60 trucks were coming. 31 trucks reached the border so far. Five of them were 4-wheel drives; three of those carried Burmese soldiers, and two of them carried KPA. We heard that the new road will go to Kyo G’Lee and Kwih Ta Khoh. They’ve brought 500 prisoners to help them. They brought them from the jails in town. They’re using both machines and people to build the roads.

Q: I heard that the SPDC wants to build a road from Saw Hta to Htee Hta Baw.

Third man: Yes, they have plans but it has not started yet. They will start at Kya In Seik Gyi and build to Saw Hta and Ber Kler. They also want to build an all-season road to Htee Hta Baw. I heard that they’ll need 500 people to build that road, but we haven’t seen it yet.

Q: Have you heard any news from Htee Hta Baw area [*further south, toward 3 Pagodas Pass*]?

Third man: Many of the villages have been destroyed between here and there, such as Htee Mu Ku, Lay Wah Chut, Kyaw Kwa, and Kyay Loh Neh. There are no people in Htee Hta Baw, Htee Po Chut and Htee Po Maw. The SPDC stays around there now. It is in Waw Raw township. Down there the people still stay in the villages near the Thanbyuzayat road [*to Three Pagodas Pass*], but I heard that they have many problems. They have to be afraid of both SPDC and KNU.

Q: Do the SPDC stay in Kwih Lat Der now?

Third man: Yes, they are camped in Kwih Lat Der right now. They have about thirty or forty troops. Their Battalion number is 62. They stay with the KPA. There are four KPA there. Those KPA used to be KNLA soldiers, but then the SLORC arrested them and they went to be DKBA for a while, and now they have become KPA and they stay with the SPDC troops. There are about 47 houses in Kwih Lat Der. Some villagers are still staying there; for example, if there are 4 or 5 people in a family then maybe 2 or 3 of them have fled to Thailand and the others are still in Kwih Lat Der. Now our people are in a terrible situation from all sides. We must be afraid of the Thais as well as the Burmese.

Q: How do you feel to stay here?

“Pa Hla Myint”: It’s nice for us to stay here but the problem is food. If we had enough food here we would never go back to our village to see their faces again.

Second man: The people from here sent us back to our village because they didn’t have food to share with us. We’d rather not go back. We’ll try to live here and just go back to our village to get our food stocks and bring them here.

“Pa Hla Myint”: The people from our village taunt us, they say, “Look, the squirrels are coming to steal food. They are thieves.” They call us “squirrels” because of our hair. *[The Dta La Ku are a minority in Kwih Kler and are sometimes persecuted by other Karens; they wear their hair long, tied in a top knot.]* We feel upset to hear that, but we pretend that we don’t hear. We go on and retrieve our food.

Second man: You can call us thieves, but we never steal other people’s things. We only go back to steal our own food from our own farms.

Q: Do you want to say anything else?

“Pa Hla Myint”: What I really want to say is that I want our brother Burmese to keep the Dta La Ku together in a safe place which is free from portering, forced labour and battle. We don’t want to be soldiers. I can’t understand why they don’t let us have a place like that. Burma is very big and I think that in such a big land there must be a safe place for us somewhere. But we can’t ask them for it because there are no educated people among us who can go and ask them. I hope our English brothers will help us by saying that for us. We are hoping for help from our English brothers.

NAME: “Pa Bway Htoo” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 44
Karen Dta La Ku farmer **#4.**
FAMILY: Married, 7 children
ADDRESS: On the Burma-Thai border by Dooplaya District
INTERVIEWED: 23/3/98

["Pa Bway Htoo" is a Dta La Ku village elder who often has to negotiate with all sides in the conflict.]

I will explain to you the things that have happened in the past, about KNU and SLORC over time through the years. These things give problems to the villagers. The villagers have to suffer between KNU and SLORC, many kinds of difficult things. Sometimes SLORC or KNU groups do what their leaders order them to do but sometimes they do not do as their leaders order, so the people who live near the border have had to suffer difficulties many times. As for me, I live along the border so I have to see and hear these problems. It makes me sad and I have pity on the people who have to suffer these problems. I want to tell about what happened first, when the SLORC came. At that time, we were near the border and many people from many villages such as Kwih Kler, Meh Naw Dah Hta, Lay Th'Ray, Tee Po Khaw, Maw, Tee Ler Baw, Kay Ghaw, Heh Kyaw Kwa and Meh Ger ran away to escape from the dangerous bullets and shells exchanged between KNU and SLORC. The villagers were afraid and ran away because they could not stand it. Some people arrived in Noh Po [*refugee camp*] but the people who were very close to the border did not go, because they wanted to make peace, to live in their own villages to farm and to earn their living in their own country. When there will be peace in their country, at that time we will go to visit them.

I am the village headman from xxxx and I have a lot of pity for the people when I see that they have to suffer these problems. So I went to visit the Second in Command of #44 [*Light Infantry Division; actually just the 2nd in command of the 44 Division troops in that area*] named Aung Kyaw Nyunt; the name of their Colonel is Than Lwin. They welcomed us nicely and told me, "Tell the people who fled to Thailand to come back and farm their fields in their own villages". Then I went to Kwih Lat Der and held a meeting there with the headmen and the people, and told them what I had been told. The people who heard that were satisfied and happy, so they went back to their own villages. The people who'd fled on foot went back on foot, and the people who had fled on bullock carts went back with their bullock carts and their cattle. The people who had some possessions hired cars and went back with warm hearts and lived in their villages happily.

The time passed by and #44 went back, then #22 [*Light Infantry Division*] and #356 [*Light Infantry Battalion*] came instead. Their leaders forced the people to work for them. The labour was not so hard, but the worst thing was that they arrested people and forced them to look for weapons after they had tied them up. Then they interrogated the frightened people. Some people were not what the soldiers accused them of, but they were very afraid and the soldiers forced them to confess anyway, and then they were into big problems until they couldn't stand it. The soldiers persecuted them in many ways, and they forced people to give their livestock, to sell them their cattle and buffaloes and to give taxes to them. The people had to give the taxes but they didn't really know to whom they should give them. If they gave them to one man, another man arrested them.

