



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Dawei Township, February to May 2015

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Dawei Township, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between February and May 2015, including logging, education and land confiscation.

- *The Burma/Myanmar government officially allowed local villagers in Dawei Township, Mergui-Tavoy District to learn Karen language in the school, but local school teachers continued not to teach Karen language in the classroom.*
- *Maw Lar Thar who owned a rubber plantation company confiscated the villagers' lands in Dawei Township, Mergui-Tavoy District and constructed their buildings and planted a rubber plantation on confiscated lands. Local villagers were strongly against this company. However, the company continued confiscating villagers' lands.*

Situation Update | Dawei Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (February to May 2015)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2015. It was written by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

Logging

In May 2015, Aung Myit Gar conducted logging near A--- village [Dawei Township]. The villagers and the village head told him not to do logging, but it did not work because he said that he has already asked for permission to do logging from both the Burma/Myanmar government and Karen National Union [KNU]. Even though [Aung Myit Gar] said he asked for permission, the villagers could not ask him to see the permission letter [because he would not show it to them]. The logging he did took place near A--- village. In response, the villagers marked the trees and tied them with local forest's string as they wanted to maintain their forest. The local people tried to ask for support from other villagers, but there was no one to help them.

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.

Education

At this time, we see [the] Burmese government tells [us] that they are going to give the rights [to teach the Karen language] to the local Karen school. It says that Karen language will be taught in the class. Not in the extra class (extra time outside of official school hours). In spite of saying like that, we clearly see that school teachers do not teach Karen language in the class. Therefore, some teachers are teaching Karen language in the extra time [before and after school hours]. This practice makes students have to go to school early in the morning to learn Karen language and they also have to learn Karen language after school in the evening. Students stay after class to learn Karen language, which results in them returning home to take a bath and have dinner very late. After dinner, they have to study more with the help of tutors. They do not have much time to relax because they have to follow this time schedule. The Burma/Myanmar government said that teachers have to teach Karen language. Teachers have to give the students the Burmese [curriculum] textbook which is written in Karen language, but they do not have the time to learn Karen language. We saw this situation in the rural area of our [Dawei] Township, which is situated in Mergui-Tavoy District.

Land Confiscation

Maw Lar Thar [one wealthy individual] established a rubber plantation company, through the help and support of the Burma/Myanmar government. It [the company] confiscated land from three villages, which are B--- village, C--- village and D--- village. The leaders from those three villages reported that the employees from this [rubber plantation] company constructed the building and planted a rubber plantation, which took up 2,000 acres of [villagers'] land. The villages' leaders went to meet the company in *Thit Taw Youn* [forest's office], and found out the company actually took 3,000 acres of land for the rubber plantation. The local people did not want them to do that. The villagers were strongly against it, but they [the company] continued to make the land wider and grow the rubber plantation until they took 700 more acres of land. In May 2015, they [the company] started to make their lands bigger and wider because they said they had to make a fence to protect the rubber plantation from fire. The people from these three villages protect their forest because they know that there is the water [in the centre of the forest]. They worried that their water supply will disappear [due to the company destroying their land], so they did not want the company to continue taking their lands. All the people from these three villages use this water, which comes from two rivers. One river is called Lay Law K'Htee and is situated in between D--- village and C--- village. The other river is called Thar Lar Min and is situated in between B--- village and D--- village. U² Su Su did all of these things [confiscation, destruction, rubber planting] because he is a reliable employee [following orders] of Maw Lar Thar [the owner of the rubber plantation company].

Further background reading on the situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Naw M---, October 2015," (October 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Muh Lah Township, November 2015 to January 2016," (August 2016)
- "Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women's testimonies from southeast Myanmar," (August 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Doh Soh Township, June to November 2015," (July 2016)
- "Mergui-Tavoy Short Update: K'Ser Doh Township, June 2015," (July 2016)

² U is a Burmese honorific title used before a man's name.

