



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

November 28, 2016 / KHRG #15-38-A4-I1

Dooplaya Interview: Saw B---, March 2015

This Interview with Saw B--- describes events occurring in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District, in March 2015, including killing, conflict between the local and the non-local people, military activities and the situation of villagers' livelihoods.

- *On March 15th 2015, K--- villager Saw Thaug Nyein who was suspected of practicing witchcraft was killed by Saw Heh Thaw in K--- village, Noh Ta Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The murder was committed using an AK-47 gun obtained by Saw Heh Thaw which is thought to belong to an armed group. Two suspects were arrested by the local KNLA soldiers and were detained and investigated at a KNLA's camp.*
 - *The interviewee, Saw B---, also raises about the need for clarification of responsibilities by the local KNU in general and about what level of local leader should take responsibility for village and village tract problems.*
 - *Saw B--- also discusses the problems that village leaders and villagers' face with non-Karen ethnic people who come and work in Karen village areas.*
 - *This interview with Saw B--- also raises about the lack of healthcare provision in his area and also how the Burma/Myanmar government took advantage of taking over a village school only after it was built and paid for by the local villagers.*
-

Interview | Saw B--- (male, 37), K--- village, Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District (March 2015)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Dooplaya District on March 19th 2015 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 Dooplaya District, including six other interviews, two incident reports, three situation update, 194 photographs and 14 video clips.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 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 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.

Name: Saw B---

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Age: 37

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farming

Position: [Censored for security] leader

How many armed groups operate in your region?

There are three armed groups, which are the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]³ and BGF [Border Guard Force].

Are they based in your village tract or do they just come through temporarily, patrolling in and out?

All of these armed groups are based close to our village tract. However, they are not based in our village; they just come in and out. Do I also have to report about the Tatmadaw too? There are police stations and a Tatmadaw army camp located in Than Mya village which is in my village tract.

How is the situation of armed group activities and their movements?

They do not cause any trouble for the villagers at the moment; they even help villagers when necessary. There are no activities that cause trouble for villagers.

How were the movements of KNLA, BGF and DKBA, and their activities during the transition period [since the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement]?⁴

³ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) was formed in 2010 as a breakaway group following the transformation of the majority of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (1994 – 2010) into the BGF. This group was originally called the Democratic Karen *Buddhist* Army until it changed its name to the Democratic Karen *Benevolent* Army in April 2012 in order to reflect its secularity. This group is comprised of different divisions, including Kloo Htoo Baw Battalion and DKBA-5, and was led for many years by General Saw Lah Pwe aka Na Khan Mway who died in March 2016 and was replaced by General Saw Mo Shay in April 2016. The DKBA signed a preliminary ceasefire with the Burma/Myanmar Government on November 3rd 2011 and then signed the [signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement \(NCA\)](#) on October 15th 2015. The group is based in Son Si Myaing area, Myawaddy/Kawkaeik Township, Doooplaya District, southern Kayah State. This DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) should not be confused with, either the original DKBA (Buddhist) (1994-2010) which was transformed into the BGF in 2010, or with the DKBA (Buddhist) (2016 – present) which was formed in 2016 as a splinter group of the DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present). Importantly, the DKBA (Benevolent) has signed both the preliminary and nationwide ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government, whereas the DKBA (Buddhist) has not signed either agreement. For more information on the DKBA and its relationship with other armed actors, see “Militias in Myanmar,” John Buchanan, The Asia Foundation, July 2016.

⁴ 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. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors began in Yangon, see

Before the [2012] ceasefire, mostly the villagers' livelihoods were difficult but sometimes the situation was good while living under the control of the armed groups. However, since the [2012] ceasefire we haven't see them do anything harmful for villagers in our region any more. Therefore, we can say that the situation is much better now compared to the past. We are now building close relationships with all of the armed groups. Before the [2012] ceasefire, we did not dare to talk with some of the armed groups and we had to stay away from them.

How is the livelihood situation in your village now?

The villager's livelihoods are fine but villagers do not have any other work to do apart from farming. For some villagers, they do small amounts of logging for a living.

Do they survive with their livelihood?

