



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, June to September 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, Hpapun District, between June and September 2014, including theft, arbitrary taxation, the illegal buying and selling of land, land confiscation, development projects, and forced labour.

- A Border Guard Force (BGF) soldier named Sergeant Saw Hpah Ghaw from Battalion #1013, under the control of Battalion Commander Saw Hla Kyaing, stole poultry from villagers living in A--- village on at least two occasions.
 - On July 18th 2014, land was bought and sold illegally between the former K'Taing Ti village administrator Ko Myo and Tatmadaw Tactical Operations Commander (TOC) Colonel Zaw Htun Myint from the K'Taing Ti Burma/Myanmar government military base.
 - On July 19th 2014, there was a meeting in Hpapun Township assembly hall organised by the Hpapun Township Administrator, U Aung Than Zaw. During the meeting a letter was distributed to the participants stating that land confiscated by the Burma/Myanmar government military in 1992, 1993, and 2006 would not be returned.
 - The Community Development Association (CDA) is working on anti-malaria projects in the areas where they operate. Currently, they are distributing insecticide-treated mosquito nets to the villagers, to protect from mosquito bites. The villagers have been giving members of the organisation 500 kyat (US \$0.5) for each mosquito net, to pay for the transportation fees and their food expenses.
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Situation Update | Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, Hpapun District (June to September 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in October 2014. It was written by a community member in Hpapun 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 Hpapun District, including five incident reports, ten interviews, and 168 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.

Introduction

The information about the human rights violations that I am going to report was received between June 22nd 2014 and September 20th 2014. The incidents took place in A--- village in K'Taing Ti village tract in Dwe Lo Township and in Hpapun Town in Bu Tho Township, all in Mu Traw [Hpapun] District.

The types of human right violations [incidents] are:

1. Theft: June 22nd 2014
2. Arbitrary tax collection: July 21st 2014
3. Illegal purchase and selling of land: July 18th 2014
4. Announcement on non-return of confiscated land: July 19th 2014

The perpetrators of the human rights violations mentioned above include the Thein Sein [Burma/Myanmar] government; the [Tatmadaw] Major General of the Southern Command Headquarters, Tactical Operations Commander Zaw Htun Myint from a military camp in K'Taing Ti village tract; and soldiers from the Myanmar nation's [Tatmadaw] Border Guard Force (BGF)³ Battalion #1013.

[Regarding] The people who committed the human rights violations mentioned above, it cannot [be said] exactly why they committed the abuses. They had, however, all grown up during the interim government ruling from 1962-1964.⁴ They believe that they can get things done through bullying and are self-assured that anything can be done by the Tatmadaw. I would like to report about the people who have these beliefs and committed the human rights violations.

Firstly, I would like to report about cases of theft.

1. Theft: June 22nd 2014

The theft that I am going to mention happened on June 22nd 2014 in A--- village, K'Taing Ti village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District. Three chickens belonging to A-- - villager U E---, 60 years old, were stolen and the thief cooked and ate them. We know that the three chickens were worth 15,000 kyat (US \$11.64).⁵ The thief was a member of BGF Battalion #1013 under control of Battalion Commander Saw Hla Kyaing; subordinate Sergeant Saw Hpah Ghaw.⁶

³ 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.

⁴ The researcher is explaining that those who have committed the human rights violations mentioned in this report grew up in the early 1960's, when an interim government, ruled by General Ne Win, ran the country. In 1962 the Burmese Way to Socialism and the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was established. The following decades seriously impacted the Burmese economy, education system and the general living standards of the people. Heavy restrictions were imposed on the Burmese people and freedom of expression in particular was severely restricted. There was a heavy reliance on the military and anyone who opposed the regime or any group of protestors would be violently repressed. The party was eventually overthrown following the student protests in 1988, which became known as the '1988 Uprising.'

⁵ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the November 10th 2015 official market rate of 1,289 kyat to the US \$1.

⁶ For more information regarding this case see more at "[Border Guard Force \(BGF\) Battalion #1013 Sergeant Saw Hpah Ghaw steals villagers' livestock](#)," KHRG, January 2015.

Saw Hpah Ghaw's BGF military camp is situated in K'Taing Ti village and there is only a fence between the military building and A--- village. We therefore know [according to the villagers] that when Saw Hpah Ghaw moved around the village and camp he caught the chickens and ducks secretly when he found them while walking around outside, and he brought them back to his camp to cook and eat them.

Moreover, according to female A--- villager Naw G---, 65 years old, Saw Hpah Ghaw will catch any chicken or duck that he can easily find when he is walking around. He stole two chickens and three ducks, which equal 25,000 kyat (US \$19.47) at the current market price. This incident happened on June 15th 2014.

Lastly, [in another case] Saw Hpah Ghaw, on June 30th 2014, stole three chickens and two ducks from Naw S--- who is 40 years old and cooked and ate them. According to the market price, the chickens and ducks were worth 25,000 kyat (US \$19.47).

The second abuse I want to mention is the buying and selling of land illegally in a village close to A--- village which is situated in Taung Thu village tract, called T--- village.

