



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

August 27, 2015 / KHRG #14-34-A7-I1

Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, April 2014

This Interview with Saw A--- describes events and issues occurring in Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District, between September 2013 and April 2014, including forced labour, healthcare, education, development projects, environmental destruction and villagers' livelihoods.

- *Saw A--- explains that he has fled from B--- village three times during his lifetime due to attacks and destruction perpetrated by the Tatmadaw. The first time was when the Tatmadaw attacked the Three Pagoda Pass area. The second time was when Light Infantry Division (LID) #44 attacked the village and the third time was when LID #22 attacked the village.*
 - *The Tatmadaw ordered eight villagers to provide forced labor in September 2013. They ordered them to carry their ammunition to another village when they were rotating troops, providing only 1,000 kyat (US \$0.89) for the villagers' expenses.*
 - *A section of the Asian Highway is being constructed in the village. As a result, the rubber plantations that were near the road construction area were destroyed. Some villagers had one or two hundred of their rubber plants destroyed.*
 - *Many houses which were near the road construction area were also destroyed and had to be rebuilt in another location. This was a challenge for the villagers, who experienced difficulty rebuilding and roofing their houses. The villagers had to go to cut thatched shingles as new roofing material for their houses.*
 - *The villagers reported the destruction of rubber plantations to the Karen National Union (KNU), however as of yet they have not received any compensation.*
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Interview | Saw A---, (male, 40), B--- village, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District (April 2014)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Dooplaya District in April 2014 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Dooplaya District, including eight other interviews, one incident report, one situation update, and 146 photographs.²

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, 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 website.

Ethnicity: Karen
Religion: Buddhist
Marital Status: Married
Occupation: Working on a rubber plantation
Position: *[censored for security]*

Before I start the interview, do you have anything to ask me?

No, I do not.

Can I take a photo of you after I have interviewed you?

Yes, you can.

After I have taken a photo of you, how do you want your photo to be? Do you want us to censor it?

Do not include the photo [in the report].

So, we are going to start now. What is your name?

Saw A---.

How old are you?

I am 40 years old.

What is the name of your village?

B--- village.

What township and district [is it in]?

It is [in] Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District.

How long have you lived in B--- village?

It has been over ten years.

Are you married?

Yes, I am.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

How old is the youngest one?

Only two years old.

What about the oldest one?

Nine years old.

What ethnicity are you?

I am Karen.

What is your religion?

I am a Buddhist.

What is your responsibility [that you have in the village]?

[I serve as] a *[censored for security]*.

What is your occupation?

I work on [a] rubber plantation.

How long have you been a *[censored for security]*?

It has been four years.

Can you tell me about your experience of being a *[censored for security]*?

The situation is much better compared to in the past. There is not particularly much development [in the village] yet. There is only a road which is being constructed. It brings benefits for the villagers. On the other hand, it damages the villagers' houses. Some villagers are confronted with a challenge as they have to move their houses. I have no idea whether or not the villagers will get compensation. There are challenges for the villagers on one side, but there is development on the other side in terms of the road construction.

Can you tell me [about] your responsibilities as a *[censored for security]*?

I have the responsibility to look after the village and the villagers.

What about other [responsibilities]?

There are no more, particularly.

In terms of being a *[censored for security]*, do you really want to be a *[censored for security]* or [did] the villagers request that you be a *[censored for security]*?

The villagers [in this village] as well as the elders who came from the other villages selected me to be a *[censored for security]*. It is not because I myself want to be a *[censored for security]*. All of the villagers including the monks had discussed and decided that I should be a *[censored for security]*.

How much money do you get from your rubber plantation per year?

We have just got [back] the cost [initially paid] for the establishment of the rubber plantation [so far breaking even].

What did you do before working on a rubber plantation?

I was working on a hill farm.

How much rice did you get per year?

We got just enough rice to cover my family.

What about the other villagers in the village, what kind of occupation do they have for their livelihoods?

They are also working on hill farms. They cannot find other job opportunities to work on.

For those who do not get enough food, what do they do?

They just work in the village. Some work charging passengers money for boat journeys. They also work selling fruit in the rainy season.

What if they still do not have enough food?

If not, they ask for help from their friends.

Do they also work in some other jobs for their income?

They work doing odd jobs.

How long has this village been situated here?

It is about a hundred years old. The village has been destroyed three times due to the fighting.

Do you remember the date of each time [the village was destroyed]?

