



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

May 6, 2015 / KHRG #15-3-A1-I1

Hpa-an Interview: U A---, November 2014

This Interview with U A--- describes events occurring in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District in October 2014, including the killing of a monk by soldiers from the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army - Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC). On October 9th 2014, in B--- village, a senior monk was arrested by five KNU/KNLA-PC soldiers, including Company Commander Ta Wah. He was arrested, beaten, set on fire and then buried for denying KNU/KNLA-PC soldiers the right to log trees located in the local monastery's garden. Villagers were able to recover the body and provide the senior monk with a proper ceremony. Villagers subsequently submitted a complaint regarding the incident to KNU/KNLA-PC Company Commander Ta Wah's superiors. Several months after receiving this report, KHRG learned that on April 20th 2015 four armed groups, the Karen National Union (KNU), KNU/KNLA-PC, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and the Border Guard Force (BGF) held a meeting to discuss how to take action against the perpetrators who murdered the monk. It was determined that they will be punished under KNU law. The five perpetrators were detained in Hpa-an District. Following their arrest, Company Commander Ta Wah escaped and his current whereabouts are unknown at the time of publication. For more information see [Karen News](#) (Burmese version only).

Interview | U A--- (male, 49), B--- Village, Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District (November 2014)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Hpa-an District in November 2014 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Hpa-an District, including two other interviews, one situation update, 202 photographs and three video clips.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

¹ 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² 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.

Occupation: Cultivation

Position: Villager

What is your name?

My name is U A---

How old are you?

I am 49 years old.

Where do you live?

I live in B--- village.

B--- [village] is based in which village tract?

It is based in Ta Kreh village tract.

Please can you be more specific?

Thay Maw Koo village tract.³

Which township?

Ta Kreh [Paingkyon] Township.

Good! Do you have family?

Yes I do.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

What is the age of your oldest child?

My oldest child is 12 years old.

What is the age of your youngest child?

My youngest child is two years old.

What do you do for living?

I work on cultivation.

What do the people call your village?

³ The interviewee states two village tracts because the first time he provided the wrong one.

They call it B--- village.

What do the people in B--- village do for their living?

They mostly work in cultivation.

Do you have any problems with your work?

There is not a big problem, just a little one.

In the village is there anything which has hurt a villager or caused an incident?

Yes, there was an incident.

What was the incident?

On October 8th [2014] we celebrated Ka Htein festival.⁴ We have a pagoda and we respect our religion. On October 9th a monk was arrested.

Who arrested the monk?

The military.

Which group of military?

KPC [Karen Peace Council]⁵ military group.

How many members of the KPC are there in that group [which arrested the monk]? Have you heard about this?

I don't know about that because I have never been a soldier.

Yes, true, you have never been a soldier. I meant when the people came to arrest the monk how many people did you think were coming?

Five people.

Was it day time or night time?

It was in the morning at 9:30 am.

Do you know their commander's name?

Their commander's name is Ta Wah.

⁴ The Ka Htein festival is an annual Buddhist festival, whereby villagers donate robes and money to their local monastery.

⁵ 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.

What is his position?

His position is a company commander.⁶

He is a company commander?

Yes.

What is his company's [name]?

I am not sure about this.

Do you know his battalion commander?⁷

His battalion commander's name is Naw Pay.

Now, where does his battalion commander live?

He lives in Ka Rer Poo.

Why do you call it Ka Rer Poo?

In Karen we call it Ka Rer Poo.

Is there any other name?

Meh La Ka Rer Poo.

Meh La Ka Rer Poo, OK. How many armed groups are there in Ka Rer Poo?

I am not certain.

Which armed group usually lives there?

Puh Yay Noo is the leader [of the KPC based in this area].

What is the name of Puh Yay Noo's group?

We call them the KPC.

OK, thanks. You said the person who arrested the monk is Company Commander Ta Wah, so why did he arrest the monk? What is reason behind this? Can you tell me?

In the past they wanted to do logging in a garden. The monk did not let him do the logging. I think he [Company Commander Ta Wah] does not like the monk.

Why he does not like the monk?

⁶ A Company Commander commands three platoons which consists of 100+ men.

⁷ A Battalion Commander commands one battalion and often remains at headquarters.

He does not like the monk because he did not allow him to do the logging.

What kind of trees did he ask for to do the logging?

T'la aw trees.⁸

Where are the *t'la aw* trees?

They are in B--- village.

Where are the *t'la aw* trees based?

They are based in the monastery garden.

Are they only based in that area or are they located in wild areas?

They [the trees] are only in the monastery garden.

Are there any *t'la aw* trees in the four or five acres surrounding the monastery?

There are no *t'la aw* trees in the surrounding area, only in the garden.

You said, in the monastery garden there are *t'la aw* trees which are protected by the monk so what do you think is the purpose of the monk [preventing the trees from being logged]?

The purpose of [this specific] monk is to build the monastery and to protect the *t'la aw* trees so villagers who do not have enough leaves for their roofs can use them.

Say everything that you know. We are discussing like we normally speak. Don't be shy or afraid of anything. Now we will go back to Company Commander Ta Wah who arrested the monk following a logging incident that the monk prevented. What about other things? Did any other conflict occur between them?

I do not know about that.

After they arrested the monk do you know where they held him?

They brought the monk to the place where he [Company Commander Ta Wah] lives.

Do they live in a hut or an army camp?

Army camp.

Do you think there are many people in their camp?

There are not many people.

I asked [about] only soldiers [how many are in the camp]. You said there are not many soldiers?

⁸ *T'la aw* trees are teak-like trees with large leaves, which are traditionally collected by villagers and used to make thatched shingles for the roofs of houses.

