



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships, July to November 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships, Dooplaya District, during the period between July to November 2014, including restrictions on the freedom of movement, arbitrary taxation and militarisation, as well as providing an update on civilian livelihoods, community development, healthcare, and education.

- Villagers report that Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) Battalion #907 Commander Saw Ba Nyein taxes villagers 100,000 kyat (US \$97.40) per yam kiln. In September 2014, some travellers and traders also reported that they were being questioned and their movement was restricted due to tension between the Tatmadaw and the DKBA.
 - Villagers who earn little money cannot afford to support their children in terms of going to school and some children who finished nursery and middle school have to leave school because of financial issues. Some children go to neighbouring countries like Thailand for work and some are staying home assisting their parents and looking after their younger siblings.
 - There are many armed groups including the Burma/Myanmar Tatmadaw, Border Guard Force (BGF), DKBA, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), Karen National Union/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), and Karen Peace Force (KPF) active in Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships. Some armed groups still commit abuses, such as arbitrary taxation on traders and travellers, forced labour, and forced recruitment.
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Situation Update | Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships, Dooplaya District (July to November 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 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

The condition of civilian life and the situation of the [Burma/Myanmar] government, DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army],² Karen Peace Council (KPC),³ Karen Peace Force

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 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

(KPF)⁴ and the KNU [Karen National Union] was recorded from some villages in Kruh Tu [Kyonedoe] and Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik] townships from July to November 2014 and appear briefly below.

Civilian condition and occupation

The majority of civilians in Kruh Tu [Kyonedoe] and Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik] townships main occupations are farming and plantation work. In our region, we are doing farming and crop irrigation. Even though the farming is rather good [crops are growing well] now, as it is not the time to harvest we cannot predict if the crops will be fruitful or not.

For those people who live near the foothill areas, some durian garden lands are not bearing fruit, the leaves of the trees are turning yellow and the trees are falling. The size of the rubber gardens have increased, which means that villagers' animals do not have as much room to graze. Some civilians are trading goods but as the amount of tax is high, the commodity price is high too. Now the rainy season is over and the transition into spring has begun, some civilians are trading yams. The government is buying dried yams as a raw material. If the yams are wet, they have to dry it. To dry the yam they need kilns, which are taxed. One kiln costs [are taxed] 100,000 kyat (US \$97.40)⁵ and the money goes to DKBA Battalion #907's Battalion Commander Saw Ba Nyein. The KNU are also going to charge tax on yam kilns however they have not charged anything yet, so we do not know how much they are going to ask for. Although civilians have to pay the tax they still make a profit so they keep doing it. At the end of September 2014, travellers and traders were questioned by the government due to the fighting between DKBA and Tatmadaw soldiers.⁶ The situation is getting better now and interrogations have reduced.

Healthcare

In the region that I entered [Kyonedoe and Kawkareik townships], the major diseases that civilians suffer from are malaria, distended stomach and upset bowls, hypertension, body ache, scabies, wet scabies,⁷ and we found that there are also some malnourished children too. Some civilians who suffer with these diseases receive treatment from the [local] clinic. For less serious illnesses they [civilians] will use traditional treatment, but for the serious diseases they are referred to the surrounding township clinics and hospitals. For some patients who are not able to afford the financial cost of the treatment they will leave hospital and go back to their village receiving irregular treatment as it is less expensive this way. In some villages there are clinics and medics that are provided by the [Burma/Myanmar] government, however there is not sufficient medication from the government clinics. Even though it is a free clinic the treatment available is only for coughing and the common cold. Patients therefore have to be referred to the township hospital when the illness is serious. We also know that villagers have to support

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 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 Karen Peace Force was formed in February 1997 after splitting from the KNU/KNLA and surrendering to and signing a ceasefire with the Burmese military government. The KPF controls some administrative areas in Three Pagodas Pass and operates a number of road and river checkpoints in the area of Three Pagodas Pass. Following repeated rejections of Burmese government proposals to reform KPF into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, substantial elements have since reformed in the Tatmadaw Border Guard in 2010 while others remain independent.

⁵ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 29th 2015 official market rate of 1026.75 kyat to the US \$1.