For logging, they do not make much profit for their income, because they just do small logging projects with a small number of trees. Sometimes if people from the towns [Kyain or Seikgyi towns] are building a house, if they want to buy logs, they [the local villagers] just go and sell them to them like that. There is no huge project for carrying logs with big trucks. The villagers just transport the logs with a cart and tractors.

Who does logging? Are they just villagers or are they connected to the armed groups?

Yes, some are villagers. I do not see any armed group doing big logging projects in my area but I do not know about the other areas.

Do you have any issues regarding military movements or activities [in your area]?

There were no big issues coming up during the period between 2014 and 2015 regarding military activities in my village. If we compare the situation with the past, it is improving a lot already. If there are any problems in the village tract regarding armed group activities, the village head will inform me. But now there has been an incident with a killing case in K--- village. However, if we look at the victim who died, we assumed that the perpetrator used a weapon which belonged to an armed group [because it was a machine gun]. However, we cannot identify exactly which armed group it [the weapon] belonged to. But the weapon was an AK-47 so it surely belonged to an armed group [because only armed groups have machine guns]. However, there are no armed groups looking to cause trouble for the villagers at the moment. We are now hoping for the higher level leaders to take action and to investigate this case.

How did it happen?

He [the villager] was shot and died in his own house. But when he was shot, he did not die immediately, he still managed to run quite far, about 75 cubits.⁵

When did the incident happen?

A 47-year-old man with four children who lived in K---, called Saw Hpah Hsweh [in Karen language] and U Thaung Nyein in Burmese [language], was shot and killed on March 15th 2015 at 9:23 PM.

Why did the people kill him?

⁵ "Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations," *Karen National Union Headquarters*, March 18th 2015. Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see "[KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders' Summit](#)," *Karen News*, April 22nd 2015.

⁵ 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.

People suspected him of witchcraft, with which he could kill people with magic. Personally, regardless of whether he is practicing witchcraft or not, as I am a [censored for security] leader, I want to see it for myself or hear people who can prove it to me and report it to me first; then I will deal with the case. If the cases cannot be solved at the village tract level, we will go forward to the next step to the higher level [KNU] leaders. That is what I want. But with this case, I feel that I should find out about the case myself instead of the higher level leaders and it makes me feel like I am a worthless leader and that they do not value me as a leader. Since the beginning [of taking this leadership position] I did not want this position, but because the villagers and village heads selected me as a [censored for security] leader because they trust us [to become leaders] and they believe in us so they chose us. After selection [as leaders], if a case happens and they [local KNU leaders] do not let us know, this is a question coming out to me that; can they not rely on us to investigate the case, and do the villagers not value us [as leaders]? And secondly, can the armed group trust us with this?

You had mentioned that the gun that killed the victim was an AK-47 which belonged to the armed groups, so how could you tell that it was definitely an AK-47?

I know it was because when I arrived at 9:23 PM I asked one of the former village leaders who knows about different types of guns. I asked him whether the gun sounded like a handmade gun or a machine gun? Based on the answer, it was not a handmade gun, it was a machine gun. For this reason, the local security guard and I went out to where the incident took place, and at the same time I asked them to bring a torch light and find any evidence in the place where the incident took place. If it was definitely a machine gun, then the bullet shell would still be somewhere on the ground. After they searched for a while they found it. I asked them to mark the location and to not touch it. Then I asked the security guard who is more responsible to get it [the bullet] and bring it [to me]. As I am not sure about what kind of bullet shell it was, I asked them and they said that it was an AK 47 bullet shell, which is not a type of gun that civilians normally have. At the same time, I contacted T--- and I gave the bullet to him as he is in charge of investigating the case. However, as the incident had happened and the victim did not die from a civilian gun, we handed it over to the armed groups [KNLA, DKBA or BGF] to investigate the case.

Have you investigated a person who killed Saw Hpah Hsweh [the victim]⁶?