2. Illegal buying and selling of land: July 18th 2014

T--- village is situated in Taung Thu village tract, K'Taing Ti area, Dwe Lo Township, in Mutraw [Hpapun] District. In T--- village, there was a case of the illegal purchasing and selling of land on July 18th 2014. In this case, the land seller was Ko Myo (former village administrator from K'Taing Ti village) and the buyer was K'Taing Ti Tactical Operations Commander,⁷ Colonel Zaw Htun Myint from the Naypyidaw [Burma/Myanmar] government military base. The area of land that he bought was 20 acres. He bought 20 acres of land for 1,000,000 kyat (US \$775.95). According to unverified information, 20 acres of land is actually worth 3,000,000 kyat (US \$2,327.85).

[None of the] local leaders, the K'Taing Ti area administrator, nor the T--- village administrator, knew about the buying and selling of this land. Therefore, the K'Taing Ti area leader from the KNU [Karen National Union] side or village tract secretary did not know and did not approve the sale. The sale was only between Ko Myo and Colonel Zaw Htun Myint. We cannot say that it was a legal exchange. Furthermore, when Colonel Zaw Htun Myint asked his privates to fence off his land, the soldiers built the fence beyond his property [expanding onto property] which belongs to others.

The [buying and selling of land] was not in line with KNU land policy and the buying and selling was not legal and the KNU did not recognise it. Likewise, the people who lost their land [due to the fencing] did not support the buying and selling of the land. At present, no one can walk across the land that Colonel Zaw Htun Myint bought. We received information that Colonel Zaw Htun Myint does not want the land that he bans people from crossing, but he is demanding 2,500,000 kyat (US \$1,939.88) from the T--- villagers [for the land to be returned]. We are still finding out whether the T--- villagers have given him the money or not [in hope of receiving back their lands].

Furthermore, I would like to mention that [it has been announced that] confiscated land will not been returned [to the original owners].

⁷ A Tactical Operations Commander is in charge of operations, planning and training, also known as 'Operations Commander' or 'Strategic Commander.'

3. Announcement stating non-return of confiscated land: July 19th 2014

On July 19th 2014, there was a meeting in the township assembly hall, called “Ywun Sa Lin hall,” which was headed by Hpapun Township⁸ [Burma/Myanmar government] administrator U Aung Than Zaw. During the 2014 meeting, the *Ma Tha Sa - 2* [Burma/Myanmar government Land Utilisation Administrative Project Committee] distributed a statement [titled] Letter #003. The farmers who are on the list of land victims [individuals who had their land confiscated in the past] were also [named] on the statement letter, and they participated in the meeting. They [Land Utilisation Administrative Project Committee] distributed the statement, Letter #003/ Ma Tha Sa – 2/2014, to those who participated in the meeting. If we look at the announcement / statement, it includes information about some of the land confiscation [that took place] in 1992-1993 and in 2006. [Letter #003 states that] the land that was confiscated during this time cannot be returned [to the original owners]. In brief, it was this statement that mentions that all the land confiscated by the military will not be returned [to the land victims].

The fourth category I would like to mention is arbitrary taxation for travel expenses by the Community Development Association [CDA],⁹ the director of which is Dr. Myint Aung Khin. They unfairly collect money from the civilians during their programme.

4. The CDA unfairly collects money for their travelling allowances: July 21st 2014

The CDA, who are a humanitarian association that moves around both sides of the car road [the CDA have a broad presence in the area], between Hpapun and Ka Ma Maung towns, the northern part of Ka Ma Maung and to Pa Lon village. USAID [United States Department for International Development] provides supplies to the CDA.¹⁰

They are working on anti-malaria activities in the area where they operate. Currently, they distribute insecticide-treated mosquito nets to villagers to protect the villagers from mosquitos. They distribute one mosquito net for every two villagers. They [villagers] do not need to pay for the cost [of the nets], however the manager Dr. Myint Aung Khin, his subordinates and other members of the organisation ask for 500 kyat (US \$0.39) for each mosquito net in order to pay the transportation fees.¹¹

There are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in Hpapun District, Ka Ma Maung area. The CDA consider themselves an NGO. If they are an NGO, they should themselves cover the transportation expenses. Actually, if they are an NGO, the donor should have already covered [paid] for the [transportation] expenses. It is regional development so they should not be collecting any kind of tax. At present, the CDA collects money for the transportation of the nets and for their food expenses from the local people. This costs them in total 500 kyat (US \$0.39) for each mosquito net. I would like to ask a question to the CDA: *“The donors who support the CDA do not support them fully. Is taxing the locals a way to cover the expenses?”* Actually, [we villagers] do not think that this kind of money should be collected [from the villagers].

⁸ This refers to the Burma/Myanmar government demarcated Hpapun Township; according to KNU demarcations, roughly this same area is referred to as Hpapun District, and comprises Lu Thaw, Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships.

⁹ The [Community Development Association](#) (CDA) is a local Burma/Myanmar non-governmental organisation (NGO) that aims to build the capacity of existing community development support and technical services. The organisation works across Myanmar in partnership with other organisations and UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNDP.

¹⁰ KHRG is unable to confirm whether USAID provides any support, financial or otherwise, to the CDA.

¹¹ According to an unpublished interview with a villager from Taung Thu Su village, K'Ter Htee village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, this money was not demanded by members of the CDA, but provided by the villagers voluntarily as a contribution towards the organisation's expenses; only those villagers who could afford to contribute the 500 kyat (US \$0.39) paid.

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

- “BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015,” (December 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2014 to January 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, April 2014 to February 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015,” (September 2015)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



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