



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Situation Update

February 7, 2014 / KHRG #13-117-S1

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### Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to October 2013

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District during the period between August and October 2013, including rape and sexual violence, forced labour and a development project.*

- On August 21<sup>st</sup> 2013, BGF #1014's Sergeant Saw Dah Tu sexually abused Ma P--- while he was intoxicated in Meh S--- village. Ma P--- was given 200,000 kyat (US \$203.05) by Officer Tin Win as compensation for what his comrade sergeant had done.
- As of October 2013, BGF #1013 and BGF #1014 were still ordering S--- villagers to do unpaid labour, including serving as messengers and guides for soldiers.
- On June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013, Burma government Hpapun Agriculture Department staff member, Saw Ah Ei, raped Ma D--- in Hpapun Town, Meh K'Law village tract.<sup>1</sup>

### Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (August to October 2013)

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2013. It was written by a community member in Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>2</sup> This report was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including five incidents, 14 interviews and 31 photographs.<sup>3</sup>*

Since the Karen National Liberation [Army] and Thein Sein's government or Nay Pyi Daw government signed the ceasefire agreement,<sup>4</sup> we have to admit that human rights abuse, forced labour, [including] sentry and messenger [duty], are decreasing.

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<sup>1</sup> The rape and sexual violence cases described in this report were also published by KHRG in a separate News Bulletin: "[Rape and sexual harassment in Hpapun District, June and August 2013](#)," KHRG November 2013.

<sup>2</sup> KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

<sup>3</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's redesigned Website.

<sup>4</sup> On January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma government in Hpa-an, Kayin State. Negotiators from the two parties met for a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of talks on April 4<sup>th</sup>, where they signed a more detailed preliminary ceasefire plan, and held a 3<sup>rd</sup> round of negotiations

However, we cannot say that it [human rights abuses] have decreased in every part of Karen State. Especially in the places where both the Nay Pyi Daw government [Tatmadaw] and KNU [Karen National Union/ Karen National Liberation Army] control the area, or the places where media groups cannot reach, such as Meh P'Lee village tract, Meh K'Law village tract, the Tatmadaw are still committing human rights abuses. So, I have included it in the situation update [reporting on issues occurring] between August 30<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013.

For the people who live in places where media groups cannot access, even when they are forced to do labour or tortured, they do not know where and who to report the abuse that they have suffered to, and they also do not know that they can talk to the parliament about the abuse. The local people also do not understand human rights. Because of that, the local villagers are always being ordered to do forced labour, sentry, messenger, porter, [as well as face] sexual harassment or abuse towards women. These kinds of abuses are still happening in the areas that I mentioned above.

Before the ceasefire talk, the Tatmadaw, in particular, was committing the human rights abuse and, after the ceasefire talk, we can say that the Tatmadaw reduced [the frequency with which they were] abusing human rights. Even though we can say that they reduce it, the BGF [Border Guard Force],<sup>5</sup> which is led by the Tatmadaw, is still sexually abusing the women and abusing human rights. Moreover, they also ordered the villagers to serve as messengers and sentries in their camp everyday, to use them when they need anything to be done. We can still see that the villagers are still being ordered by the BGF to serve as sentries. Likewise, the BGF [soldiers] also use drugs, such as beer and hard liquor, which are sold illegally, and go around the village and sexually abuse the women. They would not have sexually abuse the woman if they were not intoxicated, but they did it after using a lot of drugs.<sup>6</sup>

If I have to talk about the incident precisely, on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2013, Ma P--- was sexually harassed when the BGF from Weh Gyi area came into the village on that day. The

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on September 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 2012; see [“Preliminary Ceasefire Talks,” Karen National Union](#), April 4<sup>th</sup> 2012; [“KNU Delegations Departs for the Third Round Negotiation of Ceasefire with the Burmese Government,” Karen National Union](#), September 1<sup>st</sup> 2012. In 2013, the ceasefire process became a nationwide effort. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 2013. On January 25<sup>th</sup> 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,” Myanma Freedom Daily](#), January 26<sup>th</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry or light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see [“DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force” Democratic Voice of Burma](#), August 2010, and, “Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District,” KHRG, June 2009.

<sup>6</sup> The community member uses the word ‘drug’ referring to alcohol in the case.

person who committed the abuse is the sergeant, Saw Dah Tu; he committed it when he drank a lot of alcohol and got drunk while staying at Ma P---'s house.