I have received the killers' information already; here is the summary of the incident information. On Monday March 16th 2015 around 7:13 PM, U Tin Myit and U Maung Kya were both accused of being linked to a [separate] killing case. [They] were questioned and detained and they both admitted it. In 2013, the family member of U Maung Ba Htun accused U Thaung Nyein [Saw Hpah Hsweh] that [he] was the person who killed U Maung Ba Htun. For this reason, on March 14th 2015 Saw Heh Thaw who lived in P--- brought a gun, an AK-47, to kill U Thaung Nyein [Saw Hpah Hsweh] and on Sunday March 15th 2015 at 9:23 PM, U Thaung Nyein [Saw Hpah Hsweh] was shot dead, which was reported by two detainees U Tin Myit and U Maung Kya.

Did you know Saw Heh Thaw [the man accused of the killing] well?

Yes, we knew him, he was originally born in K--- village. His parents and siblings are living in K-- village but two of them, who are his older brother, called M---, and him [Saw Heh Thaw] got married in P--- village.

When did they get married in P---?

⁶ Here, the names Saw Hpa Hsweh and U Than Nyein are used interchangeably in reference to the same person, the deceased man.

About ten years ago. Once he was a soldier as well. Firstly, he joined KNU's army [KNLA] but after that we do not know for sure whether he is still with the KNLA or whether he has left already.

Did you know his commander's name while he was serving in the KNLA?

I do not know. When he was serving in the KNLA army he was still single, he had not got married yet.

How old was Saw Heh Thaw?

I think his age was not very different to mine. Probably between 37 and 38 years old I think. I do not know exactly.

Did he regularly come back and visit his village in the past?

Yes, he often came back and visited his village and when he came back sometimes he acted like a leader. We also saw him when he was drunk and went around in the village. But he did not look for problems with other people. But now as his name is spread around by these two people were detained, so I believe that the information is true, that he killed the person.

Which part of the body did the bullet go through?

He was hit in the left side of his neck.

How many people lived in the house when he was shot?

There was only him and his youngest seven-year-old son in the house when he was shot. After he was shot, he did not die immediately. He grabbed his child and ran away and headed to Saw M---'s house, which is close to U B---'s house. But we have not measured the distance between Saw M---'s house and his house. We just measured the distance between U B---'s house and his house, which is about 55 cubits. The distance between U A---'s house and the victim's house is about 37 cubits.

Did he leave his child at home?

No, he rushed to grab his son and carried him away to the shop. When he [Saw Hpah Hsweh] was lying on the ice box, he could not move any longer, then he was carried back to his house and he was still alive when people brought him to his house, he could not talk anymore, and about 10 to 15 minutes later he died.

How many children did he have?

Four in total. Three sons and one daughter.

Do you know the names of his children?

Yes, the eldest son's name is Saw T--- who is 26 years, Saw Ta--- who is 19 years old, his youngest son's name is Saw M--- who is 7 years old, and his daughter's name is Naw M--- and she is 17 years old.

Where had his wife gone during the incident as you mentioned only his youngest son was at home?

That night his wife and his daughter had gone out hunting frogs in the paddy fields and they got about 25 *kyat tha* [a measurement of weight] of frog that night. Then they came back, and when

they arrived at U Kyaw Kay's house she was asked to go and join people to chew betel nut with other villagers at U Kyaw Kay's house. After they heard a gunshot, she and her daughter hurried to go home. I also went and asked her about this and she said she and her daughter went out to hunt frogs and his youngest son and himself [Saw Hpah Hsweh] went out for a movie in another house, and they came back to his house and his youngest son lay down in his bed and then the gunshots started, and his father shouted out loud and he [Saw Hpah Hsweh's youngest son] went to his father, and his father grabbed him and brought him away from their house.

How many armed groups are based in P---? Since the victim was shot by an AK-47 rifle which belonged to an armed group?

I do not normally go to P--- village, and I heard that DKBA, KNLA, KNLA-PC and BGF are there.

Did he collaborate in any activities with any of the armed groups while he lived in P---?

I do not know about that, because I have not been to P--- for about four to five years. I know that when he came back [to K--- village] he visited and built relationships with us, but for me I have not been there for a long time so I do not know what he is doing.

What did you hear of U Thaung Nyein's [Saw Hpah Hsweh's] behaviour and did you see any evidence or proof that he is practising witchcraft?