So, we were living near the border and we were sad to hear about them. During the #356 time they persecuted the people and many people were hurt. The name of the #356 Battalion Commander was Ohn Lwin and the commanders who raped and persecuted

many people were Htoo Kya and A'Saw Myo Htet. First Htoo Kya was living in Kwih Lat Der and Yaw K'Daw, then he went to live in Lay Th'Ray and persecuted a lot of people. Once he met a man who was a fool [*mentally handicapped*] and he asked the man, "Do you have a weapon? Have you seen the place where the KNU hides their weapons?" Then the fool answered, "Yes, I saw". Htoo Kya asked, "Where was it?", and the man answered, "Up on the rock" [*it was a small limestone cliff*]. After a while he saw a farmer coming back from his farm and he told commander Htoo Kya, "I can't climb up that rock, but that man can climb up the rock because he was the one who put the weapons up there, so he knows better than I do". Then Htoo Kya captured the farmer and forced him to seek the weapons up on the rock. But he didn't know and he couldn't find anything, so Htoo Kya kicked him off the rock and he fell. His name was Saw Chit Heh. They killed him, he was from Lay Th'Ray village.

Another man named Saw Ku climbed up a dogfruit tree to get some dogfruit. Unfortunately he fell and broke his leg. He went to a traditional healer named Maung Yo Yeh. Maung Yo Yeh cured the broken leg with holy oil over which mantras had been recited. The Burmese heard about it, and they said "This *nga pway* [*'ringworm', i.e. KNLA*] soldier came back from the frontline battle and that traditional healer cured him". I testified that what they said was not true, because there was no battle wound on Saw Ku's leg. It really was broken by falling from the tree. Then they threatened the village headman that they would kill him because he had allowed a *nga pway* soldier to be cured. They said if the headman didn't want to die he must give them 50,000 kyats. The headman was afraid of them but he couldn't do anything. He asked them to go and see the place where Saw Ku had fallen down but they wouldn't go. He asked them to go and look at the leg of Saw Ku but they wouldn't go. They just asked for money. So the villagers helped him by collecting 50,000 kyats, and they gave that money to Htoo Kya. When the Burmese got 50,000 kyats they went away and stopped making problems for him.

So, the civil servants are working at politics. The Burmese say that they must rule over people in their country and that what they are doing is for the people in their country. The Thais also say the same, and if we look carefully we see that they rule over their people and persecute them terribly also. So we who live on the border are very sad to see the people on both sides suffering terrible things.

Afterwards #61 [*Infantry Battalion*] came, and they forced the people to work very hard but the people tried to do it anyway. They forced the people to carry cement from Ber Kler to Htee Hta Baw [*over 20 km/12 miles as the crow flies, much farther on land*], at night time in the rainy season when the river was flooded. So the people were in trouble. Some came back ill. Some coughed up blood, and some were vomiting with blood. Some had wounds on their backs and others had wounds on their sides. We had pity on them when we saw them. Before they started carrying some people asked the soldiers, "It's too heavy, we can't carry this. Will we be able to carry this?" Then the soldiers kicked them and said, "Why do you ask before carrying?" Before they crossed the river some people asked, "If we cross the river will the cement get wet?" Then the soldiers slapped their faces and said, "Why do you ask before you cross the river?" Then when

the people crossed the river and the cement got wet they kicked them and hit them again and said, “Don’t you know that the cement will be destroyed and we can’t use it if it gets wet?” They hurt many people that time. The commander who forced the people to carry cement is Kyay Lay Oo. He abused many people at that time.

So people saw that the Burmese all behave differently. Each one of them works differently and has different rules. If we look for the source we see that they all get their orders from the same leaders, but they come and order the people around differently. The people couldn’t stand it anymore so they fled for the second time. The people from Kwih Kler, Meh Tharaw Hta, Pu Chit Mu, Ter Wah Law, Lay Th’Ray, and Tee Po Khaw all fled because the Burmese persecuted those people, forced them to work as forced labourers and to be porters. We had pity on those people when we saw them in such a bad situation. After that there were more people from faraway places who fled here, because they were in a terrible situation too. We had not seen them before, because they lived far from us. We didn’t know what kind of problems they’d had to suffer. But we knew that they were in a very bad situation because they came from many villages, such as Yah Ther Hta, Noh Maw Po, Waw Lu, Klaw Day, Lay Po Hta, Na Htee Kloh, and from many other villages that we didn’t even know the names of! Also Meh Dter, Meh Ku, Htee Ka Bprah, Toh Doh Neh, many villages. Some fled up here to live with us, and some fled onward to other places too. They fled into Thailand but they couldn’t get into Noh Po refugee camp. They were coming from faraway places, and people let them stay along the pathways. It was very hard for them to get food. They were in poverty. So we looked at them and had pity on them, and we were very disappointed with the people who rule over the population. When they lived in Burma the Burmese persecuted them. When they went to stay in Thailand, the Thai didn’t love them either. We saw the Thais push them up and down and hit them until they were wounded. They ran to Baw Ner Hta, some had no food to eat nor good water to drink, so they drank dirty water and got diarrhoea, and then many people died of diarrhoea on the mountainsides. This was a big problem that we couldn’t solve. Then the Burmese and Thais wanted the people to go back to Burma. The people didn’t dare to go back because they were too worried that the Burmese would harm them, but the Thais said they won’t allow them to live in Thailand anymore. It is a very big problem.

Just after Kyay Lay Oo forced people to carry cement, the Monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu [*U Thuzana, founder and leader of the DKBA*] sent some DKBA people to us and they told us that if we are vegetarians and do everything the monk [*Thuzana*] orders, the Burmese won’t come to our village to harm us again. They said, “If the villagers follow the plan of the Myaing Gyi Ngu monk they will be free from forced labour and portering and the Burmese will not hit them or kill them anymore”. The villagers felt very happy to hear that. Everyone decided to become DKBA and they started to eat as vegetarians, but after a few days the DKBA people disappeared. They went back secretly without saying goodbye to anybody. When they first came the villagers were very happy to hear what they said, but those people left the villagers hopeless when they went back secretly. [*They were ordered back to Pa’an District by the SPDC, to be replaced by KPA.*]

After that the KPA came and told the villagers, “If you put your name on the KPA list the Burmese won’t force you to do forced labour and portering. Now we must live in peace. But if you don’t put your name on the KPA list the Burmese will force you to do forced labour and portering”. Because after all, the Burmese force people to work harder than people can, not as parents ask their children to work. If they forced us to work as parents ask their children to work, we could try to bear it. We know that people who do politics must force the public to work, but the Burmese force the people to work harder than the law, it’s not just. So the villagers want to be free from this forced labour and portering, and they agreed to become KPA if they would be free from forced labour.