I do not remember in terms of the date. I just remember the times that we had to flee.

How many times did you have to flee? Can you tell me as much as you know?

It [the first time] was when the Tatmadaw attacked Three Pagoda [Pass, this village [B--- village] was destroyed once. There were only a few houses left in the village at that time. The second time was when Tatmadaw Light Infantry Division (LID)³ #44⁴ attacked the village, it was

³ Light Infantry Division (Tatmadaw); commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

destroyed once again. After LID #44, Tatmadaw LID #22⁵ attacked and the village was destroyed again and there were only two houses left in the village.

Have the Tatmadaw come into the village after the ceasefire?⁶

Yes, they have.

Did they stay in the village when they came?

They travelled straight to the place that they planned to go. They did not go around [disturb the villagers on their way] like they did in the past.

Did they come because they wanted to find out anything?

No, they did not come to find out anything. They came with their own business. If it was getting dark, they would stop and take a rest in the village monastery and they would order the village head [to meet with them]. They did not come and cause trouble in the village.

After they ordered the village head [to meet with them], did they request anything to eat?

No, they did not request anything.

Did they request [villagers] for *loh ah pay* [forced labour],⁷ to carry their material?

Yes, they did during the last rainy season.

Do you remember the date?

No, I cannot remember.

⁴ Despite having not received any further information from the field on this particular village attack committed by LID #44 in Dooplaya District, KHRG has received several reports in recent years, following the 2012 ceasefire, on human rights violations in which soldiers from LID #44 have been implicated. In 2012 the division was stationed along the Bilin riverbank for road security purposes; during this time KHRG received reports of demands made by LID #44 on villagers in Thaton District, including forced labour and extortion, see more at: [“Forced labour in Bilin Township,”](#) KHRG, May 2012 and [“Sustained Tatmadaw resupply operations in Thaton, Nyaunglebin and Hpapun during ceasefire,”](#) KHRG, May 2012. From 2012 to 2013 KHRG received reports of LID #44 activities in Hpapun District, including restrictions on villagers’ freedom of movement and sexual abuse committed by Company Second in Command Moe Win, as well as one incident of torture, see more at: [“Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013,”](#) KHRG, August 2014 and [“Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, July to October 2012,”](#) KHRG, February 2013 and [“Incident Report: Villager tortured by Tatmadaw commanders in Papun District, December 2012,”](#) KHRG, June 2013. LID #44 is based at the Tatmadaw camp in Bilin Township, Thaton District.

⁵ The headquarters of LID #22 is based in Taung Ka Lay village, Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District; KHRG has received recent reports of land confiscation committed by LID #22 in the industrial zone surrounding the area, see more at: [“Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe, Don Yin and Hti Lon townships, April 2014,”](#) KHRG, July 2014.

⁶ 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.

⁷ *Loh ah pay* is a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

Which month was it?

It was in September 2013.

Do you remember the day?

No, I don't.

How many villagers did he [the Tatmadaw commander] order?

He ordered eight villagers from the village. They [Tatmadaw] did not forcibly get the villagers by themselves.

What did the villagers have to do?

They just had to help them carry their packs.

What kind of packs?

I guess they could be bullet packs [containing ammunition]. I did not see inside of the packs.

Can you tell me the name of the villagers who had to go?

[Their names are] Saw C---, Saw D---, Saw E---, Saw F---, Saw G---, Saw H---, Saw I--- and Saw J---.

Can you tell me how did [the village head] get them [to go for forced labour]?

[The village head] went to get them simply telling them that you have to help the Tatmadaw by carrying things [packs] for them.

Did they [the villagers] complain about anything?

They were not willing to go, but they went since the village head ordered them.

Has [the village head] ever replied to the Tatmadaw, “No, [we cannot send the villagers to carry the packs for you]”?

It is not good without sending any villagers. Whenever they order, we have to manage to send at least one or two villagers.

Do they pay the expenses for the villagers?

They sometimes pay 1,000 kyat (US\$ 0.89)⁸ [per person].

How long does it take to travel on foot between K--- [village] and B--- village?

⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 1st 2015 official market rate of 1,122 kyat to the US\$ 1.

It takes only one hour.

The villagers had to carry their [Tatmadaw] packs for one hour and what is the purpose of paying 1,000 kyat (US\$ 0.89) per person? What did they pay it for?

They [Tatmadaw] said it was for their expenses. The villagers dared not ask for it. If they [villagers] were paid, they would take it and if they were not paid, they would not take it.

