



Situation Update

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Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Win Yay townships, December 2013 to February 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik, and Win Yay townships, Dooplaya District between December 2013 and February 2014, including land confiscation, villagers' livelihoods, abuses, explicit threats and updates on villagers' education and healthcare.

- *In Lay Wa Hploh village, Kyainseikgyi Township, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) officer Ee Wah has built two clinics for villagers, as well as provided salaries for medics and medicine for patients. Villagers also reported that Officer Ee Wah began farming uncultivated land, which he did not own, in three villages.*
 - *In B--- village, Kyainseikgyi Township, villagers were forbidden by Tatmadaw soldiers from fishing in a local river due to overfishing. However, when village authorities confronted the soldiers for then fishing themselves from the river after the fact, they were subject to explicit threats by the soldiers.*
 - *Villagers in Htee Ghuh Thaw village, Kawkareik Township, reported better opportunities to work for their livelihoods as they can travel more freely during the ceasefire. The Burma/Myanmar government also built a cement school in the village using financial support from a foreign country.*
 - *Additionally in Kawkareik Township, villagers reported being offered small loans by an international organization. A number of villagers refused the loans, as they would be required to begin paying back the principal plus interest within three months, and they considered the risk too great.*
 - *Villagers in Win Yay Township reported that while the overall situation regarding health care, education and buildings has improved, there have been some cases of the destruction of paddy fields and rubber plants by the Tatmadaw during road repair projects.*
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Situation Update | Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Win Yay townships, Dooplaya District (December 2013 to February 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in March 2014. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

¹ KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma/Myanmar 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.

Kyainseikgyi Township

I went and saw the situation in Lay Wa Hploh village. On December 19th 2013, I met with one of the villagers [from nearby A--- village] who has been oppressed [by the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)].² He said to me *“Why does Officer Ee Wah who is a DKBA [soldier] have the right [to work on uncultivated lands] in Lay Wa Hploh, Ghuh Poo, Meh Ka Tha and Htee Ta Bluh areas. From whom does he get permission? This township is Kyainseikgyi Township. Why don’t people [the village head] tell him [not to work on that land]. Even though we, A--- villagers, want to work on one or two acres [of land each] in this area, we cannot work on it, nor did we have the chance to. What can we do? People, [like the village head], do not give us the opportunity [to work on it].”* The villager also added *“DKBA [Officer Ee Wah’s] organization of these things [cultivation of the land] is not a good thing [for local farmers]. The local farmers hire [labourers from the village and can only pay] a total of 40,000 kyat (US \$41.07)³ for one cleared field [large enough to fill] one [big] tin (10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb.)⁴ with paddy.⁵ However, the DKBA hires [and pays villagers] to clear one field [large enough to fill] one [big] tin of paddy for 4,000 baht (US \$124.77).⁶ Therefore, it causes some difficulties for the villagers [when trying to hire labourers]. There are about 100 workers who work for him [Officer Ee Wah]. It costs 70,000 baht (US \$2,182.35) for the monthly salaries of all of the workers [he hires to clear land]. There are also 78 of his followers [soldiers] who are being fed and supported by him and it costs 80,000 baht (US \$2,494.11) per month [for their food and wages]. These [fees] do not include other things [required for farming]. These two things, [paying villagers and soldiers] costs 150,000 baht (US \$4,675.94) per month [for him].”*

[However], if we look at him [in a different] way, there is one good aspect to Officer Ee Wah, a DKBA soldier. He has built two clinics in Lay Wa Hploh village for the villagers. He also bought medicine for the patients and poor villagers and hired healthcare workers to take care of the patients. He also bought two cars to send the patients back and forth [from their homes to the clinics]. Moreover, if some of the patients who are having medical treatment in Lay Wa Hploh clinic do not get better, they are sent to Hsaw Loh hospital, as well as provided with enough money [for treatment and medicine]. The villagers in Lay Wa Hploh village see that Officer Ee Wah, a DKBA soldier, is doing good things. If we look at him in this way, I see that it is a good thing that he helps the villagers. If we look at him in another way, the way that he did [land confiscation, it] is not good for the civilians.

I went to B--- village and I saw and heard about this village. On December 23rd 2013, the village head and village secretary said that *“[Tatmadaw] soldiers who are [currently] staying near our village ordered us not to fish because the fish were going extinct.”*

² 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/Myanmar 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/Myanmar 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.

³ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the September 2, 2014 official market rate of 973.99 kyat to the US \$1.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.

⁶ All conversion estimates for the Baht in this report are based on the September 2, 2014 official market rate of 32.08 baht to the US \$1.