But when we held a meeting to talk about becoming KPA, the KPA came and ordered us to become soldiers. They said that KPA soldiers would not need to go to other places, that they could stay at home [*based in their home villages*]. Then some people from Kwih Kler and Meh Naw Dah Hta joined the KPA army. But the KPA never kept those people in their own homes, they sent them away to other villages. And now we’ve got a message that they tried to escape from the army! So then we couldn’t decide anything about whether to become KPA or not, and we still don’t know how to solve that problem for the people. We hope that the Burmese will love their children as our families love their villages and will try to solve these problems for the people, but when the people came up here the Burmese asked the Thais to drive them back, and when they went back the Burmese persecuted them. So we are worried. The people are good, but when people can’t stand up and have to suffer, they can become bad.

Last month they gathered the people and divided them into two groups. One group was to be a people’s army [*i.e. regular KPA*] and the other group was to be village defenders who would be sentries in each village. They took their training in Kwih Kalay and the leader told them that they could stay in their own houses after the training, but after they finished they were not allowed to stay in their own homes. There were 50 of them in that training. The leader sent them from Kyaikdon to Kya In Seik Gyi, so then they knew that their leader did differently than what he said and many of them tried to escape. They ran away and hid themselves, they didn’t want to go to other villages, they couldn’t agree with their leader because he’d said they wouldn’t have to leave their homes. We don’t know how to help the people who are in this trouble now. Many people will flee here, many people have already fled from Thailand back to Burma because the Thais gave them no security and they were afraid, and I am afraid that they will have to face hunger. They won’t have a chance to make their farms, and maybe some will become robbers. It is just like the period when the Japanese and the English were fighting each other. A lot of hunger and robbery happened during that time. The best thing is that now the English are taking care of the refugee camps, but now the Thais won’t allow the new people who flee to go to the refugee camps. When they go back to Burma the Burmese don’t feed them either, so they are caught in the middle and hungry. I’m worried that they will kill each other in the fight for food, so I hope the rulers of the world will look and see this happening, meet with the SPDC and solve this problem.

If they don’t do it, we who live on the border must be afraid. We are afraid both of the people who are being driven and of those who drive them, so I hope that the big men of

the English and the Thais will meet with each other and think about how to take care of these people in a terrible situation. If the politicians are selfish then it will only become worse for these people.

Q: Are the KPA still saying that the Dta La Ku people must become soldiers?

A: Last month they were still saying that, but they haven't said anything this month. I will tell you: Many Dta La Ku fled to Thailand but they stayed together near here, not at the refugee camp. They fled because the Burmese forced them to do labour and portering. They fled from #44 and #356, then they went back again but #61 came and forced them to carry heavy things so they fled again. Then the DKBA came and told them if they became DKBA they would be free from harm by the SLORC, so they waited for the DKBA's help. But the DKBA disappeared. Then the KPA appeared and ordered the Dta La Ku to become soldiers, but the people didn't want to carry weapons because they knew that even if they didn't use them to shoot at others, those others would shoot at them.

So when we had the New Year festival, many of us headmen held a meeting and we talked about how we must be faithful to our religion and follow the rules of our religion. That is easy to tell people, but not so easy to do because we are a minority who live among other peoples. We Dta La Ku must not drink or touch alcohol, we must not eat or touch pork, and we must not rear pigs. But if we live among the Burmese we cannot do as our rules say, and that makes us sad. If the Burmese order us to go and find alcohol and bring it to them we must do it because we are afraid of them. While we are portering for the Burmese we do not dare say anything against them when they put sausage or ham or the head of a pig in our carrying basket. So how can we live as our religion dictates? Not only that, now they say we must carry guns. Even though we know that the words of our [*Dta La Ku*] leaders are right, we cannot observe them if we live among other people. So we headmen talked about that, and at last we decided that we would go to the Burmese leaders and ask them to give the Dta La Ku people a chance to live all together in Taung Ka Lay and Kwih Kler, in Burma but near the border, not on the Thai side. I think the Burmese will allow it. We will do nothing against them. If they come to our place or pass through it we hope that they will not persecute us, but if they do persecute us then we will run away again. Not only the people from Taung Ka Lay will flee, the people from other places will flee also. I think the Burmese will agree with us because the place we have chosen is near our religious centre and it will be easy for us to go to our festivals. If we live further away and we need to go to a festival we must pass many armies; if the Burmese SPDC allow us to go, maybe the DKBA will not allow us, if the DKBA allow us then maybe the KPA will not allow us, or if the KPA allow us then maybe the KNU will not allow us. Now many of our headmen have gone to the Burmese leaders to ask them. If the Burmese love us and do not want our religion to be destroyed, they ought to give us what we need.

When we look at KNU soldiers, their commander orders them to go to the villages and to help the villagers, to take care of them because the SLORC harms them. But some KNU soldiers enter the villages and order the villagers to give money, 10,000 or 20,000 Kyats, and they say that if the villagers don't give the money then they will shoot at the Burmese

around the village. So the people are afraid and try to give it to them, even if they don't have enough money for themselves. They must give to KNU, to SLORC, to KPA and to DKBA too. The people have hard lives because they have to give money to many groups even though they don't have enough food for themselves. That is the big problem for them. If you go and ask anybody about what they have to suffer, they will tell you the same. Now there are a lot of KNLA in Burma. Sometimes they disturb us when we go to our festivals, they say to us, "Do not go or I will shoot you". Sometimes the villagers want to sell their wooden houses to buy rice and move to Kwih Lat Der or Taung Ka Lay, and the KNLA ask those villagers for half the price of their house; for example if we sell our house and get 20,000 kyats we must give 10,000 kyats to the KNLA. They tell us, "If you don't want to give half the price of your house then you must not sell it". So now our Dta La Ku people need to live in Kwih Lat Der and Taung Ka Lay and just to make our farms peacefully. We won't live in Thailand. Dta La Ku people who live on the Thai side have no chance to do farming, so if they stay for a long time they will have no food.

