



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

May 23, 2014 / KHRG #12-95-T3-I1

Thaton Interview: U A---, May 2012

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during May 2012 by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights. It describes the situation in Thaton Township, Thaton District, including:

- *Access to and the cost of medical care for B--- villagers.*
- *Confiscation of 31 acres of land near Lah Aw Kher village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, Thaton Township, Thaton District by Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #44 Operations Commander U Mya Soe.*
- *Development of three new school buildings with the assistance of the Myanmar government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Max Myanmar Company.*

This Interview was initially published in May 2014 in the Appendix of KHRG's in-depth report, Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire.

Interview U A---, (male, 42), Thaton Township, Thaton District (May 2012)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It was conducted in Thaton District in May 2012 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Thaton District, including four other interviews, one situation update and 43 photographs.²

Name: U A---

Gender: Male

Age: 42

Ethnicity: Karen

¹ KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's redesigned Website.

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: --

Position: Village secretary

Village: B--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, Thaton District, Doo Tha Htoo [Thaton] Township

What is your name?

Saya [male teacher] A---.

How old are you?

42 years old.

Where do you live?

Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, B--- village, Thaton District, Doo Tha Htoo [Thaton] Township.

What ethnicity are you?

I am Karen.

How about your religion?

Buddhist.

Do you have a family?

Yes.

How many children do you have?

Six children; two girls and four boys.

How old is the oldest?

The oldest is 18 years old.

How about the youngest?

The youngest is over two years.

What [kind of] occupation do you have in the village? What is your responsibility [position] in the village?

My responsibility [position] in the village is as village secretary.

How long have you been in this position as a village leader?

Beginning from 1994, one term when Oo Saw Thein used to be village head, and in 2005 another village head was elected.

So, how many years has that been?

Seven years already.

Could you tell me about your experience as a leader of the village? What kind of problems have you faced during that period of time?

From the time that I was appointed in 2005, during [the time of] SPDC [State Peace and Development Council]³ rule, they were based here and moved around here. And Company⁴ #281 entered in our village tract [there are six villages in the village tract] and changed their company [rotated] one by one, every one or two months. During that time, they asked for help, sometimes regarding problems of food, sometimes they asked for rice during 2005, 2006 and 2007. In 2005, in our region, people came and made a hydropower [machine] for mining, but I don't know exactly, but one company entered called Meh See Nee Ma Company. They came and planted over 1,000 or 2,000 acres of rubber trees. And some people were paid compensation and some were not paid compensation for their land [that was confiscated] because the SPDC designated our land as uncultivated land. As for us, from the beginning we knew that these lands were cultivated and owned by our ancestors. And they [the military government] said, "*these are uncultivated lands,*" and leased the lands [to others]. When we were young, SPDC soldiers entered this area, but [at that time] they would have said [been called] *Nyein Wat Pi Pya Yay* [State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)].⁵ During the time when the State Peace and Development Council ruled the country, a group called *Pa La Ka* [social welfare group] came in with a project. The Eastern Division Administrator Major General Mu Khin pointed out that this is uncultivated land, and that "*we [Pa La Ka] will plant sugar cane plantations, coffee plantations and cashew plantations and rubber plantations, around 5,000 acres, in 1985.*"⁶ After they finished their duty [making the plantations], the purposes [of the project] were ruined [not able to be completed] by 1999.

Are there things like troubles from the KNU [Karen National Union] or SPDC [Tatmadaw]?

There is no trouble from the KNU brothers or sisters. But during the time of the SPDC rule, if sometimes their orders were not followed [there were troubles] mostly caused by one Company #8 commander, named U Nyein Aye Zan. In one instance, U Nyein Aye Zan beat [villagers]. Yes, these are the problems I had from them. Nothing special except that. But as for us, we helped as much as we could and they also didn't make that much trouble. There is no torture in the village because we protect them [villagers]. That is why they don't harm them. We just need to treat them [SPDC] nicely.

