



## Situation Update

April 30, 2015 / KHRG #14-89-S1

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### **Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July to November 2014**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the period between July and November 2014, including land confiscation and religious discrimination. This report also provides an update on education and healthcare.*

- *Villagers report that the education system in villages with smaller numbers of households is poorly supported by the Burma/Myanmar government. Villagers also report that in Burma/Myanmar government schools, teachers are often residents from a different area and frequently travel home, reducing the amount of teaching time for students as the teachers are absent for several days at a time.*
  - *Villagers report that medics who have completed six months of medical training conduct medical practice for business, however poor training causes additional problems for patients.*
  - *Villagers report that anti-Muslim literature has been distributed in Thandaunggyi Township, which threatens to fine Muslim villagers entering into houses or towns in the township.*
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### **Situation Update | Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (July to November 2014)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2014. It was written by a community member in Toungoo 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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including four other incident reports, 25 interviews, 311 photographs and two video clips.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in eastern 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.

<sup>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern 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.

[I] collected the situation information from Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township and wrote the [situation update] report.

## **Education**

In Thandaunggyi Township, in rural areas, the education [system] is this: the money comes down [from the Burma/Myanmar government] for the repair and building of the schools. [However], they do not help and support some villages that have few houses [small populations]. There are also things like NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council] teaching the school-age children who cannot afford to go to school or quit school for other personal reasons for one hour per day. Although they take the time to teach the children in this way, there is not enough time [to teach effectively] and there is no [measurable] difference for the children. There are school teachers in the school and they are residents from other areas and they usually go back to their home in other territories. When they go home it takes at least three days and it has created [an] ineffective learning [environment] for the children. Some teachers teach out of a sense of duty and they [teach] at [their] homes for 3,000 kyat (US \$2.79)<sup>3</sup> to 5,000 kyat (US \$4.65) for one subject.

The distance between Shwe L'Bo village and Leik Tho Town is just three or four miles, but they have had to build their school by self-reliance [on their own]. Although [the villagers] submitted [a request] to the [Burma/Myanmar] government for the [cost of the] materials for the school building and its construction, based on the number of households and students, it is still [too] few [households for the government to support the school]. They do not consider [it necessary] for the village to have their own school and they have not done anything seriously yet [for the village]. There are enough teachers and students for schools located in a town, but for the village areas they ignore [their needs]. Especially in the KNU [Karen National Union] controlled areas, the [Burma/Myanmar government support of] education is still weak.

## **Healthcare**

The local people go to the [nearest] clinic when they are sick. They have to pay no less than 2,000 kyat (US \$1.86) for the examinations and medicine. They [villagers] have to cover [the cost] of the meal for the nurse when they [nurse] do the vaccine injection. For some villagers, when they are sick they just work it out in their own way by buying oral medicine or intravenous medicine from the shops, [while] some just heal the sickness by

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<sup>3</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the April 29<sup>th</sup> 2015 official market rate of 1075.85 kyat to the US \$1.

traditional medicines from the plants. If a critical illness happens [to a villager] and if they go to the hospital it is expensive and there are patients who cannot afford to go to the hospital. Because of these reasons, some villages' patients pass away without having a chance to go to the hospital, as they cannot afford to go to the hospital. For some villages that have no hospital, they have a clinic and there are things like the female medics giving [private] medical treatment for money. Some [people] take medic training for six months and after they completed the training they do medicine injection for their private business, [however] they are not well trained and sometimes that causes unnecessary problems when injecting medicine.

### **Social**

In Thandaunggyi Township, regarding the social [situation] there is race discrimination. In Thandaunggyi Township area there was a letter distributed that said anti-Muslim, anti-Islamic [rhetoric] and that they [Muslims] are not allowed to come into [houses or towns in the area] and that if they are found [to be doing so] they will be fined. There are some Muslim families in Thandaung Town and some Thandaunggyi Township [area] police officers are not only giving much trouble to these Muslim families, but also threatening and extorting Muslim families. Moreover, they also do other kinds of extortion by setting the social topics.<sup>4</sup> Under these conditions, for the race that has a different skin colour,<sup>5</sup> they are not only facing these problems, but they also feel worried.