On March 20th 1998 a Thai official came and held a meeting near our monastery and told us that all the Dta La Ku people who have been staying around here must go back to Burma because he said everyone trusts the Dta La Ku, that the Dta La Ku can travel freely because the police never rob or interrogate them. But then he said that the people who burned down Huay Kaloke [*refugee camp*] were Dta La Ku, that the Dta La Ku who are staying in Thailand now are spies for the SPDC and burned down the [*refugee*] camps. I was so mad I wanted to hit him! I told him at once: "Every Dta La Ku who lives in Thailand and Burma puts their name on a list, and gives it to me once every year. Every Dta La Ku name is on my list. If you say that the Dta La Ku attacked the camp then capture those Dta La Ku and bring them to me. I will see whether they are real Dta La Ku or fake Dta La Ku!" Then he said nothing. But I know that if we do not live in the same place together, other people will try to destroy our Dta La Ku culture. I know that the people who attacked Huay Kaloke were not from around here. Maybe they were DKBA. There are some DKBA who tie their hair in a knot and carry weapons. We don't like that. There are some people who tie their hair in a knot and wear clothes like ours who live in Thailand, in Maw Kwa and Paw T'Ga Hta. They drink alcohol a lot. We don't like that either, because it destroys the name of the Dta La Ku who live here. I always think about these things. We are good, but other people do not see us as good. They think that we are bad, so we don't know what to do. We do good things but get bad in return, and eventually we can't stand it anymore. I hope that the Thai, English and Burmese will think and have pity and do something for the Dta La Ku people to be able to live together in one place. [*Note: the attackers of Huay Kaloke and the other camps were not disguised as Dta La Ku; the Thai official was simply using disinformation to try to threaten the Dta La Ku, which is a routine method of Thai officialdom.*]

Q: Are there still some villagers in Kwih Lat Der village now?

A: Yes, some villagers still stay in Kwih Lat Der, Taung Ka Lay, Kay Ghaw, Tee Ler Baw and Naw Po Heh. These villages are close to each other. Now the KPA and the Burmese come there. There are no DKBA now, but there are SPDC in Kwih Lat Der. They come and go, they don't stay there all the time. Now they are #62 [*Infantry*]

Battalion]. Their battalion commander is Than Win, and their company commander is named Than Win also.

NAME: "Saw Lah Htoo" **#5.** **SEX:** M **AGE:** 24
Karen farmer
FAMILY: Married, no children
ADDRESS: K--- village, Dooplaya District
INTERVIEWED: 22/2/98

["Saw Lah Htoo" fled his village during the 1997 SLORC offensive and now works in a shop in the Thai Karen border village of Ber Kler, immediately opposite a major SPDC Army base.]

Q: Do you know the news from Kyaikdon?

A: Yes, I know. I hear the news because the traders come and tell me. The Burmese are assessing the value of the land of everyone who lives in Kyaikdon. Some plots cost 50,000 Kyats, and some cost 30,000 Kyats. On the expensive pieces of land, the roofs of the buildings must be zinc. Everyone has to buy their land back from the SPDC. For example, if they appraise my land for 50,000 Kyats I must buy it from them for 50,000 Kyats.

Q: How much land do you get for 50,000 Kyats?

A: I don't know the exact measurements, but it is just enough to build an ordinary house.

Q: Do the people who stayed in Kyaikdon and never fled also have to buy their own land back?

A: Yes, they have to buy it. People who never had land can also buy it for the same price, so they are actually better off than the landowner, because they didn't own the land before. At K'Mah Kler, the SPDC came and took all of the betelnut and coconuts. The villagers couldn't get any money for it because the SPDC took it all. They also took all the chickens. If the villagers tried to stop them they showed them a knife or a gun.

Q: Do the villagers have to do any forced labour?

A: Yes, the Burmese force the villagers to do things. The villagers have to give money to buy petrol and oil because the Burmese are building a road with machines but they say they have no petrol, so the villagers have to give them money to buy the petrol. Villagers who don't have any money to give have to build the road. They are improving the road from Kyaikdon to *[Kya In]* Seik Gyi.

Q: Can the villagers in that area stay in their villages or are they forced to move?

A: The people in Kyaikdon do not need to move because their village is big. But a woman just came a few days ago and told us that the Burmese forced them to move from Meh Naw Dah Hta to Kwih Kler because there were only a few houses in her village, but

she never moved. She said, “I have my house here so I will stay here”. The others moved but she alone stayed behind. The Burmese stole her hammock.

Q: Do the people still stay in the villages just across the border here?

A: Yes, there are villagers there. The Burmese don't torture them but they steal the villagers' chickens and other things. They don't torture them because they are afraid that the villagers living near the border will run to Thailand.

Q: Where are the SPDC camps?

A: They have a camp here at the border and another one at the old headquarters gate [*near Kwih Kler, an hour away*]. There are also camps at Meh Tharaw Kee and Ywa Plaw. The Battalions are #545 and #62.

Q: Can the villagers move around freely?

A: They can go, but they need a movement paper. They have to ask permission from the SPDC officers. It depends on the officer. If the villagers need to go somewhere for 5 days then they have to ask permission for 5 days. Usually they can get passes for three days. For one pass they have to pay 50 Baht. Villagers come here often from Kyaikdon, Saw Hta, Meh Dah Hta, Meh Dah Kee, Kwih Kler, Th'Ray Kee, and Kyaw Kee. They come on passenger cars and on foot.

Q: Can the villagers prepare their fields?

A: No they can't, because they have to build the road and do other forced labour. The Burmese have ordered them to work on the road to make it better and better. Each person has to go to work for them for five days, then come back to his own work for two days. You have to work very hard, because you only get 2 days to work for yourself and then you have to do 5 days' work for them.

Q: Do you think more people will flee to Thailand?