Like you said, did they hit you or punch you?

Not only with his [the SPDC soldier's] hand, but also kicked [me] with his legs without any time for explaining. If I tell about this history, that will take a long time. Because during that

³ State Peace & Development Council of the military junta ruling Burma at the time, which was officially dissolved March 30th 2011 by Senior General Than Shwe following the election of a quasi-civilian government in Burma in November 2010.

⁴ Military unit of approximately 100 soldiers, but most in Tatmadaw are under-strength.

⁵ In Karen, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) is commonly used to refer to the Burma government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase for SLORC before 1997 continue to use it, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997.

⁶ The SLORC was formed in 1988, so it is likely the villager has recalled an incorrect year.

time, the DKBA⁷ were recruiting, and we, the villager leaders, discussed that we can't do this for them yet. And I said, "*we have sent the soldiers already, why didn't you inform me in advance?*" and he began hitting me. I didn't have time to explain. And after I explained to him, he said "*I am sorry that I committed the violence already.*" He did it and we [I] had also suffered already. This was reported to our brothers and sisters [KNLA], and his Company #8 battalion commander.

By the way, in your village B---, how many houses are in the village?

[Censored for security] houses altogether.

Mostly, what do they do [occupation or job]?

Mostly, one out of four people are doing well and the others are workers, living from hand to mouth because [we] don't have property [to farm]. In previous times, we used to have a farm and we used to cut wood and sell it in the evening, and that helped us save money in that way for [our livelihood]. But now, our farms do not belong to us anymore and so we just have to hire ourselves to others [work for others for money]; and some people go to Bangkok; and some people go and work in other villages.

So, do they have enough [money or food] for living?

No, they don't have enough. They just buy things in others' shops. They go and work [for others] for one or two days and if they get wages, they go and buy things from others. Sometimes, they buy by credit in advance and repay [the shopkeeper] later [when their wages are paid]. We just help each other and sometimes, we borrow for them [people who need money for food] from others.

How much do they sell one big tin⁸ (16 kg. / 35.2 lb.) of rice here?

They sell [rice] by the bowl⁹ (2 kg. / 4.4 lb.).

You said, how much for one bowl of rice?

500 [kyat]¹⁰ (US \$0.51) for one bowl of rice. In some shops, sometimes the price goes up or down and they sell it for a different price like 500 or 600 kyat (US \$0.51 or \$0.61).

So, in your opinion, do you think that they have to work very hard for their livelihood?

⁷ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

⁸ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb. of paddy, and 16 kg. or 35.2 lb. of milled rice.

⁹ A bowl is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One bowl is equivalent to 1.28 kg. or 2.88 lb. of paddy, and 2 kg. or 4.4 lb. of milled rice. A bowl is also equivalent to 2 mess tins, 8 milk tins, or 1/8 of a big tin.

¹⁰ As of January 13th 2014, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 987 kyat to the US \$1.

Yes, they have to work really hard for their livelihood. Some people have many children, so they don't have enough [money] to feed their children. Three [out of four] people in the village have to work really hard for their livelihood. There are *[censored for security]* houses in our village.

Regarding food insecurity like this, is there any aid come?

The aid does not come here. But in the village, the UN [United Nations] has come and provided things [monetary support, seeds and fertilizer] to raise things [livestock and plants for agriculture] and they have stored it [the supplies] here. The organisation is UNDP [United Nations Development Programme]. They have not provided support for anything else, like providing rice. They have supported us to do our livelihoods only. It [the aid] is for our livelihoods. They did not lend the money [they just provided it]. They trained us how to raise the animals. They provided the start-up money for us to grow paddy, fruits, ground nuts and corn. Then they have monitored the results once a year, sometimes, once every six months and sometimes once a month. They have monitored the project to see if people's incomes increased. They did this project for people [who] do not have the necessary start-up money.