Nothing, I did not see this guy having problems with others. Personally, I think he is a quiet person. He did not do drugs and he just worked quietly for his livelihood. He does any sort of heavy labour work, even if he was asked to dig a ditch for his livelihood. He works for his livelihood and any benefits he gets are from his hard work. We did not see him doing any bad things to other people. However, as I mentioned, some people who saw him as a bad person but they could not give me any evidence. If they could show me evidence, I would be eager to know and find out more. Firstly, I would solve and handle the case. If the case is too difficult to solve at the local level, then I would hand it to the higher level authority. However, before they [perpetrators] do anything they should have informed me about the problem, but they did not let me know in advance. For this reason, I do not believe that he had done black magic, because nobody could provide it to me with any evidence, and the people who killed him cannot give me evidence of witchcraft either.

Is there anyone who could give you evidence that he was able to do black magic?

No.

Based on this case, how will you deal with it?

In the village level we did not arrange anything for the victim's family. As the victim died from an armed group's weapon, we did not deal with anything [related to this case]. Everything has been handed over to the armed group.

Which armed group did you hand it [the case] to?

We handed it [the case] over to the Noh T'Kaw Township local KNU [KNLA] responsible person.

Did the investigation team come here?

Yes, the investigator arrived in the morning and we took a photo of the corpse and the wound. He even saw the corpse with his own eyes.

Have the perpetrators that you mentioned a moment ago been detained?

They [KNU] have not taken any action yet. As they [KNU] have not taken any action, as we are the local leaders we should investigate the case but we want the investigation team and the people who took responsibility for the case to take the action as quickly as possible. As the person who did this [killing] knows that what they did was wrong and what they did wrong and what they did, and as we submitted the case to the leaders, we are therefore worried for our security in case the perpetrator retaliates against us [for reporting the incident]. We cannot find out more information as we have explained before. For them [KNU], are they waiting for more information [evidence of the killing incident] or are they watching us and what we are going to do? We do not know. I just want to know that.

Are there any consequences regarding this killing case?

I want to say one thing, this family are poor. They did not even have money for the funeral. This person [Saw Hpah Hsweh], he was an innocent [man] but he had to die violently, and the family are also poor, so for this reason someone has to take responsibility for the death in this family. As a single mother, the livelihood situation is getting harder for her. If her husband were alive, the situation would be much better. For this reason, we want the responsible person [KNU leaders] to assist the victim's family.

Do you have any other problems in your village tract that I have not asked about?

Nothing special. Regarding this killing case, it put the family who were left behind in a bad situation. I also want to know one thing regarding the leadership. I believe as the people decided and elected a village leader, each elected village leader has responsibility to lead and to decide what is right and wrong. If other [censored for security] leaders get involved in a case, should they inform us? For example, do they need to inform me if they deal with an incident that happens in this village tract?

For this case, I do not think you can take over the case that happened in another village tract, and it is not good to not inform the village head in that village tract.

For example, when there is a problem happening in another village tract, I go to that village tract and I deal with the problem as much as I can but I do not inform that village tract leader. Do I have the authority to do that? I ask this because in the past we have experienced this kind of situation. For example, if a village tract leader sees a person who might need help, the village tract leader and associate leaders discuss the issue together to help and support the person. Before giving support, the team of leaders will carefully consider making decisions on whether a person's behaviour and their livelihood conditions are good or not [and] whether it is worth it to provide the support or not. If it is worth it to support that person, the leader will guarantee support for them and will give them a document to confirm the support. However, after that when other village tract leaders do not like this, they come and do as they want without informing the host village tract leader. I want to say that if the host village tract leader has solved the case already, then the other village tract leaders should not get involved to deal with the same problems. If they are not happy with the decision, they should come to the host village tract leader who provided the support to the person; instead of going directly to the victim. If a host leader agrees, they can deal with the case. If there is no permission, they cannot deal with the case.

Regarding taking over the responsibilities of other village tract leaders, do you normally inform the township responsible people?

In the KNU township quarterly meeting I had already reported and talked about it but they have not taken actual action for this case yet. I just wanted to know that if a case happens in our

village tract, which we cannot handle alone, so two village tract leaders cooperating together would be great. If we work together with many people it will be more effective and it will go smoothly. If you work alone it will not work all of the time. For this kind of [killing] case we can support each other. But for taking over the case without informing the host, it will become a challenge for the other village tract leaders and it can make them unhappy with their work that they are responsible for.

