



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Incident Report: Monk orders forced labour for bridge construction, Hpapun District

The following incident report was submitted to KHRG in March 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District in January 2012. On January 1st 2013, civilians were ordered to work on the construction of Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge by the presiding monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu, U Thuzana. Men, women, elderly people and children from Daung Mwe, Day Wa, Kyaw Pa, Me Pa Lee and Pu Zon Myaung village tracts in Bu Tho Township were ordered to do unpaid work as a religious donation, however, some villagers felt the order amounted to forced labour because they were unable to refuse the demand. Additional information about this incident can be found in the previously published KHRG report, "Demands for labour and money by religious leaders in Hpapun District, January 2013".

Incident report | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (January 2013)

The following incident report has been written by a community member 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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including one other incident report, three interviews, one situation update and 50 photographs.²

Part 1 – Incident(s) detail

Type of Incident	Forced labour
Date of Incident(s)	January 1 st 2013
Incident Location (Village, Township and District)	C--- village, Pu Zon Myaung village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District

Victim Information								
Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Religion	Family	Occupation	Responsible	Village
Saw G---	36	Male	Karen	Buddhist	Yes	Farmer	Village head	Y---

¹ KHRG incident reports are written or gathered by community members in Hpapun District who have been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. KHRG trains community member in eastern Burma to document individual incidents of abuse 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 incident reports, community members are encouraged to document incidents of abuse that they consider to be important, by verifying information from multiple sources, assessing for potential biases and comparing to local trends.

² KHRG's most recently-published field information from Hpapun District can be found in the report, "Papun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, March 2012 to March 2013," KHRG, July 2013.

Perpetrator Information				
Name	Rank	Unit	Base	Commander
Monk Thuzana ³	Patron of Myaing Gyi Ngu, founder of DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army] ⁴		Myaing Gyi Ngu	Unknown

Part 2 - Information Quality

1. Explain the specific manner how you collected this information.

The researcher [KHRG community member] himself knew the information about building a bridge called Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge, which is being constructed across the Yunzalin River in C--- village. [The construction is] led by the presiding monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu, U Thuzana. [This is] based on the exact information reported by Y--- village head, Saw G---, who had to go and build the bridge even when he was not available. Saw G--- is a victim who had to go to build the bridge.

2. Explain how the source verified information accuracy.

This information is accurate because he [the victim] was involved and had to do forced labour in the bridge construction. Saw G--- said, *"If it was donation [voluntary] work, it would be fine if we did not go. But now, it is like you cannot refuse to go, so it is not donation [work] anymore"*.

PART 3 – Incident Details

Describe the Incident(s) in complete detail. For each incident, be sure to include 1) when the incident happened, 2) where it happened, 3) what happened, 4) how it happened, 5) who was involved, and 6) why it happened. Also describe any villager response(s) to the incident, the aftermath and the current living situation of the victims. Please, use the space prepared below and create attach if needed.

The construction of Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge, which is going to be reported now, started from January 1st 2013 [and is ongoing] until now.⁵ There will still be the ordering of [villagers to do] forced labour without payment until the bridge is successfully finished. The Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge construction is located in C--- village, Pu Zun Myaung village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District at the northern part of the Yunzalin River mouth.

The person who leads and builds the Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge is the patron and presiding monk, Monk Thuzana, from Myaing Gyi Ngu. The civilians who have to do forced labour have to deal with difficulties. They complain because of being ordered to do forced labour without payment for the long-term bridge construction, even though it is meant to be donation work for religious [purposes]. Since January 1st 2013, when the Htee La Eh Hta's Bridge started being constructed, the local civilians, including old and young people, male and female, many people, have been ordered [to perform labour] for a long time.

³ U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, March 1996. In 1995, KHRG reported that U Thuzana had collaborated with the Tatmadaw, and met with then-South eastern Commander Major General Maung Hla to obtain weapons and supplies for 4,000 soldiers in his monastery. As a result of the agreement, U Thuzana's monastery in Myaing Gyi Ngu, in northern Hpa-an District, reportedly developed a reputation as a mystical safe haven for villagers avoiding Tatmadaw abuses. See "Karen Human Rights Group commentary," KHRG, February 1995.

⁴ 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.

⁵ The construction of the Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge was ongoing at the time of the report, March 25th 2013.

The civilians who are bring ordered [to perform labour] include everyone from Daung Mwe, Day Wa, Kyaw Pa, Me Pa Lee and Pu Zun Myaung village tracts in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. It is known that half of the civilians in Bu Tho Township are ordered [to do forced labour].

Besides ordering [villagers to work] without pay, if the civilians cannot afford to travel and are absent from their own work, U Thuzana does not take responsibility to solve it [the problem] for them. I have done research and know that, even though it is a time when we can say that the ordering of [villagers to] porter and [to do] forced labour by the country government has decreased, the forced labour [ordered by] the Myaing Gyi Ngu vegetarian denomination is carried out so the civilians have to do more work.

Part 4 - Permission for Using the Details

Did the victim(s) provide permission to use this information? Explain how that permission was provided.

Saw G--- gave permission that [the information] can be used as we like and as it is needed.

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

- Papun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, March 2012 to March 2013,” (July 2013)
- “BGF and KNLA grenades injure villagers and their children in Papun District,” (July 2013)
- “Incident Report: Villager tortured by Tatmadaw commanders in Papun District, December 2012,” (June 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to March 2013,” (June 2013)
- “Demands for labour and money by religious leaders in Papun District, January 2013,” (June 2013)