What was the number of the [Tatmadaw] battalion or column?

I don't know.

Do you know the name of the commander?

He introduced himself to me but I forgot it.

What about the name of the operations commander (G3)?⁹

I do not know either.

How many soldiers were there when they came?

There were 90 soldiers.

Was it a battalion?

It was a battalion.

Did they ever order chicken, pork or money [from the villagers] when they came into the village?

No, they do not after the ceasefire. They asked to buy chicken if they wanted to eat and they paid the same amount as the villagers pay for it in the village.

Do they ever harm any villagers when they come into the village?

No, they have not after the ceasefire.

In terms of ordering porters [for forced labour], has any villager reported it to the KNU [Karen National Union]?

Yes, they [KNU] know about it.

What did they say?

They did not say anything.

⁹ An Operations Commander (G3) is responsible for planning, strategy and training officers. Also known as a strategic/tactical commander.

Have any [other] Tatmadaw groups ever come into the village after them?

Yes, they came. They usually travel with their trucks as it is during the summer, but they do not stop in the village. However, they usually travel on foot during the rainy season and then they stop in the village.

Have they ever demanded that the villagers [go with them] when they travel to K--- village?

Yes, they have.

How many villagers [did they demand]?

[They demanded] eight villagers. The villagers only had to exchange their packs with the villagers in the next village. The villagers from this village had to carry their packs to K--- village. And then villagers from K--- village have to carry their packs to Meh Thwee Hta village.

Did you try to ask the villagers when they were back what they had to carry or how much weight they had to carry?

I asked them. They said that they had to carry bullets. They are heavy, very heavy. The villagers were asked how much they can carry. They [Tatmadaw] did not force them to carry as [much as] they did in the past. In the past, they were forced to carry their heavy packs.

How old were the villagers when they were ordered to porter in [September 2013]?

Some villagers were old, 40 or 50 years old.

How old was Saw C---?

He was 35 years old.

What about Saw D---?

He was about 40 years old.

What about Saw E---?

He was 28 years old.

What about Saw F---?

He was 45 years old.

What about Saw H---?

He was about 56 years old.

What about Saw G---?

He was 48 years old.

What about Saw I---

He was 39 years old.

What about Saw J---

He was about 40 years old.

Are they all married?

Yes, they are.

How much could they get for one hour of work [as a labourer for others]?

They could get like 100 baht (US \$2.93)¹⁰ per hour if they work like this [carrying heavy things for others].

Did you ask the villagers how much money they were paid when they came back?

I asked and they said they got 1,000 kyat (US \$0.89) per person.

So, they got 8,000 kyat (US \$7.12) as there were eight people?

Yes.

How is the healthcare situation in the village?

If the villagers are sick, they can get medication from the health worker here in the village.

Where is the health worker from?

The health worker is from B--- village.

Is he a government health worker, KNU health worker or independent health worker?

[He is an] independent health worker. He is a villager.

How does he ask [the villagers] to pay for medicine as he is a private health worker?

It depends on the disease. If the disease is serious and needs to be cured with expensive medicine, the cost will be expensive. If the disease is not serious, the medicine will be cheap.

Are there any clinics established by the KNU or the government?

No, there are not.

¹⁰ All conversion rates for the baht in this report are based on the July 9th 2015 market rate of 33.95 baht to the US \$1.

Is there a school in the village?

Yes, there is.

How many standards are there at the school?

[The school] is up to fourth standard.¹¹

What about the teachers? Are they government teachers, KNU teachers or did the villagers hire [the teachers] by themselves?

They are the villagers. The villagers hired them.

How many teachers are there at the school?

There are two teachers and they are both male.

Where are they from?

They are from Bi Lu Kyon [village].

Do the teachers get support from anyone from year to year?

The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)¹² supports them.

How much do they get per year?

They both get 5,000 [baht]¹³ (US \$147.21) per year.

Do any villagers support them?

Each student has to give them two baskets (41.8 kg or 92.16 lb)¹⁴ of paddy [per year].

How many students are there at the school?

There are 62 children at the school.

Do they have to pay school administration fees?

¹¹ A Standard refers to a grade in the Burmese education system. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 4, middle school is Standards 5-8 and high school is Standards 9-10.

¹² The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

¹³ In some areas of Dooplaya District the Thai baht is used as currency along with the kyat. In this case, it is apparent that the researcher is speaking in terms of baht, as 5,000 kyat (US \$3.88) would not suffice as a yearly wage.