How about the support from the Government? Is there support from Government?

There is no support from the Government.

How about economics [business]? What do they do for business?

There are no businesses here.

For earning money.

For earning money, some two or three wise people do trading.

For trading, where do they buy things from?

From Bilin [town], Kyaik Khaw [village]. They buy things like rice and groceries, etc. for the village.

Is it very far from here to Bilin and Kyaik Khaw?

From this side, it may be around five furlongs¹¹ [to Bilin] and around four furlongs to Kyaik Khaw.

Are there people who do work [business] with rubber plantations?

In our village, only those people in the village who are considered in the group of one out of four who are doing well in [business], can have rubber plantations and the remainder of the people in the village are doing odd jobs and have nothing. They [those who are doing well] have around 20 acres [of land]. One person has a maximum of five acres, the others have two acres and some people plant around their house.

Are their plantations ready to tap?

In the village, some people's rubber trees are ready to tap. Because they planted the untapped rubber trees in their area before the companies entered. After the companies

¹¹ A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.125 of a mile or 0.2 of a km.

entered, they destroyed their plantations. Otherwise, half of the people in the village would be doing well in their jobs [business].

How do they sell the rubber?

They sell it by the pound. The price is not the same every year, but different. Sometimes it's up or sometimes down, and if the price is up, they give over 1,000 [kyat] (US \$1.01) [for one pound of rubber] and if the price is down, they get only around 600 kyat (US \$0.61).

So, if we look at the business side, that is not really good. How about healthcare? Are there clinics in the village?

Yes, there is a satellite clinic. But the medicine is not enough and the clinic just has a midwife. It is not like a clinic with a doctor.

Was the midwife appointed by the Government or the villagers?

The Government.

Does the [midwife] always stay [in the clinic]?

She stays [because] we give her accommodation. UNDP gave us humanitarian support and we were able to build a clinic for her along with her accommodation and she always stays in the clinic. There was no support from the Government. We, villagers, organised people and helped to build it.

Has the KNU mother organisation ever been here to give medicine?

No, but sometimes they inform us to come to Tha Reh Hkee village [for training], but there is no one who has the ability [to read English because the name of the medicines are in English]. So, they were not able to go there to [Tha Reh Hkee] village for the meeting [training]. That is the problem for our villagers.

Because some places get medicine from the BPHWT [Back Pack Health Worker Team]?

They [BPHWT] do not reach here.

How about sending the patient somewhere? For example, if a patient has an emergency, where do they go?

They have to send them to the Bilin town. If Bilin Hospital can't [treat them], they send them to Thaton [town]. Mostly, if Thaton Hospital cannot treat them, then they do not have any more options. Some people just recover by receiving treatment in Bilin Hospital, and some people just recover in the village with the health worker.

When going for treatment and recovery and returning [to the village]. How much do they have to spend for that trip?

It depends on how serious the illness is. If the illness is not serious, sometimes they spend around 100,000 [kyat] (US \$101.32), and if the illness is serious, they have to spend 300,000 [kyat] (US \$303.95) or 400,000 (US \$405.27); sometimes up to 700,000 [kyat] (US \$709.22), especially if they were sent to Thaton Hospital. If they were sent to Bilin or Thaton [hospitals] with a normal illness, they only spend around 200,000 [kyat] (US \$202.63) or 300,000 (US \$303.95), including their travelling expenses, food, etc. for around ten days.

Is everybody able to go, if their illness is serious?

Some people can't go [afford treatment], but sometimes they borrow from others. Some people's illness can't be treated and they die and their children [have to pay the amount owed]. If that happens to parents, children have to come down [repay the amount owed] and if that happens to children, the parents have to come down.

Are there schools in the village?

Yes.

Up to what standard?