⁶ For more information see ["Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik, Kyainseikgyi and Kyonedoe Townships, May to October 2014," KHRG](#), February 2015.

⁷ In Burmese, people colloquially refer to a disease which presents with a moist rash similar to scabies as *We So*, literally, "wet scabies." KHRG was unable to establish an English-language medical term for the disease.

the government medics and nurses with living arrangements, food and with anything else they may need.

In our townships there are township clinics that were opened by the KNU which are free of charge. Although each township has [Burma/Myanmar government] Anti-Malaria Teams, there are [additional] government organisations and associations entering the community [other than the] Anti-Malaria Team, including Mother and Child Care and Polio Protection and Immunisation and Anti-Tuberculosis. Villagers do not know which injection they should get and they also worry that they will not get the right injection. In 2013 a medical complication arose after a villager had an injection for elephantiasis.⁸ Because of the 2013 medical complication, villagers were concerned with which health teams [or organisations] will arrive next to give help. The KNU stated that in KNU areas, any organisation working on a project in the community should inform the local responsible persons [persons in charge of the community] in advance.

Education

The civilians [who have children] want their children to have access to education. For the parents who earn daily wages, they are not able to take their children to school; some children have to look after their younger brothers and sisters and some children have to assist their parents. Some parents of children who have finished primary and middle school were not able to keep supporting their education so [the children] had to quit school and help their parents. Some go to neighbouring countries, like Thailand, and look for a job. Some schools are self-reliant which are organised among villagers for the children. They hire the teachers by providing 60 (1,920 kg. or 4,224.4 lb.) to 70 (2,240 kg. or 4,928 lb.) baskets⁹ of rice per teacher [per year]. Some villages that are close to the city have built nursery schools and kindergarten schools by cooperating with the government and United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF). Some villages are still applying to get permission from the township level Education Department to build the schools. Some branch schools have been opened with the cooperation of the government. Even though the teachers get a salary, the villagers still have to support the teachers with everything they need, including basic food products like rice and oil, as well as accommodation. In some villages, villagers do not have to support the teachers and in some they do. Some villages receive support from UNICEF and via this organisation they attract primary students to start learning by giving 1,000 kyat (US \$0.97) per student. Moreover, they provided free access to items such as books that are needed in school. In some schools students do not get 1,000 kyat and no access to items such as books is provided. Furthermore, they have to personally buy everything that they need. From the KNU side, the KED [Karen Education Department] gives support by providing exercise books, chalk, pencils, pens, playing equipment and toys and they annually support the teachers financially and with various school tasks through a self-supporting basis [independent school].

Some schools are built with bamboo so they have to be repaired every year. While repairing the school, we have difficulties with the bamboo, wood and thatch. If we need wood we can ask for help from KNU forest administrator. We have to deal with it by cooperating with the whole village for the rest of the materials we need. Some villages do not have the space for schools and playgrounds and expanding land in order to build them is a problem and not always possible.

⁸ KHRG has previously published reports detailing incidents of negative side-effects as a result of elephantiasis medicine. The KHRG community member could be referring to the incident which occurred between September 9th and 13th 2013, when elephantiasis medicine was distributed to 1144 villagers from Kawkaeik Township by Burma/Myanmar government. Some villagers who ingested the medicine experiences dizziness, vomiting, itchy skin, swollen testicles, and even one case of miscarriage. For further details see, "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, September to December 2013](#)," KHRG, September 2014. Similar incidents occurred in other districts. See for example, "[Field Report: Thaton District, September 2012 to December 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2015.

⁹ 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. A basket is twice the volume of a big tin.

Military government

Due to the [Burma/Myanmar] military government's current temporary ceasefire,¹⁰ the Tatmadaw are not as active in the community as they have been in the past. However, they do still occasionally order the villagers to porter their bags, ammunition and hens, and they often ask for the use of a hand tractor to help with the transportation. The villagers have to transport the armed group's belongings and often have to pay for fuel. Through government road and communication improvements, companies constructed a vehicle road with the width of 40 cubits (1,828 cm. or 720 in.)¹¹ and some villagers lost their land and plantations and they did not receive any compensation for this destruction.