A: They couldn't survive there [*in Burma*] but they don't want to come here, firstly because they have their own land and possessions to think about, and secondly because the Thais don't allow them to come. It's not easy for them to come.

One man who came here and went back home was caught by the Burmese and they tied him up, hung him in the air and then set a fire under him. He didn't die because he had good medicine. Now he stays in Thay Pu Law Htwee. People don't want to go back [*to Burma*]. I ask them why. They say that they don't want to carry [*as porters*] anymore. If people come here the SPDC collects tax from them [*along the way*]. If they stay there the SPDC tortures them and takes their things. Some people stay there just because the KPA tells them to stay, or because they decide to join KPA. The SPDC controls that group of people. They created it as a new group. The KPA sent people here to Noh Po [*refugee camp*] and said that the SPDC calls us to go back because the SPDC will give us peace. They said if we go back we will get peace for sure. It is not for sure at all, and they cannot get peace for us that way.

Now they want to get more KPA members. They told people that if they become KPA they won't have to do anything, that if we become KPA the Burmese won't abuse us or use us for forced labour and we can stay freely. They said if you join they will mark your house and no one there will have to do forced labour. Now they are gathering people and giving training.

Q: Does the DKBA stay in this area?

A: No, they don't stay here anymore because the KPA told them to leave. The KPA aren't afraid of the SPDC, the SPDC gave power to them so they think they can do everything, but one day the SPDC will take the guns back from them, I'm sure of it. If all the people go back to Burma then the SPDC will take back the guns from both the KPA and the DKBA. They just want the KPA and DKBA to attack people in Thailand until everyone comes back, then they will take back all their weapons. The KPA and DKBA don't like each other.

Q: Do you think people can all go back to Dooplaya and live there peacefully soon?

A: No. We can't survive there. People who live in Burma are not happy to stay, some say that if the KNU fights the SPDC then they will fight the SPDC too. They should give people rights and democracy. If there is no democracy we will be their slaves for ever. Whatever they tell us to do we must do, if they say not to move we must not move, if they say we must die then we die. We cannot live like that. We've been here for one year now. When #44 Division came to our village we fled to escape and came here. If the SPDC stays there forever then we will stay here forever. We don't like our lives here but at least we have our lives.

Q: What about here, you said that the Burmese came and took one grandmother's betelnut!

A: The SPDC soldiers came and took betelnut from Ber Kler on the Thai side. They climbed right up people's trees and took the fruit. Then the headman told them not to come and steal like that so they didn't come again. *[There is a major new SPDC Army base directly across the border from Ber Kler. At the time of the interview SPDC soldiers in mufti were crossing the border and hanging around the village every day.]* They came and stole the betelnut, then they sold it to other people because they have no money. The Thai soldiers did nothing, they just said they wouldn't allow the SPDC to come anymore but the SPDC soldiers still come very often. They come every day, they even come to my shop with pistols. They wear simple clothes like ours but they come with pistols. It is the officers who carry the pistols.

Q: What do the Thai soldiers do if they see the pistol?

A: The Thais don't do anything because they are very afraid.

Q: What do the SPDC soldiers usually buy here?

A: They usually buy alcohol and clothes. They come and sell charcoal and cattle. If they get money they buy fish and chicken to eat. It is the Privates who burn the charcoal, because they have no money. But the officers get their money from the villagers. For example, if people come here to buy things they have to pay the officer 10,000 Kyats as

tax. People who come to sell cattle have to give them 200 Baht for each cow. Here 10 Kyats is worth 1½ Baht, but they usually pay in Baht.

Q: Do the SPDC soldiers make much trouble here?

A: When they come we have to be careful and watch them every second because they steal things, they steal from every shop if they get the chance or if you're not looking for a moment. When they come they carry bags, they ask to see something and while you're getting it they try to slip other things into their bag. They also try to steal money from people. Their officer says nothing about it. Two weeks ago one officer came to sell some charcoal, then he drank alcohol together with some villagers. He wanted more to drink but the shopkeeper wouldn't give it to him, and he beat the shopkeeper. Later the Ber Kler headman told him to go back.

Q: Do you think the Burmese would like to capture Ber Kler?

A: Yes, for sure. People here are afraid. There are *[Thai]* soldiers but they never say anything because they are too afraid. Sometimes they drink with the Burmese officers.

Q: I heard the Thai officers say that many more SPDC troops have come. Is it true?

A: Yes it is true. Two new Divisions came, and they also brought so much food that it should be enough for one year. I don't know exactly how many soldiers came.

[Another man from Dooplaya, "Pa Lah", 35, married with 2 children, added the following:]

The SPDC said that if the KNU comes and shoots at them, they will attack and burn Noh Po *[refugee camp]*. They've said that many times now. Their officers say it to the villagers. Also, all the Muslims around Saw Hta and Kyaikdon must become Buddhists, because if they don't the SPDC says they will kill them. They already beat one foolish *[mentally handicapped]* Muslim man. Many Muslims used to stay in Pa Klaw Nee village, near Kyaikdon, but now they've had to move. They can stay near Kyaikdon, but they have to become Buddhist. So now there are many Muslims pretending to be Buddhist.

[One month later on March 24th we interviewed shopkeeper "Saw Lah Htoo" again about new developments:]

A car was just destroyed by a bomb, just above Kwih Kler. It happened this week, on Sunday *[March 22nd]*. It was a bomb buried in the ground *[a vehicle mine laid along the road by the KNLA]*. I don't know exactly whose bomb it was. The car blew into two parts. A child died and the driver was hurt in his chest. The child was about 9 years old. His village was Taw Wah Law.

Q: After that happened did the Burmese do anything?

A: The Burmese didn't do anything. I didn't hear anything from the Burmese.

Q: Now do the villagers from Dooplaya still come and visit here in Ber Kler?

A: The villagers still come to visit but it is very difficult for them to get a pass, and now they can't come by car, they must come on foot. I think maybe they are worried that bombs will explode and destroy the cars. Usually about 10 people come at a time, but not all from the same village. They come from villages such as Saw Hta, Meh Kwih, Kyaikdon and from the villages near the border.

Q: What news have the people from Kyaikdon brought this month?