Seven standards. In 2005, we organized our villagers and the students' parents in our village track around Shwe Yaw Pya. We discussed and said, "*there are very few people who are educated from our villagers here.*" After we talked, we hired the teachers but we had to go and register the school in Daw Ya [village] and we came back and taught here. We hired the teachers and they teach here. In 2006 and 2007, they [the Government] permitted us to teach and register [the school] here and we have been teaching until now, 2012.

So, the Government permitted it?

Yes.

So, up to grade seven, how many teachers do they give [send] for your school?

Six teachers now and five teachers last year. Those five teachers have been teaching for years and in 2010 one more teacher was sent to us and now there are six teachers altogether. Those six teachers include general workers.

Do you know how much they earn for one month?

In previous times, one primary teacher earned over 30,000 kyat (US \$30.40) and the principal earned 50,000 [kyat] (US \$5.07) per month, now up to seventh standard. Last year there were two more teachers for the middle school classes. This year their salary has increased and they earn 80,000 kyat (US \$81.05).

Now your village has up to seven standards. Is that because the Government sent more teachers? And you also have to find more teachers?

Yes, we had to find more teachers. There were problems because of not having enough teachers and that caused issues for the children. We had to find a way for that. We got two teachers from Puh Htaw Meh Pa [Karen organisation] from Ain Sein [city], We got two teachers from there as helpers, and in our village, we gathered the people who failed tenth standard [in Myanmar government schools] and we hired six more teachers, so that it is going better and more smoothly.

So altogether, how many teachers are there in your village's school?

This year we may have 12 teachers.

Is there support for this school?

There is no other support. We built the school by ourselves, not the Government. We had a school, but it was not legal [not recognised by the Government]. They [the Government] helped us with two school buildings. That building's length is 60 feet and its height is 30 feet. And UNDP supported us with two school buildings. One building is 60 feet [long] and the other one is 70. In between 2011 and 2012, during that time, one company called Max [Max Myanmar Company] helped us with one school building that is 150 feet [long].

Is there support from other organisations?

No.

How about the student's materials? Is there support from the Government?

No.

For example, for the primary school level, they [the Government] said [there should be] free education. In previous years, in 2011 or 2010, was there thing [free education] like that?

No.

How about this year?

They just started free education in 2012, from nursery school up to fourth standard.

This year?

Yes, this year.

How about other organisations? Is there help from other organisations? Regarding materials for schooling.

We know that the aid from the KNU [Karen National Union] comes and provides things like books, footballs, pens, pencils, cane balls, nail cutters, jump ropes and scissors. As far as I know, it's been over four years already that they have been giving that support.

Do they provide support every year?

Sometimes more materials and sometimes less materials, because sometimes it is difficult to transport things. So, some years there are more students and some years less students. If there are more students, they get less support. The support amount is the same for every year. So, if there are more students, they get less support.

Like what you said, does the Government forbid that?

For that, as we discussed, our villagers do not let them [the Government] know. We do like that, they hear but without seeing with their own eyes. Sometimes, in previous times, they knew and they asked, "*who provided these things?*" and we told them [where the support came from] but they didn't say anything special.

How about the students who completed [their schooling] here? Where do they go after that?

After they complete seventh standard, they go to Daw Ya [village]. There is a middle and high school in Daw Ya and we use the same curriculum, so they join the high school, up to tenth standard, there.

Regarding travelling [for students], is it easy?

Yes, very easy.

Now we are going to look at the Myanmar military situation. Around this area, which military camp is nearest?

At the fork in the road there is camp, not a camp but a battalion. The nearest place, at the fork in the road and Hseh Reh village tract, and located there is the nearest artillery, LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]¹² #314. In the south, the nearest battalion is LIB #9 [the villager reported LIB #9, but it should be MOC¹³ #9]. Those are the nearest LIBs. In previous times, there was a company [military unit], but now they [the Government] has removed them all, since the ceasefire.¹⁴ In our Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, in Ma Yan Gon village, there are a few people [two soldiers from that company left].

Are they still staying there?