### **Livelihoods**

In Thandaunggyi Township area, most civilians do plantation [work for their livelihoods]. The local people are dependent on the plantation land for their livelihoods and the land is the main thing for them and they prioritise working on agriculture. The [Burma/Myanmar] government military [Tatmadaw] confiscated the land and the farmlands and the land [available] for the residents is lesser and they are not doing well in their livelihoods. Moreover, the weather is not stable and selling on the market is not going well. In the past, one viss<sup>6</sup> of cardamom was 15,000 kyat (US \$13.94), but now this year the price has come down to 8,000 kyat (US \$7.43). The crops are not productive and the price of goods is getting higher, [so villagers] face problems for their families' livelihood. For the rubber [plantation] owners, the rubber price is not good. The

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<sup>4</sup> Here the researcher is explaining that by 'setting the social topics', through fomenting anti-Islamism in local communities, police officers are able to create reasons and justification for discrimination against Muslims.

<sup>5</sup> In Burma/Myanmar, individuals who are perceived to have a darker skin colour are often referred to as the S'gaw Karen term *Kaw La Thu*, "thu" meaning black. In Kayin state, it is often associated specifically with followers of Islam (Muslims), although this association is sometimes erroneous, and Muslim individuals do not typically self-identify with this term.

<sup>6</sup> A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. or 3.52 lb.

rubber buying price for one pound is only 500 kyat (US \$0.46) and the rubber plantation workers are not doing well. If they do not work on it [rubber plantations] they have nothing to eat so they do it unwillingly [as it is not as profitable as before]. Likewise, because of land confiscation the day labourers are facing problems. They have jobs but the payment is unfair. The employers do not call the workers to work for them. The odd job workers are facing problems. The price of goods is high and the income for animal husbandry businesses does not match [is lower] than the inputs, so some business owners temporarily stopped business operations. Because of this, it also brings problems to matrimonial affairs and the families. Especially in the hill area, people do [hill] plantation and the seasonal fruit prices are not good and they face problems [earning] their livelihoods. They remove their children from school to help them in their work. There are circumstances like merchants and agents from the land area having troubles. From these happenings it is very difficult to be firm in the family life in the future.

### **Development**

In Thandaunggyi Township regarding regional development, the superiors [from the Burma/Myanmar government] dropped [paid] the [project] money directly [to the local authorities] and the local residents did not know [what happened with the project] and there were grievances. The roads from Thandaunggyi [Town] to Maung Ngwe Gyi [Town] and from Thandaunggyi [Town] to Leik Pya Ka Lay [village], the [local residents there] constructed it by themselves and a group of people [government officials and local leaders] sent a proposal to the government by setting the title with the development project to construct that road [that had already been built] without letting the local resident know [about what they are doing]. For the [office] buildings, schooling buildings, clinics [or hospitals] and with any kind of project, the village head, [township] administration officer and the clerks do not consult with the civilians and they implement [the project] by themselves. They [the government officers] do not do [development] for the areas that really need it. They prioritise doing [development] only for the sections in the towns and the villages beside the main roads. While implementing these projects, there were grievances with the civilians.

### **Opinion**

Village administrators should be transparent with the villagers because they are the representatives for the civilians; they should respect the civilians and discuss [about projects] mutually with the civilians. Likewise, in education and healthcare also the departmental staffs should work and be familiar [accessible] with the civilians. Moreover, the ruling class also should meet and discuss openly and seriously with respect to the civilians who are under their control and who pick up the necessary parts [to mend] and

who fix those parts, and this can help decrease trouble for the civilians' livelihood problems. If there is no such activity, in [my] opinion, in the future these problems will keep going the same way.

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

- "Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014," (February 2015)
- "Ongoing militarisation of southeastern Burma/Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government," (February 2015)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014," (December 2014)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July 2014," (December 2014)
- "Toungoo Incident Report: Arbitrary arrest and detention and violent abuse in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2005," (October 2014)

## Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)