



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

February 9, 2015 / KHRG #14-34-S1

Doplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, March to May 2014

This Situation Update describes events and issues occurring in Win Yay Township, Doplaya District, prior to and during the reporting period of March to May 2014. These include forced labour, restrictions on the freedom of movement, development projects, villagers' livelihoods, access to education, and access to healthcare.

- In September 2013, Tatmadaw soldiers demanded that the village head of A--- village provide them with eight villagers, to help them carry their ammunition. The village head did not refuse their demand, and sent eight men from the village. In return for their labour, the Tatmadaw gave 15,000 kyat (US \$13.77) to the eight villagers to divide between themselves and eight villagers from B--- village, who were also sent to porter for the Tatmadaw soldiers.*
 - Villagers complained that only the village heads were invited to a meeting concerning construction of a section of the Asian Highway, which will connect Than Pyu Zayat and Ba Ya Thon Hsu towns. During the meeting the village heads were asked to provide written details of the villagers whose lands were affected by the road construction.*
 - Several village heads were replaced with new village heads, purposely chosen by the Karen National Union (KNU). The KNU did not elect the new village heads systematically or according to what the villagers wanted; according to the villagers, the old village heads were replaced because they knew too much about the background of the road construction, in particular the precursory land confiscations, so the KNU appointed new village heads and village secretaries.*
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Situation Update | Win Yay Township, Doplaya District (March to May 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in June 2014. It was written by a community member in Doplaya 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 This report was received along with other information from Doplaya District, including one incident report, nine interviews, 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 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.

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.

Situation update

In Dooplaya District, Win Yay Township, community members describe their perspectives on the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council],³ KNU [Karen National Union], civilian healthcare, transportation [freedom of movement and road development], livelihoods, educational problems, and community members' problems. This [report also] states the regional situation update.

SPDC government issues

In September 2013, the SPDC government [Tatmadaw soldiers] demanded [that] eight villagers from A--- village help them carry their ammunition. The name of the village that they [the villagers] were supposed to porter [ammunition to] is B--- village. When they [villagers and soldiers] arrived in B--- village, they [soldiers] demanded another eight villagers from B--- village. B--- villagers helped them by carrying [ammunition] to C--- [village] and on the way back they [A--- villagers and B--- villagers] also had to porter [ammunition] to A--- village. They [soldiers] gave 15,000 kyat (US \$11.57)⁴ [to the A--- and B--- villagers]. The village head said that he did not note down the Tatmadaw officers' names. He said that each of the eight A--- villagers received 1,000 kyat (US \$0.92). He said the [required] age limit for the porters [as stated by the Tatmadaw officers] was between 28 years old and 56 years old. For the B--- villagers, I do not know all of them so I did not get [detailed information]. He [village head] said it takes three hours walking on foot from C--- village to A--- village.

Some local people said that local organisations and people knew about it [forced labour], but they did not get involved or interfere with the case, and one villager said that if they [Tatmadaw soldiers] keep demanding forced labour even though they are in the ceasefire period,⁵ in the future it could be worse. The villagers also said that because the road [under construction] is the Asian Highway,⁶ transportation [of people and goods] is getting easier.

³ State Peace and Development Council of the military junta ruling Burma/Myanmar at the time. The SPDC was officially dissolved March 30th 2011 by Senior General Than Shwe following the election of a quasi-civilian government in Burma/Myanmar in November 2010. In Karen, the Burmese phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) is commonly used to refer to the Burma/Myanmar government or to Burma/Myanmar's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) continue to use that phrase, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011; see: "[Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'](#)," *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the December 14th 2015 official market rate of 1,296 kyat to the US \$1.

⁵ This refers to the preliminary ceasefire agreement signed on January 12th 2012 between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. However, on October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see [Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#), *Reuters*, October 15th 2015. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

⁶ 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. Kawkaik to Myawaddy is a route on the Asian Highway. In Myanmar the project has involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see "[Hpa-an Situation Update: Paingkyon Township, July 2014](#)," KHRG, October 2014; "[Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway](#)," KHRG, October 2009; and "[The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkaik Town road construction threatens villagers' livelihoods](#)," KHRG, March, 2015; and "[Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State](#)," KHRG, April 2007.