Yes, we see them.

Like you said, they, artillery and LIB #9, they live close to here. Were there any demands in the last one or two years? Like asking for thatched shingles, wood or bamboo, etc.?

That has been decreasing in the past one or two years. But the soldiers who have been living here, we go and send rice to them. Sometimes they send letters because they said they can't go by themselves. So, they apologise [asking help] to send the letter for them, and if they ask the taxi [motorcycle] driver, they give them money for that. Sometimes we have to send their rice sacks to Htee Nya Paw [village]. Yes, there are things like that. For that they pay money [to the taxi driver].

¹² Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw); 500 soldiers but most in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers.

¹³ Military Operations Command; 10 battalions for offensive operations; most MOCs have three TOCs, made up of three battalions each.

¹⁴ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma government in Hpa-an, Karen State. Negotiators from the two parties met for a 2nd round of talks on April 4th, where they signed a more detailed preliminary ceasefire plan, and held a 3rd round of negotiations on September 3rd and 4th 2012; see "Preliminary Ceasefire Talks," *Karen National Union*, April 4th 2012; "KNU Delegations Departs for the Third Round Negotiation of Ceasefire with the Burmese Government," *Karen National Union*, September 1st 2012. In 2013, the ceasefire process became a nationwide effort. On November 2nd, 17 ethnic armed groups signed a joint proposal for a nationwide ceasefire in Laiza, Kachin State; see "Burma's armed ethnic groups sign nation-wide ceasefire pledge in Laiza," *Kachin News*, November 5th 2013. Two days later in Myitkyina, Kachin State, the EAGs presented their proposal to a Burma government delegation, which then presented its own plan. The Government rejected the EAG's proposal for a multi-ethnic federal army, the EAGs requested more time to review, and both sides agreed to meet again; see "Myanmar Peace Talks Fail to Nail Down Cease-Fire Agreement," *Radio Free Asia*, November 5th 2013. On January 25th 2014, in Law Khee Lar, Karen State, 17 ethnic armed groups agreed to an updated proposal to be presented to the Burma government in Hpa-an in February 2014; see "Ethnic armed groups sign 11-point nationwide ceasefire draft," *Myanmar Freedom Daily*, January 26th 2014. For more information on the ceasefire and how it has affected local villagers, see "Safeguarding human rights in a post-ceasefire eastern Burma," KHRG, January 2012 and "Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process," KHRG, November 2012.

How about from the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] mother organisation? Are there things like making demands?

No, but they just come to the village sometimes because their friends in the village invite them to come and have a meal with them. Because they [are like] their brothers and sisters, friendly and happy and [they] love each other. So they invite their [brothers, sisters] to come and visit with them because they haven't met each other for long time. There is nothing else.

Let's say, in some places there could be something like soldiers from the KNLA coming to the village drinking alcohol and they get drunk and shoot their guns in the village like that. Are there things like that here?

In our region, there is nothing like that. But sometimes we hear gun shots from the places which are a bit far from here, like Ma Yan Gon [village].

In Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, are there things like soldiers from the Government or other organisations coming and confiscating the land of the villagers?

Yes, IB [Infantry Battalion]¹⁵ #44's Operation Commander U Mya Soe, came in 2005 at the time when the company came [to the village] he also came, near M--- village. He said that that was uncultivated land¹⁶ and confiscated 31 acres of land. He worked with a land surveyor. People [villagers] said [to Operation Commander U Mya Soe]: *"that is our football field and we keep it for the children to play as it located before the school. That is the play ground for the villagers."* Even though we said that he worked with the land surveyor and said that it was uncultivated land. They confiscated 31 acres of land and some people [whose lands were confiscated] dared not to say anything. They just let it be. One kid, his aunt's land was confiscated and he went to them and spoke about it and he [U Mya Soe] gave him 10,000 [kyat] (US \$10.13). He is not living in IB #44 anymore, he moved to another place and sold the land to Max Company. He sold those 30 acres of lands worth 310,000,000 [kyat] (US \$314,083.08) to Max Company. That harms the villagers more because the land is next to the village and if we look at other side [we] also lost the village's sport field and the students don't have anywhere to play. Now there is only a small place for students to play.