At the beginning of 2013, in Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik] Township, at A'zin Chaung Pyar and A'zin villages, the [Burma/Myanmar government] Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs provided 90,000,000 kyat (US \$87,882.00) in funds to be dispersed to the Kyaik Don branch township officer in charge, Saw Ba Shwe [leader of the electricity generation project]. The Ministry of Progress and Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs said that villagers do not need to spend [their own] money for the electric dynamo¹² and power lines. [In reality,] villagers were forced [by Saw Ba Shwe] to work on the project; and moreover, they had to buy the power lines and electric meters by themselves. One electric meter cost 25,000 kyat (US \$24.30) [per household] and for the houses which happen to be located close to the main power line, the [total] cost [of installing an electric supply to their home, including the electric meter and the electric wires] was 85,000 kyat (US \$82.60) [on average. Houses further away had to pay more]. They were also told that they will be charged 500 kyat (US \$0.50) for one unit of usage. [However, at first,] it will be free of charge for three months. The officer in charge, Saw Ba Shwe, said [before they began this project] that they will hire an electric engineer from Shan State and the cost [of hiring the engineer] will be paid by them [the committee in charge of the project, but in reality, villagers still had to contribute financially].

This electricity is available in A'zin Chaung Pya village and some houses in A'zin village already have electricity. It cannot be said how long this electricity will last because the power line does not have protection [from the elements or human interference] and villagers have said that it can also be dangerous.

BGF [Border Guard Force]¹³

There is no information regarding the activities of this organisation. The one thing worth mentioning is that the gate tax is a permanent charge.

KPC

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ A cubit is a standard measurement for the length of bamboo poles, commonly referred to in Karen as the length from one's fingertips to one's elbow, about 45.7 cm. or 18 in.

¹² An electric dynamo is similar to a generator but it does not use fuel, it runs using the power of running water – the faster the flow of water, the more electricity will be generated.

¹³ 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.

No special information is known about this organisation. Nothing is known about its community service.

KPF

No activity or community service was found for this organisation apart from that they charge a gate tax.

DKBA

Although there is no community service in the activities of this organisation, we know they are affiliated with drug commerce and some youths are negatively affected by using drugs. At the end of September [2014] there was some tension between DKBA battalions and the Tatmadaw based on a fight between the DKBA and government troops [Tatmadaw]. Furthermore, in September 2014, DKBA Battalion Commander Saw Ba Nyein, from Battalion #907 led by Saw Chit, recruited new privates in some villages in Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik] Township. Depending on the village size, if the village is big enough, they would recruit more than two villagers. If village was small, they would collect one private in order to increase the number of privates in the battalion. Youths who are not interested in joining the DKBA have to pay money instead. As far as we know, villages that had to pay money are Kwin K'lay village: 4,500,000 kyat (US \$4,367.14); A'zin village and Tha De Koh village: 7,500,000 kyat (US \$7,273.57) and A'zin village: 2,800,000 kyat (US \$2,715.47) was charged. The remaining villages: Mi Tan village, Mi Nan Aat village, K'mah Kler village, Kwee Kler village and Meh Tharaw Tah village have already paid, but I do not know how much. Moreover, one of the villagers said that DKBA Battalion #907 charged villagers who dry yams in the village. They were required to pay [tax] for one kiln, which is 100,000 kyat (US \$97.19).

KNU

KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] Battalion #18 were preparing for the increase¹⁴ in soldiers. They discussed with villagers and held public talks in the community and convinced youth above eighteen years old who were interested to be serviceman for at least three years, some young people participated enthusiastically. There is no new private recruitment in the rest of the townships in Dooplaya District. They practice and perform according to the previous procedures and processes in terms of politics, military affairs, and persuasion.

Conclusion

As for the conclusion, during the temporary ceasefire period with the [Burma/Myanmar] military government, various organisations such as social organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are entering into the area, as there are many armed groups in the region. Based on this condition, in order not to harm the KNU and the local community, we have to follow the law and rule of the region that has been set up by the mother organization, the KNU.

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

- "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)
- "Dooplaya Incident Report: Killing case in Win Yay Township, October 2014," (August 2015)

¹⁴ They were preparing to increase the amount of soldiers as part of the usual recruitment process.

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)