Responsibility [for this] was given to these two persons, [the village head and village secretary], and they were ordered to watch over villagers so that no one went to go to fish.⁷ One day, these soldiers themselves [went fishing and] caught three bags of fish. The village tract leader went and told them “*You said no one was going to fish and now you are fishing.*” They then said to the village head “*Do not say anything! It is not your concern. If you dare to say [anything], then say it. [But] if the Tatmadaw and KNU [Karen National Union] fight against each other again in the future, you will see [what I will do to you].*” They [the Tatmadaw] asked the two of them, “*How many heads do you have, [are you willing to risk losing it]?*”. However, after these two persons explained the issue to me, I asked them the names of the soldiers, but they did not know. I also do not know the names of the soldiers. The villagers want to report this issue [to the Tatmadaw], but they do not dare to report as they are afraid of them. I see this is not such a good thing. It affects the rights of the civilians.

As well, in the education sector [in Kyainseikgyi Township] there is a teacher in C---village who asked me “*Why we did we not get permission to build the [middle] school? We want a middle school. [Tell me], how do we go about getting permission to build a middle school in this place? The local authorities [Burma/Myanmar government] in this area have already said that we cannot [build the middle school]. They [Burma/Myanmar government] said that they do not have free time to manage [the construction], so do not build it.*” The local teacher said that he really wants to build the school, as students who are in higher grades [fifth standard and up] in this village have to leave school [and stop studying] sometimes [if they cannot afford to move to another town]. It is difficult [for students] in this village [to continue their education]. This teacher said “*It will be good if we can build a middle school [in this village].*” Therefore, how can we think of [solutions for] him?

I [also] went and saw the situation of the villages related to the building [of houses and roads]. When I look at the transportation used by the villagers for their physical livelihoods, there have been some changes with the road between Kyainseikgyi town and Three Pagodas town compared to the past. Before [the ceasefire],⁸ there was no road. Presently, there is a road which looks good. When I go back and see it [the road], I feel very good. When I look at one village after another between Kyainseikgyi town and Three Pagodas town, the [villagers'] buildings, economy, agriculture, plantations, transportation and cultivation are going well. There might also be some destruction of the villagers' things [plantation or cultivation from road construction]. Things are changing because, in the past, there was nothing [buildings] beside the road in Kyoh Kyaw village. Now, when I go back, I see there are some shops beside the road. The [Tatmadaw] soldiers are also building shops [that they run themselves] there and the traders usually go to stop there and buy something to eat. They [soldiers] get some income from them [traders]. In the past, [before the ceasefire], when I looked around along the road, the villagers dared not work alongside the road as they were afraid of the Tatmadaw. When they were going to harvest the paddy, they would have to be careful and pay attention to when the artillery would start firing and when the Tatmadaw would come. The villagers say “*It is getting better than the past. We have more opportunities to work than the past.*” When I go back and see the villagers, I feel good. It is a good thing.

⁷ In a follow up discussion with the village head, they described that after the Tatmadaw's decree that there would be no fishing in the river, the village head and the Tatmadaw agreed that there would be a three year moratorium on fishing in the river, to allow replenishing of stocks. Any fish caught following that would be shared between the Tatmadaw and the villagers. This agreement was broken by the Tatmadaw, as described.

⁸ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

Kawkareik Township

On December 4th 2013, I went and saw some villagers [in Htee Ghuh Thaw village]. Things are going well with them. During the ceasefire, they have better opportunities to work for their livelihoods as they can travel more freely. I started [my travels] from Htee Ghuh Thaw village and [went] forward [from there]. In Htee Ghuh Thaw village, the Tatmadaw [Burma/Myanmar] government came and built a cement school which cost about (US)\$1,000 and they had [financial] support from a foreign country. Therefore, if we look at the Tatmadaw, they did a good thing for the civilians. They started building the school in April 2013 and it [construction] finished on November 16th [2013]. [They] are doing the opening ceremony of this school on February 6th [2014]. After they built the school, they [Tatmadaw] gave it to the villagers and asked the villagers to start [running] the school by themselves. The buildings in [Kawkareik Township] villages are getting nicer compared to the buildings that I have seen in the past. This is a great thing.

[On December 9th 2013], I went and saw the situation of the villages [again]. I also saw a strange thing in [Kawkareik] Township where I visited. The villagers in Tha May Doo village have a great ability to adjust the [size of] things [houses]. When I looked at their houses, it seemed all of their houses were the same size and the same height.⁹ There were no houses which were bigger or smaller than the other houses. The roads were very clean and flat, which looked beautiful. They did not have businesses for their occupations; they were only working on cultivating paddy and hill fields. It is going well with their livelihoods. It is a big village, too. [The villagers] have unity; they love and help each other. The other villages are very small and the villagers do not have unity and love for one another. As well, they do not help each other with their work [farming]. Tha May Doo village is an unusual village. When I saw it I felt very good.