Since you mentioned Max Company, do you know the owner of Max Company?

U Zaw Zaw is the owner.

Do they work together with the [Myanmar] government or Kaw Thoo Lei [KNU]?

They said that they work with the Government and Kaw Thoo Lei. I don't know if they will follow the right [if they respect the rights of the villagers].

¹⁵ Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw); 500 soldiers but most in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers.

¹⁶ The perpetrator of this abuse may have been claiming authority under one of the Burma government laws that allows rights to land to be transferred from villagers to private entities. The Wasteland Instructions Law (1991) enabled both domestic and foreign investment in large-scale commercial enterprises through transfer of use rights to designated "wasteland" (or "vacant, fallow and virgin land"). This practice was recently reaffirmed by the Vacant, Fallow, Virgin Land Law (2012). As development has increased in southeastern Burma since the signing of the government-KNU ceasefire in January 2012, KHRG has received an increasing number of complaints of confiscation of "uncultivated land" or "wasteland." For KHRG documentation of land confiscation arising from development projects, see: *Losing Ground: Land conflicts and collective action in eastern Myanmar*, KHRG, March 2013. For summary and analysis of the legal and policy framework relating to land management in Burma, see: *Legal Review of Recently Enacted Farmland Law and Vacant Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law*, Food Security Group - Land Core Group, November 2012.

In the village tract [Shwe Yaw Pya] do you know of other places where they confiscated the land?

Yes, in Kyeh T'Raw village, located in a village tract [Shwe Yaw Pya], which is under the control of a Tatmadaw officer [inaudible]. That is an artillery, called Artillery #314. They have been there for around nine or ten years already. The artillery's land is, in previous times, the land was villagers' durian plantations, mango plantations, pomelo plantations. There were many plantations. They said it was "uncultivated land" and they recognized it as the battalion's land and confiscated it. After confiscating the land, the land that they planned to confiscate was not near the village. But now in 2009, 2010, 2011 they planned to confiscate land up to the river that is near the village. They said: *"that is the battalion's area."* The rubber trees that are ready to tap they ask 200 kyat (US \$0.20) for each tree. Then, in the summer of 2011, they asked to cut down the [trees] and clear [the bushes]. As for villagers, they kept [the land] like their ancestors and thought that if they clear [the land] they will plant [rubber trees]. The people thought that they would be satisfied with the profit split half and half. For example, if they planted two acres, they would be pleased with one acre's profits. After asking [the villagers] to cultivate the land, they said, *"I can't wait anymore. This is not your land. This is the battalion's land."* So, we also reported it to the Government. In previous times, that was not the time when the president was controlling the country, [maybe SPDC controlled the area] and so they [land surveyor] dared not to help us. Everybody has to be afraid of them. Like, the township administrator, etc. they dared not [help the villagers]. And now we don't know what they will do next, but we have reported it to them already. We just wait and see if they can help us in some way. In the battalion's area, there are 517 acres of the lands according to the land surveyor's document. And they confiscated more land near the village and made the [battalion's land] wider.

So the land has been confiscated by the [battalion]?

Yes, until now. So, those who have confiscated the land are Max Company, IB #44 with Operation Commander U Mya Soe and LIB #314 artillery.

So currently, the land has been confiscated?

Yes, they confiscated the land because [in previous times] that was the civilian's land in the village.

So, how about if we look at the time since the ceasefire? What do you think of the situation of the Government?

As civilians, our feeling about that, we dare not to believe them. They always have in their mind to cheat [people or villagers] because there is no confirmation [transparency].

So, they come, go and visit the village region. How about now? Are there things like that? Are they gone?