¹⁴ A basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg or 46.08 lb of paddy, and 32 kg or 70.4 lb of milled rice.

No, they do not have to pay. But we collect only 10 baht (US\$ 0.29) [per year] from each student.

Do the students have the chance to learn peacefully?

Yes, they have the chance to learn peacefully.

Do the students have the chance to learn Pwo Karen [and/or] S'gaw Karen at school?

The students are learning Burmese and English at school. But in the summer [holiday], people teach Pwo or S'gaw Karen language in the village.

Is there anyone who distributes school materials such as books, pens or pencils freely to the students?

Yes, there is. The KNU distributes [the school materials].

Do all the students get them when they are distributed?

Yes, they all got them [school materials].

Where do the villagers who are seriously ill go to get treatment?

If the health worker cannot cure the patients in the village, the patients are sent to Three Pagoda [Pass] as there is a big hospital there. Sometimes, the patients are sent to Thailand.

What about those patients who do not have money, where do they go for treatment?

Some villagers give their names to the KNU and the KNU help some of the villagers [to get medication]. The KNU provides them [with] a letter and they go to get medication at the hospital in Thailand.

What are the common serious diseases that occur in the village?

The villagers mostly suffer from high blood pressure in the village. There are no diseases like malaria or other [serious] diseases.

What about the villagers, can they work peacefully or not peacefully?

Currently, they are able to work peacefully.

Do people buy rice here?

Some people who do not have enough food have to buy rice.

How much money is it for a big tin of rice?

They buy the rice in bags.¹⁵

¹⁵ A bag is a unit of volume used to measure rice. One bag is equivalent to 50 kg of rice.

So, how much money is a bag of rice?

It is 28,000 kyat (US \$24.92) for a bag of rice.

And how much does it cost for a viss¹⁶ of pork or chicken in the village?

It is 5,000 kyat (US \$4.45) for a viss of chicken and 3,000 kyat (US \$2.67) for a viss of pork.

Are there any development projects conducted by the government in the village?

No, there is not.

Have they ever come to the village?

They came but they just passed through the village.

Have any companies come and implemented any development projects in the village?

There is only the road [that they are constructing].¹⁷

What is your opinion on KNU/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers as a [censored for security]?

The KNU leaders [soldiers] in our area are good. We do not see anything that [suggests] they act [in an] oppressive [manner] toward us.

As a company is constructing the road, do you know how many bridges they are going to construct?

There is one road being constructed in our village and another road [being constructed] near our village. There will be two bridges in total that I know [about] but they have not constructed them yet.

When this road was constructed was there any destruction of the villagers' plantations or rubber plantations?

¹⁶ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. or 3.52 lb.

¹⁷ Due to the location of Saw A---'s village and details of the road being constructed provided in the interview, KHRG was able to determine that the road in question is the Asian Highway. The Asian Highway Network is a United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific-supported project that aims to link 32 countries in Asia across 141,000 kilometres of roadway. In Burma/Myanmar the project has involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see "[The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik Town road construction threatens villagers' livelihoods](#)," KHRG, March 2015; "[With only our voices, what can we do?: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar](#)," KHRG, June 2015; "[Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway](#)," KHRG, October 2009; and "[Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State](#)," KHRG, April 2007. In addition, fighting continues erupting between the Tatmadaw and the DKBA along the highway, with the latest clash erupting in early July 2015, resulting in the highway between Myawaddy and Kawkareik shutting down for several days, see more at: "[Recent fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers leads to killing and displacement of villagers in Hpa-an District, July 2015](#)," KHRG, August 2015. See more on land confiscation and environmental destruction as result of the Asian Highway road construction in Win Yay Township at: "[Doooplaya Photo Set: Road construction in Kyainseikgyi and Win Yay townships, November 2014 to January 2015](#)," KHRG, August 2015.

The rubber plantations that were near the road [construction area] were destroyed. Some villagers had one or two hundred of their rubber plants destroyed.

Were the rubber plants that have been destroyed matured and ready to be tapped or [were they] newly planted rubber plants?

They were not matured yet, but they were already three or four years old.

Were there any poor widows' rubber plantations included [in the destruction] when the rubber plantations were destroyed?¹⁸

Yes, many widows' rubber plantations were destroyed as well.

How many rubber plants [belonging to widows] were destroyed?

There were about 320 rubber plants [belonging to widows destroyed].

