



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Situation Update

June 4, 2014 / KHRG #13-137-S1

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### Hpa-an Situation Update: Nabu Township, September to October 2013

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*This Situation Update describes the state of education in Nabu Township, Hpa-an District during the period between September and October 2013. This report includes information about the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI), which, during 2012 and 2013, provided support to the villagers to help them build new schools. This report also covers problems that the villagers are facing with the Myanmar government education system. These issues include not being able to teach the ethnic language, not being able to fly the Karen flag, a lack of teachers and corruption related to receiving a Myanmar government education certificate.*

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### Situation Update | Nabu Township, Hpa-an District (September to October 2013)

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in December 2013. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an 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>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Hpa-an District, including 21 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

I would like to report about the Norwegian [organisation, Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI)], which came and built three schools for the villagers in my region during 2012 and 2013. In 2012, they built a school in N--- village, Noh Hpyoo village tract, T'Nay Hsah [Nabu] Township, Hpa-an District. The school was built successfully and villagers decided to hold [classes] until the 8<sup>th</sup> standard in that school. Karen literature is not taught in that school and the Karen flag is not allowed to be flown. I saw [met] some of the villagers reflecting [upon the situation] and [they] were asking themselves, "We live in a Karen village, we are the Karen ethnic group, so why can't we learn Karen literature and why can't we fly the Karen flag? We can only fly the Burmese flag and it means we are under control of the Burmese people. We have many Karen

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<sup>1</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>2</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.

*armed groups and I would like to tell them to take action in order for us to be able to learn our own language and to be able to fly our own flag at our village school as we are the Karen ethnic group.”*

I would also like to report about the Norwegian [organisation that] helped to build a school and supports the Karen villagers in S--- village, Htee Hpoh Kyaw village tract, T’Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District. After the ceasefire [agreement], I saw that the villagers have been able to give [their] opinion more and they also dare to express their ideas regarding the rights that they should have in their region. In my [the researcher’s] opinion, our Karen Human Rights Group should be more active in the region. Regarding the school that I have mentioned, it is located in a very complicated area where five different armed groups are active: Tatmadaw, KNLA, KPF [Karen Peace Force],<sup>3</sup> DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]<sup>4</sup> and BGF [Border Guard Force].<sup>5</sup> This is a place where villagers are injured and killed. This school was successfully [finished being] built on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2013 and all of the teachers teaching in that school are [appointed] by the Myanmar government so that the Karen people are not taught the Karen language and Karen textbooks are not produced [used]. Karen people see that this situation is not good. How can I answer the people if they ask me, *“How can we solve the problem and how are we are going to discuss the problem?”*

I also would like to report about M--- School, which is being supported by the Norwegian [organisation], and was finished being built on September 15<sup>th</sup> 2013. The villagers are trying hard for their children in order [for them] to be able to attend school with a higher quality so that they [the villagers] set it up until the 10<sup>th</sup> standard. It is not a school that the government set up, but it is a school in which the school [students’] parents and the leaders try [to run the school] as a self-help basic school. They understand the situation [of their village] and have worked together for a better situation for the children who need to spend money to attend school in the town. Even if they need to hire teachers, they are going to hire them. Regarding this issue, I asked them whether the Government acknowledges the students and will provide the certificate of the school, [in] which the government acknowledges them or not. They replied to me that, *“We only need to have money in Myanmar. We can buy the certificate. If we pay money to the headmaster or the teacher, it is easy for us to get the certificate. The only important thing for us is for*

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<sup>3</sup> The Karen Peace Force was formed in February 1997 after splitting from the KNU/KNLA and surrendering to and signing a ceasefire with the Burmese military government. The KPF controls some administrative areas in Three Pagodas Pass and operates a number of road and river checkpoints in the area of Three Pagodas Pass. Following repeated rejections of Burmese government proposals to reform KPF into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, substantial elements have since reformed in the Tatmadaw Border Guard in 2010 while others remain independent.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<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

*our children to be literate. If we go and learn in their school, even after ten years, they would not let our Karen children pass the exam. It's only a waste of money and the Burmese people will only keep our Karen people below them.*" This school is set up in M--- village, Keh K'La village tract, T'Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpa-an 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)
- "Hpa-an Situation Update: Lu Pleh Township, 2012 to 2013," (February 2014)
- "Incident Report: Two children injured from DKBA and BGF fighting in Hlaing Bwe, April 2013," (October 2013)
- "Hpa-an Interview: Saw N---, June 2012," (October 2013)
- "Hpa-an Situation Update: T'Nay Hsah Township, April 2013," (October 2013)