A: Now the people there must carry rations for the Burmese. If a villager has a vehicle he must use it to carry rations for the Burmese. If the car is destroyed by a bomb the Burmese won't do anything for him, he must take care of himself.

Q: The car that was destroyed this week, was that a villager's car or the Army's car?

A: It was a villager's car carrying rations for the Burmese. Now the Burmese use the villagers' cars to transport their supplies because they think the KNLA will not shoot at the villagers' cars but they would shoot at the Army's cars. *[In the area the SPDC officers use villagers for transport, calculating that this will decrease the chance of landmine attack or ambush, that if the road is mined villagers will die instead of his men, and also so that he can keep or sell off his fuel supplies for personal profit.]*

Q: Do the villagers have to help the Burmese every day?

A: Yes, every day. They have to do forced labour on road construction, one person from each house all the time, and the people who have cars must wait around to drive for the Burmese whenever they need them and wherever they need to go. But these car owners must buy the petrol themselves. The Burmese never buy the petrol for them.

Q: Do the villagers still have to work on the car road?

A: They have to build the main roads and also rebuild the streets in Kyaikdon. They have to improve the roads and streets, the Burmese are digging the earth with bulldozers in the betelnut plantations, they are destroying all the betelnut trees but they never pay anything to the villagers. The villagers even have to buy the fuel for their bulldozer! They never buy their own fuel.

Q: Last month you said all the villagers in Kyaikdon must buy their own land, is that still true?

A: Yes, every villager had to buy their own land. They each had to pay 30,000 to 50,000 Kyats. People had to sell their belongings to get the money to pay for their land. And on land which is 50,000 Kyats *[in the central part of the village]* they ordered that the owners must put zinc roofing on their houses. As for the betelnut plantations, if the owner stays close by they can get the fruit, but if not then the KPA took all of it. They also demand taxes on all the crops. The KPA took all the houses and crops of everyone who fled to Thailand, and they sold those houses. The KPA are staying together with the Burmese. The KPA are staying in K---. The Burmese are also staying there, but in their own camp. They work together.

Q: Does the KPA force anyone to become soldiers?

A: Yes, two or three people from each village must go. If people can't go then they must give money to the KPA. Now the KPA is doing training at Kwih Kalay, below Kyaikdon. Just a few days ago we heard that some KPA soldiers already ran to escape the army. The KPA is helping the Burmese.

Q: How do they help the Burmese?

A: They help them by planning how to attack Noh Po [*refugee camp*]. We heard that the KPA and the Burmese will go to attack Noh Po camp. Maybe they will go together.

Q: Are there any DKBA in the area of Kwih Kler, Saw Hta and Kyaikdon?

A: No, there are no DKBA there. All the DKBA moved back to 7th Brigade area [*Pa'an District, 100 km further north; the SPDC ordered the DKBA back after it gave authority over most of Dooplaya to the KPA*].

Q: Do you think the Burmese will attack Noh Po?

A: As I told you before, they are looking for a way to attack Noh Po. The Burmese told the villagers in Saw Hta that they will attack Noh Po. They've been telling them for a long time that Noh Po will be attacked. [*Part of the reason for this may be to discourage Dooplaya villagers from fleeing to Thailand to stay in Noh Po.*]

Q: Who will attack, the Burmese or the KPA?

A: The method of the Burmese is that even if they attack, they will always say it was the KPA or DKBA who did it. They will never say it was the Burmese. Even if KPA or DKBA won't go with them the Burmese will still say it was KPA or DKBA, because they will just mimic the DKBA or the KPA when they attack.

Q: If they go to attack Noh Po, do you think they will make problems for Ber Kler villagers along the way? [*Ber Kler is over 10 km from Noh Po, but it is along one possible attack route.*]

A: They probably won't make problems for the Ber Kler villagers. But last month they told us that if we shelter any refugees from Noh Po or KNLA soldiers then they will shoot at Ber Kler. They also said that if they know any KNLA are coming to Ber Kler they will kill them here.

Q: How can they attack Noh Po if the Thai soldiers stop them?

A: We can't trust in Thai soldiers. They do not dare to shoot. They will never shoot, even when their duty is to shoot.

Q: Now do Burmese soldiers still come to Ber Kler village?

A: Yes, they come every day. They still come to buy food. The Thais [*soldiers and Border Patrol Police*] don't dare to say anything against them. They're always watching when they come to do shopping. I see their Corporals and Sergeants coming with them and observing the situation. Last month I saw pistols on their waists every time they came. The day before yesterday one of the Thai villagers here left a gun in the back of his truck, and a Burmese soldier stole it. I'm not sure what, I think it was a pistol. Then the gun owner told the headman, they went to ask for the gun and they got it back.

Q: Now there are Thai soldiers everywhere near here and they say they will fight the Burmese if they cross into Thailand. Are the Thais in the village here Army or Border Patrol Police?

A: They are border police. They just sit at their gate which is by the border. They don't dare go into the forest. They're even afraid to stay here in the village! They're not brave.

Q: Do the villagers who come here from Kwih Kler, Saw Hta and Kyaikdon still want to stay in their villages, or do they want to flee to Thailand?

A: They love to live in their own villages. It is not easy for them to flee to Thailand. The problem if they come here is that the Thais will drive them back to Burma. The Thais already drove many of them back once when they came last time. So although they must live as slaves in Burma and they don't like to live like that, they must live that way. But if the KNLA go to their places to fight the Burmese, they will still help the KNLA to shoot the Burmese. That is what they keep in their minds and in their hearts. They really hate the Burmese, and they can't live their lives in either Thailand or Burma. So if the KNLA go to fight many of them will stand up to fight too. But if the KNLA don't go to help them they don't dare do anything by themselves, because the Burmese will kill them.

Last month my sister came and told us that a Burmese soldier came into the movies. He touched a girl's chin and the girl slapped him. Then he slapped the girl who slapped him. Afterwards he was sent to the commander to be punished. And in a shop in Saw Hta a Burmese Corporal stole a *longyi [sarong]* when the shopkeeper wasn't looking and ran away with it. The shopkeeper sent her child to go and get it back but the child couldn't get it, so his mother went to the Corporal and shouted at him, and only then she got it back. They do bad things. Now they are logging around Saw Hta, sawing the logs into timber and sending them to the towns to sell. The villagers have to do that for them, and the villagers have to press sugar cane for them when they want to drink it. Many villagers have to go and do that. Everyone is afraid of them and dares not say anything. When they order the villagers to give them chickens and the villagers don't agree, they point at the villagers with guns or knives. They always threaten the villagers like that.