Did the company note down all of the rubber plantations destroyed?

Yes, they did. The KNU leaders also have noted it down.

Have you been told the date that they are going to pay compensation?

We do not know yet. We just reported to them what we needed.

At the time of the road construction, were there any houses that had to be moved?

Yes, there were. Since the houses were destroyed [disassembled to make way for the road construction], they had to be moved [the materials transported and the house rebuilt elsewhere].

Have they [owners of the destroyed/disassembled houses] moved [rebuilt] their houses [elsewhere]?

Some houses have been moved [rebuilt elsewhere]. But some houses have not been moved [rebuilt elsewhere] yet as it is difficult to move [rebuild] the big houses.

Currently, it is rainy season. Have those [villagers] whose houses were destroyed, rebuilt [their houses]?

As some of them are in the process of moving their houses, they have not completely rebuilt their houses yet.

Will they rebuild their houses with a roof of zinc or thatched shingles?

They will roof their houses with thatched shingles. The houses which have been destroyed were roofed with zinc.

¹⁸ It is likely that the researcher asked this, as widows whose means of making a living are destroyed are left particularly vulnerable to poverty without support from male family members, and in terms of social capital have comparatively less capacity than married couples or men to claim compensation.

How much money for a hundred thatched shingles?

It is 10,000 kyat (US \$8.90) for a hundred thatched shingles.

Where do you buy it [thatched shingles]?

We order and buy it from other people and they come and bring it to us.

What about the people who do not have money, how do they roof their houses?

They go to cut [their own] thatches for roofing their houses.

What do they [poor villagers] do for their livelihoods?

They have to try and work hard for their livelihoods. Some of them are in debt to other people.

So, how do they solve their debts?

They have to go and work for the people who they borrowed money from.

What about those [villagers] whose houses have not moved yet, have they been informed of the date that their houses need to be completely moved?

[The village head] was even asked to tell them to move their houses. [The village head] felt afraid to tell them so, as it is not easy to move their houses.

Have you asked those who have to rebuild their houses what kind of challenges they will have to face when rebuilding their houses?

To move their houses is easy as it just needs to be demolished [and the material moved]. However, to rebuild their house is not easy as it costs a lot of money and they do not have money.

So, what is your opinion on repairing the current road?

There is development for the villagers.

What about the way [opportunity] to do business?

They do not have another more [accessible] way to do business.

How is the social living standard in the village?

Since the road is getting better, some houses have been improved [as the villagers have easier access to buy and transport better housing materials]. There will be ways opened to do business in the future.

As you mentioned before, did all of the eight villagers [who had to go as porters] come back on the same day or [did they] come back the next day after sleeping a night?

They came back on the same day. After they arrived there, they came back directly.

Are they all villagers?

Yes, they are.

Were they provided with rice when they were working as porters?

It took only one hour [so they were not provided with rice]. But I am not sure [whether or not they would have been provided with rice] if it had taken longer.

What about water, were they offered [water] to drink? What about food?

Yes, they were offered water to drink. But they were not provided with food.

How heavy was the pack that they had to carry?

Some said it was about 10 [viss] (16 kg or 35.2 lb). Some said it did not weigh that much. Some said they had to carry only a small bag. Those who had to carry the bullets [said] it was heavy.

Do you have anything to add which I have not asked you about?

No, I do not have [anything else to add].

If there is nothing else, thank you.





These photos were taken in B--- village, Win Yay Township, Dooplaya District on April 9th 2014. The top two photos are of a divorcee, Ma M---, and her rubber plantation. She is 52 years old. She said that the road construction went across her rubber plantation; it crossed over 200 rubber trees. She has repaired the fence with the help of her children as much as she could after it had been destroyed. The bottom two photos show houses in B--- village. These houses are in the process of being destroyed due to the Than Phyu Za Yet Town to Bu Ya Thon Hsu (Three Pagoda Pass) section of the Asian Highway road construction. The owners of the houses will have to move the housing materials and rebuild their houses elsewhere, as described in the interview. *[Photos: KHRG]*

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

- “Dooplaya Incident Report: Killing case in Win Yay Township, October 2014,” (August 2015)
- “Dooplaya Photo Set: Road construction in Kyainseikgyi and Win Yay Townships, November 2014 to January 2015,” (August 2015)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Kyonedoe Townships, January to February 2015,” (August 2015)
- “Rape and violent threats in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, April 2014 to May 2015,” (July 2015)
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Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)