KNU and local civilians

Currently, the poor civilians whose lands were affected are discontented with the unresolved land issue and there is misunderstanding with the KNU.⁷ There are challenges for the KNU and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) local soldiers when they deal with the civilians. Currently, for the construction of the Asian Highway that will connect Than Pyu Zayat and Ba Ya Thon Hsu [towns], only the village heads were invited [to the meeting] and they [village heads] were asked to write down the effects [of the road construction on villagers' lands]. In some cases, there were things like [land confiscation] without informing [land owners]. Some villagers from villages have said that they know the Asian Highway will be constructed, but they have not been consulted.

I heard what the villagers were saying, that currently they are afraid of the mother organisation⁸ [KNU] and local organisations [armed groups]. Twenty-four village heads from one village tract, who [between them] run twelve villages, pay close attention to these groups [KNU and armed groups]. I have also seen that the local armed groups [KNU] replaced the old village heads with new [purposely] chosen village heads. The villagers dare not say anything to the KNU [about the] change of village heads. These old village heads knew too much about the background of the road construction, so [the KNU] appointed new village heads and village secretaries.⁹ They [villagers] said they [KNU] did not change [village heads] from the internal villages [villages that are not directly next to the road] they changed [the village heads] only in the villages that are situated beside the road [Asian Highway route AH112].

[One of] the 24 village heads from the village tract also told the villagers that, "*Your land is on the [Burma/Myanmar] government's land and it is ok whether you get paid compensation or not.*"¹⁰ [His] name is Saw Kyaw Poe Sho. He also told the villagers that, "*You are lucky if you get compensation.*" Some [villagers] complained about the difficulties in earning their livelihoods when their land is affected. [The villagers who complained] said currently it is 20,000 kyat (US \$18.37) for one sack of rice.¹¹ For this [Asian Highway] road the KNU and Myat Lin Aye Company cooperate [work together], and it is only half way [constructed], so that the villagers dare not say anything as we are civilians and are afraid of them making trouble for villagers. They [villagers] said they are just like *ton auk ka pa* [frog under the log].¹²

Villagers from another village angrily said to the company [Myat Lin Aye], "*If you do not give compensation then do not demolish my house, and if you do [demolish my house] I will burn down the bulldozer.*" The KNU local armed forces [KNLA] came and told them [villagers], "*The road is for all people; move away if you do not want to stay [here] and do not walk on the road when the road is constructed.*" One villager said that he does not want to mention the village names [of the villagers who complained to Myat Lin Aye company]. He also said that there are a

⁷ The community member later provided information that the company constructing the section of Asian Highway asked the KNU to take over part of the project, including the distribution of compensation. The villagers have not received any compensation and are therefore wondering where this money has gone. The community member explained that most people who lost their land understand that the construction of the road is for the development of the country and therefore has the potential to bring positive change, however they are nonetheless suffering immediate, adverse impacts, having lost their land, and want compensation to remedy this. The administrator of Win Yay Township does not know where the money for compensation has gone.

⁸ Here the researcher is referring to the KNU.

⁹ According to what the community member is saying, the KNU wanted to replace the village heads with individuals who did not have such detailed knowledge of the land confiscation, lack of consultation, and lack of compensation associated with the road construction in the area.

¹⁰ The village head is stating here that because the land belongs to the Burma/Myanmar government, the villagers may or may not get compensation and either outcome is acceptable.

¹¹ A sack is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One sack is equivalent to 31.35 kg or 69.12 lb of paddy, and 48 kg or 105.6 lb of milled rice. A sack is also equivalent to three big tins.

¹² *Ton auk ka pa*, or 'frog under the log' is a Karen metaphor describing a frog taking cover under a log for safety from a predator. In this context the villagers are the frog taking cover from the KNU and the Myat Lin Aye Company.

lot of benefits with the Asian Highway and also there are a lot of disadvantages because there are arguments happening between the Karen civilians and the KNU. The villager also said, *"We do not know who to rely on [for support] with our self-sufficient house [house they have built by themselves], crops that have been planted and old roads that are affected by the new road construction."* He said, *"Karen people reared a baby fawn and when it grew up it became a tiger."*¹³ He also said if the KNU was not taking responsibility [was not facilitating construction of] for the Asian Highway road there would be no arguments between the civilians and the KNU. He also said that everyone wishes [the country] to be developed and waits for the peaceful time. The civilians are happy with the changes [that have been] generated by the ceasefire but they still have worries. When the Asian Highway road is under construction, it is dusty and the dust goes into the houses during the construction and it can also affect the villagers' health.