Even when we were in our house [*just after the occupation, before they fled*] they came to our house and demanded chickens. We let them take what they wanted, but when their Sergeant came with a big truck he saw our coconuts and took the coconuts without asking permission. Then he went and took his soldiers' gun and shot at the coconuts [*in the tree*] to destroy them. They never ask for anything nicely, and if you speak they tell you, "You are very clever to speak, so I will kill you". They threatened people and said, "Now you are in our hands. If we decide to kill you, you can't do anything." They oppressed us until we couldn't stand it anymore, so we came here. If we could stand it we would still live there. If the Burmese live there forever we will live here forever, here in Ber Kler, we won't go back. We don't want to go back before there is peace in Burma, but we will go back when there is peace, when Burma becomes a democratic country.

#6.

NAME: "Naw Eh Ghay"
Karen Christian missionary
FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 8 months to 6 years
SEX: F
AGE: 53

ADDRESS: Meh Tharaw Hta village, Dooplaya District

INTERVIEWED: 4/98

["Naw Eh Ghay" was interviewed in Noh Po refugee camp.]

Q: Since you came here did ever go back *[to Dooplaya]* to visit?

A: I went back the first time to Kwih Kler village, then I went back again during my children's school vacation. The situation in Burma is too bad. The people are in fear. Every time the SLORC *[SPDC]* Army comes the men have to run away and hide, because they try to capture the men whenever they come. Every day 6 people must go to stay with them so that they can use them whenever they need them. Wherever they want to go those 6 people must go with them and carry their things, which are very heavy, sometimes until they cannot carry anymore. Sometimes they have to do other work, and sometimes it is dangerous. People who do not dare to go must give 1,500 kyats for 3 days *[in lieu of 3 days of work]*. If people don't go then the Burmese will never set free the previous group. People must always stay with them and keep rotating.

Then they brought prisoners [*convicts*] up into the jungle on Army trucks. Along the way they tied the prisoners' necks and hands tightly to the sides of the trucks and made them stand up straight. When they arrived at the T'Ku Kee church they let them get down from the truck. Some prisoners couldn't stand up anymore and they fell down. The soldiers saw that and kicked them and hit them until they became unconscious. Then they picked them up and dragged them under a shady tree. I heard that they will use those prisoners to do road construction. The road will go from Kyaikdon to [*Kya In*] Seik Gyi. I know the prisoners are in Kyaikdon right now because I saw Auntie S--- at the bible school there and she told me, "Now Kyaikdon is full of Burmese military and prisoners. They've probably brought the prisoners to do road construction." Right now the villagers aren't doing road construction because they have to rotate doing forced labour in the Army camp full time, and they must go and do whatever the soldiers order them to do at any time.

Q: Before you came back here did you hear about any villages being forced to move?

A: About the relocations, now Kalay Kee and Kyaw Kay Ko have to move because the Burmese accused them of feeding the KNLA, so the Burmese won't allow them to stay there anymore. The people of Kyaw Kay Ko have to move to Kya In and the people from Kalay Kee have to move to T'Ku Kee. I heard that relocations will also occur in many other places. Even the villagers in Kya In [*western Dooplaya*] must move to the roadside. I also heard one village headwoman say, "If I'm going to build a house I will build it at the roadside, because we must move there anyway". I heard her say that in H--'s shop in Seik Gyi.

Before the 11th [*of March or April 1998*] they arrested villagers from Kya In and put them in jail. They beat them badly. I didn't see them when they were beaten but I saw their wives and children who had to give bribes to save them. Finally they set them free after many people had come and vouched for them, but they had to pay 10,000 kyats for each villager to be freed. Not only that, they had to buy clothes and food for the soldiers too. The arrested people were villagers of Kya In. I don't know their names, but younger brother Pastor Tha Du was among them.

The villagers there are afraid of them and have to give money to them all the time. They must give them whatever food they want whenever they ask for it. If the villagers don't give it to them then they just steal whatever they want. They always demand rice, vegetables, salt and fishpaste. I saw that happening in T'Ku Kee. When I went back there I didn't have a chance to ask about too many things, and I often had to hide and couldn't dare go outside. But I heard about many things from the villagers there who have to live in fear.

#7.

NAME: "Pa Boe" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 30
Karen Dta La Ku farmer

FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 7 months to 7 years

ADDRESS: Kwih Kler village, Dooplaya District

INTERVIEWED: 20/2/98

[When interviewed "Pa Boe" was staying in a hut near a Dta La Ku village in Thailand.]

Q: Where is your village?

A: My village is Kwih Kler. I guess it takes about 3 or 4 hours to walk from here.

Q: How many months have you stayed here?

A: I fled and came here one or two months ago. I came because we had a bad time there, because they forced us to do their work until we had no chance to do our own work. They forced us to do many things such as portering, standing as sentries, and many other kinds of labour. We had to carry bullets for their sentry troops. Many people from Kwih Kler had to go.

Q: Where did you have to go as porters?

A: Sometimes to nearby places and sometimes far away. If they were sentry troops based nearby they would set us free sooner, but if they were going down to the town to change their troops then it would take many weeks. Sometimes they did not tell the truth. If they said that a trip would take 2 or 3 days, it really took one to three weeks. Many people had to face that. Some people coughed up blood after they came back from portering. If we had not come here we would still be serving as porters. When they first arrived *[in February 1997]*, we ran away. After that we went back to the village to stay, and we've had to go as porters since then, until just before we came here. Now we do not dare go back.

Q: How many families live in Kwih Kler village?

A: At first there were more than 100 families, but now fewer families are left in the village. Some have left, but some still stay.

Q: Where was the camp of the Burmese who forced you to be porters?

A: In Kwih Kler they had a camp, and we also had to go to their Saw Hta camp. I'm not sure how many soldiers they had because they changed their troops often. They're not the same as Karen soldiers - sometimes they changed once or twice in one month. So I don't know how many soldiers there were. They had many groups. Right now #62 *[Infantry Battalion]* is in the village.