In our region, before the ceasefire was signed, in 2011, they gathered all [Myanmar soldiers in that area] and in [2012], after the ceasefire was signed, they didn't send [soldiers] anymore. Before the ceasefire was signed they removed some soldiers, but we don't know whether they sent more soldiers to other regions.

So now, after the ceasefire, where are the soldiers? Are there any soldiers in some places?

A few soldiers remain in our village tract, in Ma Yan Gon village, a few soldiers are there.

Are there any other places [places that soldiers are living]?

No.

Regarding the signing, [ceasefire] what do you think? Do you think we can believe them?

Our brothers and sisters here, the KNU, want people to improve [develop]. They have that intention, but we don't know how the SPDC is going to act. But we dare not believe them. Because in previous times they made a ceasefire [with the KNU] and as far as we know they were fighting a short time after the ceasefire was made. We, our Karen people, KNU, we can believe that they will really make peace. We can't believe the government SPDC.

Regarding not being able to believe them, do you want to say why?

They cheated us. Like Major General Khin Nyut, they cheated when they organized the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]. After the DKBA split [from the KNLA], they did not show them [DKBA] good [ways], and more over they asked them to fight against Karen people. By that we foresee that it can't be good. They call us and hold hands together; they said it would improve civilian's lives. So that the rest of our brothers would follow, and so that they would think, "*our brothers who went first were showed good [things or ways]*" so that the rest will think that it is good. Now there is no difference. They called us and held hands together and asked us to fight against our brothers. By that, you can determine [if they are believable or not], and that is real. Generation by generation, they said they will make peace repeatedly. In the end everything [that the government said] was lies. After groups [people or soldiers] returned, it was no different. They just came and harmed [people] and then went back to their camp.

So now, if we look at the people [civilians], do you think they can believe them [Myanmar government]?

I don't think that the people, civilians can believe [the Government] fully.

Now I have asked you everything that I wanted to know. So finally, is there anything special on your mind that you would like to mention? On behalf of people, for civilians?

So, it's like that. Regarding the SPDC government, we want our brothers [KNU] to believe [the ceasefire] temporarily and half believe it, not to believe everything fully. To speak on behalf of the villagers here, in this village tract to make the SPDC stop harming the villagers and if they [KNU] could, help us a little [more]. Because now it is very hard to work [earn a livelihood] and the people are having problems working without owning any property [land] and because of that they have to work in other countries. Yes, that's what I would like to mention on behalf of people.

What else?

The other thing is, for the healthcare of people in the village, if possible, take care back [take more care]. If possible, on the behalf of village, if you can help, help us in a good way. There are problems in the village and if [you or other organisations] can help the civilians will be a little happier.

For the people, in order live in peace, what do you think is necessary?

To live in peace, like I said before, after the ceasefire, we want [the ceasefire] to be signed with them [Tatmadaw] fowling the agreement. If they could hold hands forever, the civilians' lives would be lighter [better] with no fighting and opportunities to go [travel]. The civilians would live lighter [life would be easier].