Some houses are made with bamboo and they [villagers] said they got 350,000 kyat (US \$321.51) money [compensation] when their houses were demolished [to make way] for the road construction. They [construction company] did not say anything [to the owners of] the wooden houses they just told them to move. They [construction company] said *"If you don't move we will demolish your houses with a bulldozer."* Currently, they [construction company] are moving the soil from under the houses. They mine stones from rocky mountains in the farms for the road construction. They could not pay compensation [to the farmers] as they could not sell the rocks, which are low in quality. Some owners dare not talk [complain about it] and go to Thailand for work. They [construction company] also excavate soil from the farms for the road construction. According to one farm owner, the farm was passed [to him] by his parents. They stopped excavating the soil and did not answer him when he went and asked for compensation.

Some villagers said that they agreed to have their land excavated for fish farming. The civilians said even though they did not get full compensation it is fine for them if they receive compensation for the crops and the labour [time spent on growing them]. They [villagers] said now they [construction company] have flattened the land for the Asian Highway road. They said now there are motorbike accidents [on the road]. According to the civilians and a KNU leader, *"the reason why this is happening is because there are no [clear] rules for the vehicles [drivers]. Previously, the KNU did not have [any] vehicle rules [driving rules] and this is a problem nowadays, so we have to cooperate with the Myanmar government's traffic police and use their traffic rules."*

One villager stated that he wants to know the four countries that support the Asian Highway road construction.¹⁴

A villager from F--- village does not have permission to cut the teak that he planted; the [KNU] forestry [department] does not allow [him to] cut down [the teak that he planted]. He did ask permission [to cut down the teak]. The civilians worry about giving this information [to KHRG] because they are living very close to the local armed group, the KNU.

In the past few months a [Burma/Myanmar] government official has committed violent abuse against a villager and he [the villager] reported only a few [of the abuses]. He said he [does not] dare to talk about it. So it is difficult to find out about the cases and I told the villager to record the cases [of abuse] secretly. The villagers do have worries [for their safety].¹⁵

¹³ This metaphor describes the KNU being created by their grandparent's generation with the intention that the organisation would protect the Karen people and bring peace to Karen State. In this case, the villager believes this is no longer happening; rather the KNU has come to be feared.

¹⁴ The Asian Highway is a large-scale development project funded by around thirty countries across Asia and Europe as well international agencies such as the Asian Development Bank. This being so, it is not entirely clear specifically which four countries the villager is referring to here, however the majority of state funding for the section of Asian Highway under construction in southeast Burma/Myanmar appears to come from Thailand, China, India, and to a lesser extent, Japan.

¹⁵ KHRG has been unable to obtain further information on this case.

On April 4th 2014, KNDO [Karen National Defence Organisation]¹⁶ Bo¹⁷ Wah Lone arrested refugees [from Z--- camp] at the place where they cut bamboo and bullied [abused] them. He asked them [refugees] to lay down on the ground, clean the vegetation for hill farming and cut the roots of the tree stumps. I also know that they [refugees] were surrounded by gun wielding soldiers [as they worked]. One [refugee] was tied up with a rope and pulled like a cow and another man [refugee] had to carry a bag of ammunition and follow them [the soldiers]. [The soldiers] also said [to the refugees] that, *"If you run away you will be shot."* They [refugees] said that they live together [with KNDO soldiers] in [Z---] refugee camp in the same section and they did it [abused them] on purpose. They [KNDO soldiers] also spoke [to the refugees] in Burmese [threatening], *"Are you coming to attack us? We will kill you all."*¹⁸



This photo was taken on April 21st 2014. It shows Saw Y-- and one of his friends. They are refugees and were abused by KNDO soldiers who tied one of them up with rope while they were cutting down bamboo for themselves, on April 4th 2014 in Dooplaya District, Kawkaireik Township, Meh Th'Raw Hkee [area]. The person that was tied up with the rope is in the green shirt; he suffered more than others. [Photo: KHRG]

Civilian healthcare

[In terms of] civilian healthcare, there are not many diseases in summer but there is dust on the Asian Highway road [due to the construction] and the dust comes into the house and flows around the house during meal times. I had a meal with civilians and [during the meal] it came into my mind that it is the dust [that causes] disease. The villagers said that the company said that they will water the [road],¹⁹ but they watered [the road only by a] few villages and there were many villages that did not feel the effects of this.