The villagers [in Kawkareik Township] said that there is an organization, the UNTBBC,¹⁰ which is from a foreign country that will come and support them. They said that they are going to give some support to the villagers as they feel pity for the villagers. They will help [by lending] 100,000 kyat (US \$102.67) per house. They asked some of the villagers whether they wanted to raise pigs or whether they want to work in agriculture. There are some villagers who wanted to raise animals, as well as some villagers who want to work in agriculture. However, they (UNTBBC) said that the villagers would have to report how much they have earned [and start paying back] the capital plus interest after three months. Therefore, some of the villagers said that they do not dare take [their money]. [A villagers said] *“For example, after we have taken 100,000 kyat of their money and we buy one pig, we would not be able to find 100,000 kyat for them [to pay back the loan] if our pig has died. As a result, we do not dare take their money [as it is too risky]. It will cause problems for us in the future and we dare not to accept [their support].”* Actually, that is not the right way for them to [support the villagers]. If they are willing to help the villagers, they should not help them by giving the villagers 100,000 kyat [and expecting them to pay it back with interest]. This is like they are lending [the villagers] their money, [instead of providing real support]. I see that this is not a good thing for the civilians.

On January 3rd 2014, I went again and visited Kawkareik Township. The situation is getting better. Starting from Kawkareik town and forward, things such as the roads,

⁹ Here and throughout this report the community member continually draws attention to the quality of new buildings, as well as other features of local development. His interest and often surprise at the quality of these projects are indicative of the level of development that has occurred since the preliminary ceasefire.

¹⁰ Although the community member wrote UNTBBC, it is unclear which organization(s) or project the community member is referring to. It is likely the community member is referring to The Border Consortium (TBC), formerly the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), as well as to one of the several United Nations (UN) bodies that works within Burma/Myanmar on development projects and with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), or in Thailand with refugees. However, it is unclear which UN body the community member is referring to or the particular project being implemented.

livelihoods of the villagers, education sector and health care sector are getting better village by village. There is the Asia Highway which leads to Myawaddy [from Kawkareik town] and it is a very splendid road. The road from Kawkareik town to Aung Hpa Gyi region [in Kawkareik Township] area is also good. When I go from place to place and from village to village, the buildings look very good. I have reported all of the things that I have seen.

Win Yay Township

[On February 6th 2014], I went back and saw the situation in the field. In Htee Hpa Htaw village, Win Yay Township, [the villagers'] occupations, the buildings, the health care sector, the school, and the churches for religion are getting better compared to the past [before the ceasefire]. I also arrived between Taw Tee village and Pha Pya village. Presently, the ethnic group [Burmese Tatmadaw] are repairing the roads to be better. In some places, it destroys some part of the villagers' paddy fields. It also destroys some of the rubber plants belonging to the villagers. I asked a Taw Tee village tract administrator "*Do the villagers feel good about it? Are things going well with them?*" The village tract administrator replied "*There are village tract administrators in every village tract. Do they not have responsibility for that?*"¹¹ I see that this is one thing that abuses the civilians' rights.

Conclusion

The ethnic groups [Tatmadaw and KNU] are in a ceasefire. If we look at the [current] situation, although they [Tatmadaw] said they have stopped fighting, we do not know what they have planned. They also have not withdrawn the Border Guard Force (BGF)¹² soldiers. They [Tatmadaw] are [still] sending rations and weapons [to their camps]. We do not know what their purpose [for doing this] is. If we look at the [Thai-Burma/Myanmar] border in Kwee Ler Ter, Per Hkler and Tha Waw Thaw villages, the Tatmadaw repair their camps to be better. It is not good for the villagers [as they might harm the villagers]. It is not a good thing.

There is no complete freedom for the villagers to work on their livelihoods [as they still fear the Tatmadaw]. Although they want to work on cultivation, they cannot work [completely free from fear] on it. [I ask them] why they are not given the freedom [to work without fear]. They [villagers] said "[even though] *They [Tatmadaw and KNU] have a ceasefire [for] the freedom of the civilians, we do not have any freedom [from fear of Tatmadaw reprisals]. [We see] the value of ourselves [as human beings] as not even being worth 0.005 kyat [zero]. We cannot work on anything [completely free of fear].*" I see this is not a good thing. In this Situation Update, I have reported everything that I know from the situation in the field.

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

¹¹ Here the village tract administrator responds to the community member's question with his own question, effectively that he is aware that the destruction of villagers' land is an issue that he, as the village tract administrator, has a responsibility to address, but has yet to find a solution.

¹² 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 battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and 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.

- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik, Kyonedoe and Kyainseikgyi townships, March to May 2014,” (August 2014)
- “Dooplaya Interview: A---, September 2013,” (July 2014)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yaw Township, November to December 2013,” (July 2014)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Kyonedoe Townships, October 2013 to January 2014,” (July 2014)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, January to August 2013,” (July 2014)

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)