At 9:00 pm that night, BGF #1014's Sergeant Saw Dah Tu went into Ma P---'s room while he was drunk and sexually harassed her. That was on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2013 and the location is S--- village, Meh P'Lee village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, in Ma P---'s house. Ma P---'s mother, Ma Hs--- or [also referred to as] Naw W---, went to see Saw Dah Tu's BGF #1014 *Bo*<sup>7</sup> Saw Tin Win and told him about the incident. Because of that *Bo* Tin Win gave her 200,000 kyat (US \$203.05)<sup>8</sup> as compensation for what his comrade sergeant had done.

And the other human rights abuse is forced labour, such as forced labour or ordering the villagers to serve as sentries without paying them. The armed groups that came and based their camp in S--- village, Meh P'Lee village tract, Bu Tho Township are BGF #1013 and BGF #1014.<sup>9</sup> Since they started building their army camps and, until now, October 30<sup>th</sup> 2013, they order the villagers to serve as *set tha* [messengers]<sup>10</sup> and sentries. The villagers also will have to guide them and porter their stuffs and weapons for them. Until now, while the KHRG community member is interviewing the villagers, the BGF is still ordering the villagers to serve as messengers and sentries. The community member interviewed Saw T---, who is 37 years old.

Moreover, the Hpapun Agriculture Department staff, Saw Ah Ei, or [also named] Ja Ei, raped the Ei--- villager, Ma D---, who is only 25 years old. The rape case happened on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013 in Hpapun Town, [section # censored for security], Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The perpetrator is U Ah Ei or U Ja Ei (31 years old, father's name U Htun Hla Shwe), and he is a staff from Hpapun Agriculture Department. The abuse happen when Ma D--- went to the water pump, which is located close to U Ja Ei's house. Because of the sexual abuse that the son had done, U Htun Hla Shwe, who is U Ja Ei's father, compensated 300,000 kyat (US \$304.57) to Ma D---. However, U Ja Ei or U Ah Ei is still kept in the jail in Hpapun Town and has not been released yet.

Furthermore, I also want to report about the development projects [happening] since the ceasefire talk. The vehicle road from Hpapun Town to K'Ma Maung, called Aung Theint Dee town, is being repaired and developed with cement. The repairing and developing started on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2013. The bridges along the Aung Theint Dee vehicle road, which are still in the process of being developed, are the T'Kone Taing village's bridge, Hway Hsan village's bridge and Nyi Naung [village's] bridge, which is located close to Ma Htaung village.

The T'Kone Taing Bridge is 60 feet long and it was built with the concrete, so the cost is 173 billion kyat (US \$175,634,517.77). It was built by the engineer, Ko Min Thant, who is

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<sup>7</sup> Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

<sup>8</sup> As of February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 985 kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>9</sup> KHRG continues to receive reports discussing abuses involving BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014, including: "[BGF Battalion #1014 forced labour and forced recruitment, April to May 2012](#)," KHRG, June 2013; "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011 to July 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013; "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013 and "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013.

<sup>10</sup> *Set tha* is a Burmese term for forced labour duty, such as with messengers stationed at army camps or bases, serving as an intermediary to deliver orders from army officers to village heads, but also involving other menial tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.

from the branch of the Burma [government] construction ministry special group #13. The Hway Hsan Bridge is also built by the Burma construction ministry special group #13, but it was led by Engineer Daw Yin Nwe. The bridge is 50 feet long and it is also built by cement so, the cost is 167.80 billion [kyat] (US \$170,558,375.63).

The Nyi Naung Bridge, which is located close to Ma Htaung village, is still in the process of being constructed and repaired by the Burma construction ministry special group (13), which is led by Engineer Daw Yin Nwe. The bridge is 60 feet long and it costs 164.30 billion. The bridges that are mentioned were all started to be constructed and repaired on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2013, and some of them are still in the process of constructing.

Everything that mentioned above happened between August 30<sup>th</sup> 2013 and October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013. Just as the human rights abuse has change positively, like vehicle construction, there are also some negative changes.

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

- ["Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2013,"](#) (December 2013)
- ["Rape and sexual harassment in Hpapun District, June and August 2013,"](#) (November 2013)
- ["Hpapun Incident Report: Tatmadaw soldiers threaten brickmaker in Bu Tho Township,"](#) (November 2013)
- [\*Civilian and military order documents, November 2009 to July 2013,\*](#) (October 2013)
- ["Forced labour and indiscriminate firing in Hpapun District, June and July 2012,"](#) (October 2013)