Q: Were there other types of labour that you had to do for them?

A: We had to do many kinds of labour for them. We haven't had to build the car road yet, but we will have to build one. There is a car road in the village but it is not good.

Q: Were the villages in Kwih Kler area relocated?

A: Some people still stay in the village. Some people such as the Dta La Ku didn't like to stay in the village anymore because they couldn't live according to their religion. There were many different kinds of religion in the village, so it was difficult for the Dta La Ku to practice their religion. In the village there were Baptists and Buddhists. The

Dta La Ku wanted to go away but the village headman never allowed them to leave the village, so some Dta La Ku tried to run away secretly. Many families came with us, about 10 families. In Kwih Kler there were not too many Dta La Ku people but there are still some families left in Kwih Kler. Some Dta La Ku people who came here also went back. Before they went back there were nearly 20 Dta La Ku families *[from Kwih Kler]* here.

Q: Many people already went back, so why don't you go back?

A: I do not dare to go back because I am afraid of the Burmese. I will go back when there is peace in my village, after the Burmese leave my village, because the Burmese treated us badly.

Q: How can you get your food here? Can you farm here?

A: Yes, we must farm.

#8.

NAME: “Saw Beh Htoo” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 28
Karen Buddhist farmer
FAMILY: Married, 3 children
ADDRESS: Kwih Kalay village, Dooplaya District
INTERVIEWED: 22/2/98

[When interviewed “Saw Beh Htoo” was staying in a hut just on the Thai side of the border.]

Q: How long did it take you to come here?

A: It took a day. Our village is to the west, near Kyaikdon. I’ve stayed here for one season, with my brother and sister.

Q: Did the SLORC come to your village?

A: Yes, they came. I was staying in the village when the SLORC came. I stayed about 25 days and then I came here. First I came alone, then I went back and called my family. I don’t want to go back because the situation is not good.

Q: How many houses are there in Kwih Kalay village?

A: It has more than three hundred houses. Sgaw and Pwo Karen, Thai and Mon. About a hundred houses are Karen. Several families have come to stay here. The KPA come here all the time. They tell stories to try to get us to go back. They told me to go back to my village. He said, “You can go back, nothing will happen”. I told him I won’t go back, first I will stay here for 4 or 5 years and then maybe I will go back. I told him that I don’t like Burmese soldiers.

#9.

NAME: “Saw Lay Ghay” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 30+
Karen Christian farmer
FAMILY: Married, 3 children aged 8-12
ADDRESS: Noh Dah Kee village, Dooplaya District
INTERVIEWED: 22/2/98

[When interviewed “Saw Lay Ghay” was staying in a hut just on the Thai side of the border.]

Q: When did you arrive here?

A: I arrived here in October 1997, because the SLORC came into our village. After they came I stayed for less than a month. The SLORC told us to do so much for them that we couldn’t do our own work, so we came here. Every day the SLORC told us to get rocks from the river and carry them up the hill. Their camp is on the hill, just near Lay Po Hta. We had to go every day to carry rocks. Every man in Noh Dah Kee village had to go every day.

Q: How many houses are in your village?

A: It has eleven houses. We came here with one other household. We came a secret way. Five households are still staying in our village. The SLORC [*SPDC*] makes the people work for them every day. The people have to carry rice up the hill for the SLORC whenever their rations come. I'm afraid to go back because the SLORC makes us work all the time, there is not enough food and I have no money to buy food. My house was made of bamboo, so I think it is probably destroyed by now. The Thai soldiers told us to go back but I am afraid of the SLORC. I will stay until the SLORC go back to their place. If they go back to their place I will go back to my village.

Q: Will you go back if the SLORC leaves and only the KPA stays there?

A: No, I am afraid to go back because the KPA also works with the SLORC.

#10.

[The following field reports were sent in by a KHRG human rights monitor who obtained some of the information from villagers and some from KNLA intelligence reports.]

On 17 May 1998, SPDC troops from Strategic Command #2, Infantry Battalion #357, commanded by Battalion Commander Than Shwe, entered the villages of Lay Mila [4-Mile], Bone Kaw and Meh Ter Pwee and arrested village elders Saw Ku, Pa Ter Ru, Pa Per Lweh, Mer Hu Lah, Saw Myint Thay, Nya Shu, Maw Shwe Thay, Neh Kyaw Pay, Maw Lah Shwe, Maw Lah Tha, and Maw Per Eh *[all men, ages not given; 12 men were arrested, though only 11 names are given]* and beat these men badly until 4 of the 12 died of the beatings. They accused the men of having had contact with the KNU.

On 18 May 1998, Battalion Commander Than Sein and his troops from SPDC Infantry Battalion #231 arrested Saw Htoo Lay (male, age 37) from Meh T'Kreh village and beat him to death.

On 22 May 1998 at about 10 a.m., SPDC Frontline Engineers #904 Battalion forced villagers from Kyaikdon village, Kawkareik township to work under duress on the road from Kyaikdon to Kyo G'Lee village tract. They forced the villagers to begin construction on a road bridge, to break stones into pieces and to lay stones and gravel to make the roadbed.

On June 5th 1998, SPDC soldiers from Infantry Battalion #356 led by supply officer Cho Win entered Waw Lu village and captured villagers there to be porters. The villagers tried to escape but 4 men were caught: Pa K'Lah (age 50), Pa Lu Lah (age 30), Pa Day Thu (age 25), and Pa Tha Kyi (age 40). The soldiers then beat the 4 men *[probably in anger that they could only catch the four of them]*. Pa Lu Lah was beaten badly and was seriously injured.

Now the officers of SPDC Strategic Command #2 continually demand money from the villagers in the area, but they have issued an order prohibiting many villagers from going to work in their fields. People in the area are now suffering from hunger and vitamin deficiency, because meats such as pork and chicken are getting more and more expensive. One viss [1.6 kg/3.5 lb] of meat costs 500 Kyats, and one viss of dried meat costs 1,000 Kyats. *[The prices of meat are most likely being driven up due to the systematic looting and slaughtering of livestock by SPDC troops.]*