They [the villagers] also said that the KNU healthcare workers come only once a year. The clinics from the [Burma/Myanmar] government do not have enough medicines [available], the villagers have to spend money if they ask for medicines and if they do not have money they have to borrow

from others. [Villagers] also said that they could return [pay back this] money only if they are healthy. The [villagers] houses were moved²⁰ this year, they did not receive compensation, there is no carpenter [to help rebuild houses] and the rainy [season] is coming soon and the villagers will have to stay accordingly in temporary huts. The [villagers] also said that 100 sheets of thatch shingle is 20,000 kyat (US \$18.37). They reported this information to KHRG and said to help them as much as possible with media [publishing and advocating].

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

¹⁸ KHRG has previously published information regarding this case. For further details, please see ["Dooplaya Incident Report: Villagers subjected to forced labour and degrading treatment by the Karen National Defence Organisation, March 2014"](#), KHRG, September 2014.

¹⁹ By putting water on the road it should decrease the amount of dust which is caused by the construction.

²⁰ In some cases this means that houses (which are small enough) were physically moved from one area to another area. In other cases villagers will break down their houses and move the parts and rebuild the house.

Civilians' fears and concerns

I also heard about the villagers' opinion from what they were saying, that if the Asian Highway road is constructed the situation will be either improved or will be worse with the fighting. The Asian Highway is a three year project [in the area] and currently, they have only flattened the land. They have not covered the road with stones yet. Currently, the KNU and government SPDC [Burma/Myanmar government] are working together and the civilians have seen this. They are happy to see that they were having meals together [in the news], but they [villagers] sometimes said that they are worried in case things get worse quickly.

They said this is the third period [year] of ceasefire. The Asian Highway road is in the process of construction and [villagers want to know] who will pay for the lands and houses that are affected [by the road construction]. "[Is it] *possible to get compensation?*" was asked by a widow and she [also] asked for help from the community member. The rubber trees in her plantation were planted by her husband and when the time came to eat [receive profit from the rubber plantation] he [her husband] passed away. She is struggling for her livelihood with her four children. In addition, her [rubber] plantation was destroyed by a fire and [this left her] in bigger trouble.²¹ According to the local civilians, they have reported [about their lost lands] to the leaders²² but they do not know when they [the leaders] will pay [compensation] and they asked the KHRG community member as they were worried about not getting compensation. The KHRG community member reported about this to the leader.

Civilians' transportation situation

Some villagers and village heads said, *"Nowadays the transportation in the border area is getting better, because during the ceasefire the government started road and bridge construction projects making it easier to travel. It was not easy to travel in the past."* They [civilians] said, *"Nowadays, because of the [effort] of the KNU, the media, magazines, news, and the international community to persuade the Myanmar government [to sign the] ceasefire [agreement], the Myanmar government have started making [positive] changes."*

I also have seen that a construction company is constructing a bridge between Taung Di and Hpa Pya villages. The elders [village heads] whose lands are not affected by the road construction were fine and were smiling, but those whose land is affected by the road construction were sometimes in tears and sometimes smiling. I met with villagers who said [to construction workers], *"If you [are going to] do it [the construction], do it straight [just go ahead and do it]."* He [villager] said, *"I dare not to say [complain] so I just told him like that."* He [villager] said, *"They have weapons so I told them nicely. I also told them that it is easier [after the road construction] for travelling."*

Civilians' livelihood

I know that the [situation for] civilians [to earn their] livelihoods has become worse. In 2013 during the rainy season, there was flooding and it destroyed the paddies, and in 2014 when the road construction began the community member saw that [due to] the road construction there was a lot of civilians' land affected and they had to rebuild [move] their houses.

Some people said it is [currently] 20,000 kyat (US \$18.37) for one sack of rice, 3,000 kyat (US \$2.75) for one viss²³ of pork, 5,000 kyat (US \$4.59) for one viss of chicken. For the bamboo houses on the Asian Highway road [construction] they got compensation of 350,000 kyat (US \$321.51) and they can easily move. What will happen with the wooden houses is unknown.