Yes, there are not many soliders.

Is it based near the road? Can travellers see the army camp when they walk on the road or is it far from the road?

They live on Meh La road, a junction which is split from Meh La road to Ka Nuh Hta, and the road from Meh La Ka Rer Poo to Ka Teh.

Starting from Meh La Ka Rer Poo and travelling to B--- village, how long will it take to walk on foot?

If you go by foot I think it will take one hour.

You said one hour away, so it is very far? After they brought the monk to their place [army camp] what did they continuously do to the monk?

After they brought the monk to the army camp they went to Ka Nuh Hta road. They went one furlong⁹ away and hit and burnt his back and then killed him.

They directly¹⁰ killed him?

Yes, they directly killed him.

Did someone see what they did?

No one saw what they did. There were only the five soldiers there.

After the monk was dead what did they do [with the corpse]?

After he died they buried him.

We will repeat a little bit starting from when they arrested him. After that [his arrest] they went back to the army camp and killed the monk. How did they get there [to the camp]?

They travelled by car.

When they went to kill him did they go by car?

Yes they did.

Good, after that you said they hit the monk and burnt his back and killed him, so how did you know [that he was beaten and burnt]?

I knew because they poured oil on his robes. The monk had no robes on his back [when we recovered the corpse].¹¹

⁹ A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.2 of a km. or 0.125 of a mile.

¹⁰ By 'directly' the researcher is trying to determine if the interviewee believes it was the intention of the soldiers to kill the monk after they had beaten him.

¹¹ When the monk was arrested he was wearing robes. They poured oil on his robes and set him alight. When the villagers reclaimed his body his robes had been burnt away.

You told me you saw with your eyes; how did you see this?

I saw he was wearing his robes when he was going out.

Did you witness the attack?

I was with him only for half of the way.

Where did they arrest the monk?

I went with him half way. When he got in the car I was not with him anymore. I was with him in the monastery garden but outside of the monastery I was not with him.

Have you seen where they buried him?

Yes. How did I see? I saw because one of the arresting soldiers showed us.

One of his soldiers wanted to show you so then you got to see the corpse?

Yes.

After they buried the corpse did they continue to do something?

No, they did not. We went to take him out [from his grave] and then did a memory worship program for him in the monastery.

Why did you take him out?

[He] is our monk. They should not keep him in the forest. We knew they already killed him so we asked him [the arresting soldier] to show us [where they buried him] and we dug him up. We brought back his corpse to the monastery. We gave him a bath and had a memory worship program.

You removed the corpse?

Yes, the whole village went to remove his corpse.

The whole village went?

Yes, the whole village. A monk, C---, also went.

I understand much more clearly. It seems like the people burnt his back and hit him to death. You said his back was burnt with fire so did you see his injuries?

Yes, I saw his injuries.

Which part was badly affected when they hit him?

We could not touch his head and temples because they were so badly injured. There is a lot of evidence to prove he was beaten.

Did anyone take photos?

Yes, many people took photos. I have a video with me.

What about photos?

There are some photos on people's phones.

How many days did you wait before you went to remove his corpse?

We waited only one day before removing his corpse.

You brought the corpse back to the monastery then you buried him?

No, we did not bury him. We cremated his corpse.

We can say [the monk who was killed] was a senior monk. After he passed away what did you do about Company Commander Ta Wah? Are you able to do anything with this case? Because Ta Wah did commit murder. What did the villagers do? Did you submit a complaint to someone?

We submitted [the case] to their [Company Commander Ta Wah's] leaders.

You submitted it to their leader?

Yes, we submitted it to their leaders.

Do you think their leaders will do something to them?

The leaders have not let us know if they are going to do something so we do not know anything.

If you do not know please say you do not know. You are able to submit a killing case to their leaders. What will the leaders do [with that case] you do not know?

We do not know.

Another thing we talked about is the monk passing away. The monastery has been left behind so can you find another monk to replace him?

We have not found anyone yet. We should wait for the order from monk C---. We must find someone, but monk C--- has not said anything yet so we cannot start looking for anyone yet.

You told me about the senior monk, do you know his name?

Yes his name is Ku Tha La.

He is a senior monk?

Yes.

Where did he live?

He lived in Htee Klay village.

Htee Klay is located in which township?

Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik] Township.

I do not mind if you do not know. I think it should be based in T'Nay Hsa [Nabu] Township. I am also guessing that because Htee Klay is located there. OK, you told me about an incident occurring and I understood much better. Would you like to say anything that I have not questioned you about? If you want to say you can say to me.

I do not know other information. I know only what I have told you.

The information that you have, you have told me. I do not know anything; I asked you what I knew and you answered with the information that you have. I mean you and I talked and you gave me some detailed information. I want to say thank you. All your family will be safe from sickness and troubles. Thank you very much.

Thank you.



The above photos were taken in B--- village, Thay Maw Koo village tract, Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District by a Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD) researcher. The photo on the left shows the monastery compound and the *t'la aw* trees in the background. The photo on the right shows the exhumed body of the senior monk who had been arrested, beaten, set on fire and buried by five KNU/KNLA-PC soldiers for denying them the right to log *t'la aw* trees in the monastery's garden. [Photos: KORD]

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

- "The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik Town road construction threatens villagers' livelihoods," (March 2015)
- "Hpa-an Field Report: January to December 2013," (January 2015)
- "Hpa-an Situation update: Hlaingbwe, Nabu, Paingjyon and Hti Lon Townships, May to July 2014," (November 2014)
- "Hpa-an Incident Report: Land Confiscation in Paingkyon Township, February 2013," (November 2014)

- “Hpa-an Interview: Saw U---, December 2013,” (October 2014)

Hpa-an District



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