



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Coercive land appropriation and KNLA landmine incident surrounds construction of a BGF army base in Hpapun District

This News Bulletin describes two incidents related to the construction of the Tatmadaw-Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013's army base in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, which underscore the challenges faced in implementing development projects in areas of contested authority and in a context of ongoing militarisation. In May 2012, a group of eight villagers sold their land after a KNU/KNLA-Peace Council member affiliated with the BGF impersonated a Karen National Union (KNU) official in order to convince villagers to sell a total of 135 acres of their land. The villagers later came to regret their decision and have reported this incident to local KNU authorities to no avail. In a separate incident in early 2013, the KNU gave permission to the Green Hill Company to transport sand for the construction of a school. After determining that the sand was in fact being used to construct the same BGF Battalion #1013 army base, KNU and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) authorities demanded the termination of the project, and when it was not ceased, KNLA soldiers planted an anti-vehicle mine at the sand collection site, which exploded, resulting in the death of five workers.¹

According to a KHRG community member, in early May 2012, Tatmadaw-Border Guard Force (BGF)² Battalion #1013 planned to build an army base in between K'Ter Tee and Baw Kyoh Leh villages in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. To implement the project, they cooperated with the Burma government and confiscated a total of 135 acres of land, including villagers' rubber plantations, cashew plantations and farms, for their military compound.

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It information from eight land grabbing forms, one incident report, one short update, one situation update, two photo notes and three interviews received by KHRG in between June 2012 and November 2013. 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 categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's redesigned Website.

² 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.

Villagers reported to KHRG that the confiscation took place on May 20th 2012. The Burma government Hpapun Administer U Hswi came to K'Ter Tee village; four villagers were invited to attend the meeting that related to the confiscation of land belonging to eight people. According to the KHRG community member who met with the villagers who attended that meeting, one of the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council (KPC)³ members named Hteh N'Ser, who is affiliated with the BGF, told the villagers that he was from the KNU headquarters and convinced the villagers to agree to sell their land and accept compensation. Later, the villagers found out that they had been deceived and regretted their earlier decision to sell their land. They wrote complaint letters to local KNU authorities, requesting that an official take up this issue on their behalf; however, they have not received any response from the KNU yet.

Compensation for land and crops paid by Green Hill Company⁴				
Villager	Compensation	# of acres	Type of land	Ownership information
1	400,000 kyat (US \$409) ⁵	0.5 acres	Paddy field	Inherited from parents
2	1,700,000 kyat (US \$1,738)	7 acres	Mango and cashew plantation	Inherited some of the land from parents and widened the area
3	2,250,000 kyat (US \$2,301); 1 acre for 450,000 kyat (US \$460)	5 acres	Rubber plantation; not ready to drain	Bought from other individuals
4	4,050,000 kyat (US \$4,141) paid in three instalments	9 acres	Paddy field	Inherited from parents
5	900,000 kyat (US \$920); 1 acre for 450,000 kyat (US \$460)	10 acres (only compensated for 2 acres)	Paddy field	Inherited from parents
6	3,200,000 kyat (US \$3,272); 1 acre for 800,000 kyat (US \$818)	4 acres	Mature rubber plantation	Inherited from parents
7	4,000,000 kyat (US \$4,090); 1 acre for 800,000 kyat (US \$818)	5 acres	Mature rubber plantation	Inherited from parents
8	900,000 kyat (US \$920); 1 acre for 450,000 kyat (US \$460)	10 acres (only compensated for 2 acres)	Paddy field	Bought from other individuals

They started to construct the army camp on May 10th and the land was confiscated on May 20th 2012. The compensation was given to the eight villagers at different times during May, June and July 2012. According to the villagers, the BGF and Green Hill Company

³ The KNU/KNLA Peace Council (also called the Karen Peace Council or KPC), is an armed group based in Htoh Gkaw Ko, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2007 and subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform its forces into the Tatmadaw Border Guard. See: "[KPC to be outlawed if it rejects BGF](#)," *Burma News International*, August 30th 2010.

⁴ This information is included in eight separate Land Confiscation Evidence forms received by KHRG in December 2013, which were filled out by the KHRG community member together with the villagers whose land was confiscated.

⁵ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the July 3rd 2014 official market rate of 978 kyat to the US \$1.

compensated the owners for only 34.5 acres of land out of 135 acres.⁶ The villagers feel that they must say they are satisfied with the deal because they already signed the documents. However, they are not satisfied with the amount of compensation and feel they were coerced into selling their land. At the same time, they think they cannot do anything to negotiate with the company or authorities. Thus, these villagers decided to report the incident to KHRG and to any other authorities who visit their area.

Since May 2012, the construction was carried out by the Green Hill Company, and as of November 2013, the KHRG community member reported that the construction of BGF Battalion #1013's camp was almost finished, noting that 75 buildings had already been constructed.⁷

According to local villagers, the risk of this type of construction is that the armed wing of the KNU, the KNLA, might engage in an armed attack if this project is not terminated. The local community is deeply concerned about the potential for such armed conflict, as they believe the BGF will continue to build its army base until it has been successfully completed.

Indeed, one incident occurred on February 11th 2013 related to the construction of the BGF Battalion #1013's army base; a Green Hill Company truck that was transporting sand for the construction of the army base detonated a landmine, which killed five civilians, including three under the age of 18. The incident occurred in the western part of the Yunzalin River in K'Ter Tee village, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District.⁸ A villager reported to KHRG that the KNU had permitted a Green Hill Company representative, Ko Myo, to transport sand for the construction of a school. However, when KNU and KNLA authorities discovered that the sand was being used for the construction of the BGF army base, they warned Ko Myo to stop transporting the sand. The transport ceased temporarily, but then continued and the KNLA continued to demand that the project be terminated. According to a villager in the area who spoke with KHRG, KNLA Battalion #102 soldiers then planted the anti-vehicle mine in the project area.⁹ The Green Hill Company compensated the family of each victim with 300,000 kyat (US \$307) and Ko Myo provided an additional 200,000 kyat (US \$204) to each family.¹⁰

These incidents underscore the challenges faced in implementing development projects in areas of contested authority and in a context of ongoing militarisation. In such environments, development projects have significant potential to trigger violent conflict when implemented in a coercive manner or without the agreement of all local people and authorities.

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

- "Hpapun Short Update: Ongoing militarisation and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2013," (July 2014)

⁶ As can be seen in the table, eight villagers received compensation for a total of 34.5 acres of land. Two of those villagers, each of whom had ten acres of their land confiscated, received compensation for only two acres each. The remaining approximately 85 acres of land was community land and did not belong to individuals.

⁷ For photographs of the army base and the land documents, see "[Hpapun Photo Set: BGF Battalion #1013 land confiscation for army base in Dwe Lo Township, June 2012 to November 2013](#)," KHRG, June 2014.

⁸ See "[Papun Interview: Saw A---, March 2013](#)," KHRG, August 2013.

⁹ For a previously published News Bulletin describing this incident in detail, see "[Landmine explosion and death of villagers in Papun District](#)," KHRG, May 2013.

¹⁰ This information was provided to KHRG in March 2013 in a Situation Update written by a community member trained by KHRG from Hpapun District; see "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to March 2013](#)," KHRG, June 2013.

- “Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire,” (July 2014)
- “Hpapun District Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, January to February 2013,” (June 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho, Lu Thaw and Dwe Lo townships, January 2013,” (June 2014)
- “Hatgyi Dam update and consultation concerns, December 2011 to May 2013,” (June 2014)