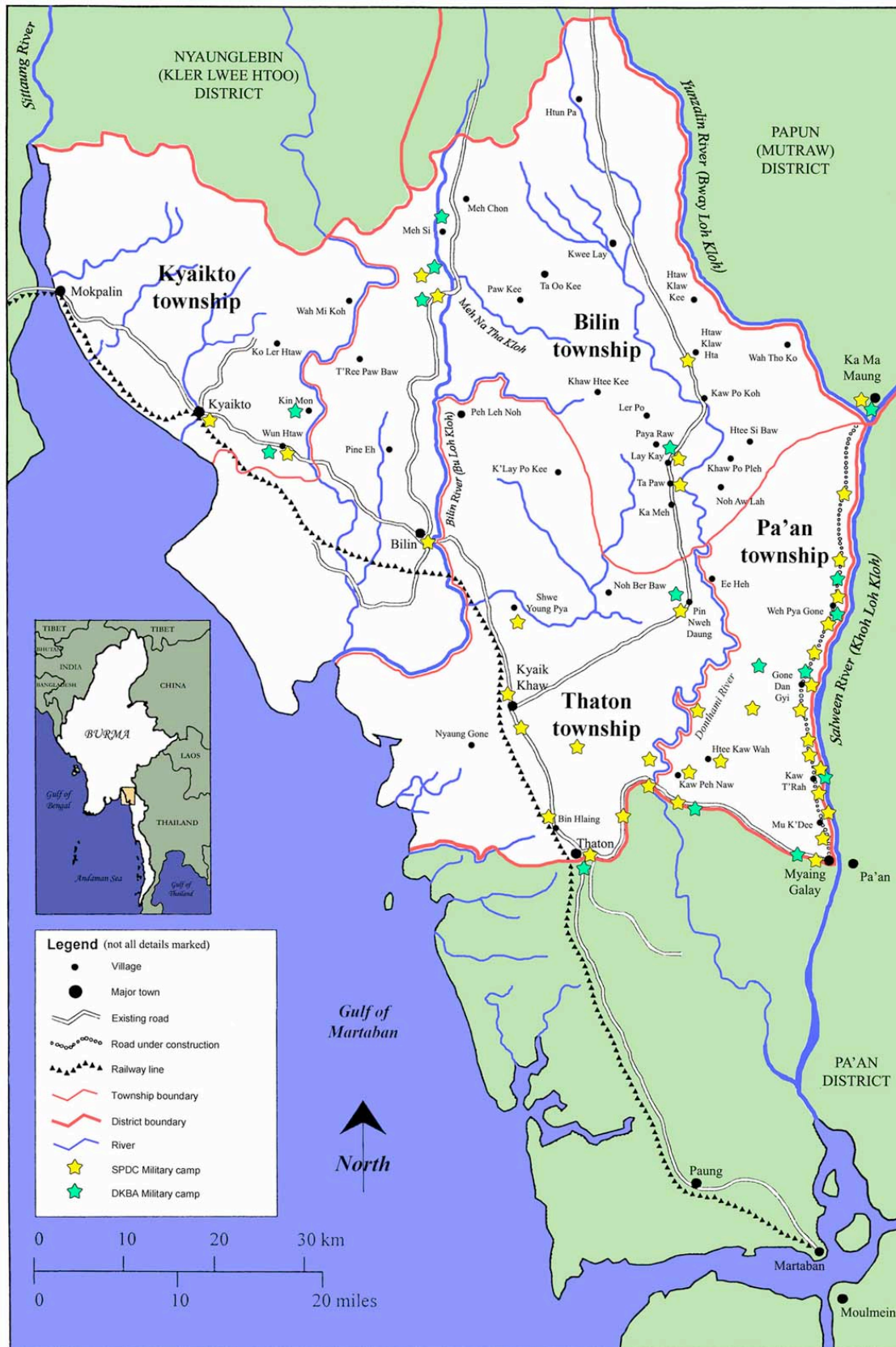
So now, I know all that I wanted to know. So, what I want to know, the information that I wanted, I asked you and you answered by sharing your experiences as you went through them and your feelings. So, thanks. In the future we may have to work [cooperate] together more. The more we work together, the more we know our information and problems. So, thank you for sharing your information.

Thanks.

Further background reading on the situation in Thaton District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire*, (May 2014)
- "Thaton Situation Update: Hpa-an, Thaton and Bilin townships, January to July 2013," (December 2013)
- "BGF Battalion #1014 forced labour and forced recruitment, April to May 2012," (May 2013)
- "Incident Report: Forced labour in Thaton District, April 2012," (May 2013)
- *Losing Ground: Land conflicts and collective action in eastern Myanmar*, (March 2013)

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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