²¹ The community member did not provide information on whether any of the widow's land or plantation was confiscated or affected by the road construction.

²² The community member did not specify whether the leaders in this context are KNU or Burma/Myanmar government.

²³ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. or 3.52 lb.

I saw that the villagers were looking for a solution [to the land confiscation] but they [live] close to the KNLA and it is difficult to find a solution, *[censored for security]*.

According to Saw G---, there are livelihood problems and water problems. There are development activities, but the Karen civilians still have to get water from the river to drink. Every leader knows about these things. According to a villager called Saw G---, there is a rising population, [the number of] houses are increasing, roads are being developed, and business channels are opening up, but they still have to consume drinking water from the river. He also mentioned that if [villagers] do not have water it is going to be difficult. In the past the village used to be small but now there are Mon, Burmese and Karen people. For the people who have money they can handle it [the road construction] but [the villager] said, *"I wish the government knew that there are more people who are facing problems."* The villages are situated in Win Yay Township, Doooplaya District along the road that connects Than Pyu Zayat and Ba Ya Thon Hsu. They are H--- [village], E---, I--- and there are also some other villages that are affected [by road construction].



The photo on the left was taken on April 9th 2014. This photo shows one of the houses in A--- village. This house has been half destroyed due to the road construction. The A--- village head said that the construction workers claim that the road is not wide enough yet and they plan to clear more land as necessary. The photo on the right was taken on April 9th 2014. The photo shows Saw J---. He said that he used to live in Kyainseikgyi Township but has lived in Win Yay Town for four years after buying land there. While he and his wife were out, his 19-year-old daughter was left at home and the village head and some other leaders came to the house and told her that the house needs to move ahead of the planned road construction; they asked her to sign a document confirming the family would move. They told her that they will send this document to Naypyidaw. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Educational problems

There are many children who are not able to go to school and according to the KHRG community member²⁴ in Doooplaya District, Win Yay Township, educational support is the most important area in terms of development [focus], because the government prioritises only road [construction]. [There is] no support related to the villagers' education. I heard from a village head that the local people are also helping [to support educational development] as much as they can.

Researcher [Community Member] problems

A problem [identified] is the Karen organisation [KNU] [wanting] to talk openly with civilians to build their understanding. I wonder why the civilians dare not talk openly. *[Censored for security]* there are groups [organisations] formed by civilians and also on the other hand there are other organisations [NGOs]. [Other community members] also have seen these things. The politics is not done by one side and [villagers] want the Karen local organisations to listen

²⁴ The author of the report is referring to himself.

carefully to the local civilians' voices [concerns]. Currently, it is not like that [described above] the villagers have to listen and do what they are told [by the KNU] and they [villagers] dare not to talk about [criticise] them. This truly shows the civilians lack of freedom of expression. There are many problems. The community member himself also does not have freedom [of expression or documentation]. Some village heads are also torturing the villagers with their words [controlling the villagers and imposing orders on them] which is why they reported to KHRG that they want to know precisely about human rights and *[censored for security]*.

Conclusion

What I want to mention finally is; recently the civilians ask us if we are sure about the ceasefire. That is what they are worried about. [They want to know if there] is a possibility of getting compensation due to the road construction, or [will the ceasefire collapse and] bring back fighting? They wish for the leaders to come down and observe the local civilians' situation and also they said they want to prioritise education for the Karen civilians. There is a ceasefire [agreement] but sometimes it is like Mon Diverge [group]²⁵ or robber [organised by villains] and it shakes [causes fear] the civilians. The final thing that I want to report is [a need for] supporting the civilians in terms of road construction.

Note: the civilians from Dooplaya District, Win Yay Township requested not to mention the village names, villagers' names in this report and villagers' photos. The villagers said they will provide information about the land issue [amount of land lost with the name list] next year.

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

- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships, July to November 2014," (January 2016)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi Township, March to May 2015," (November 2015)
- "Forced recruitment of a child soldier by KNLA in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District, October 2015," (October 2015)
- "Fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers along the Asian Highway displaces villagers in Dooplaya District, July 2015," (September 2015)
- Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, April 2014 (August 2015)

²⁵ Mon Diverge are an armed group from Mon State, that split from the National Mon State Party. They are known locally as robbers, due to their unlawful behaviour.

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)