Do you want to say anything else?

Can I talk about education and healthcare? In our village basically we would like to improve the education and then the healthcare. Even though we have access to education, if we are not healthy we cannot do anything. We want to be able to access education properly. Also based on our current village situation, if we need support from the higher leaders such as KED [Karen Education Department] or [KNU] township responsible people, they should care about us, if they value our education. Moreover, we are thinking of increasing our education by having more standards. Secondly, as our village has grown bigger and bigger, the healthcare should also increase. Currently there are insufficient numbers of local health workers. For example, if two or three patients are sick at the same time and the health workers are busy and struggling with their own livelihood issues, they do not have much time to look after the patients, so it is a problem for the patients. In this kind of situation some of the patients have died because of a lack of health workers. For this reason, how will the [KNU] responsible people deal this and how can they address this kind of case?

How many standards of education do you have in your village?

There are seven standards. Firstly, the school was built by the villagers as a self-reliant school. Even though all of the school buildings and materials, such as wood and other building materials, are provided and constructed by the villagers, who have not received any support from the [Burma/Myanmar] government, after the school was built it became a government school and the school now teaches from Standard 1 until Standard 7.

How many government teachers teach in this school?

For the teachers, they always substitute and I think the school has enough teachers. Some of the teachers still have to be trained even though they are teachers, but this is an issue for the teachers so the school principal deals with this issue. Even though we talk about it, it does not mean that we are complaining or gossiping about the teachers, however our villagers still contribute a lot of things for education.

The standards, starting from Standard 1 to Standard 7, are they directly set up by the Burma/Myanmar government?

Yes.

What about now having higher standards; have you met with the government responsible person?

Yes, we have been talking about it and discussed it with them for many years already. Now if we look at our neighbouring villages, you may see some of the villages' schools were built behind our school, many years ago, but they are now better than our school. For us we always submitted letters and tried to report to the government to renovate the school but we never received any responses from them.

Did the government allocate and send out any health workers for healthcare services?

For healthcare, the government set up a clinic in the Tha Mya area and the clinic is in Noh Ta Hsguh village and if we want to go to the clinic in Noh Ta Hsguh village it will take a half hour of walking. In the past if we want to take vaccinations injections, for pregnant mothers, children, prevention of polio, the health worker themselves came to the K--- village but now, since this year, if we feel sick or something is happening, we all have to go to Noh Ta Hsguh Clinic. The health worker will not come to K--- village anymore because they built the clinic for us there. If we look at what the government said in our village tract, if we want to build the clinic in our village, is that OK?

Are there health workers placed in the village for emergency cases, as you said there was a clinic built in Noh Ta Hsguh which takes 30 minutes to walk to?

Only the assistant midwife, but for general injections we have to go to the clinic in Noh Ta Hsguh village.

What about the health workers from the KNU [affiliated groups], such as [Free Burma] Rangers or other healthcare groups; have they ever been available in your village?

Yes, last year they came once but we have never seen them again since then.

They will probably come again and when they come you can also mention about it to them; the things that you have mentioned to me. I will report it to the relevant leaders too but I do not know what decision they are going to make regarding education and healthcare.

For us, we want to increase the quality of healthcare and education in our village by ourselves. If we look at our village situation everything is done by ourselves [villagers] for our income, and support from outsiders is very weak. Currently, we were told that any organisation that wants to enter and to provide support, they have to meet the requirements set by the KNU's policy which is very difficult to satisfy. As we are at a lower level, sometimes we cannot do lots of things because we are weak [not enough manpower]. For this reason, we live behind the other villages if we compare development growth.

How many households are there in this village?

The documents that I gave you yesterday; that information has been included.

For this one [household number] we just have to report it to another higher level leader. I cannot give any decision on this and I cannot give you the answer what we discussed too.

For me I do not want the answer. I just want to know how can we report it and what level can I report it to, just this.

You can report everything to me regarding healthcare, education and other challenges in the village and we want the village leader to report to us any problems that they face in the area. If the armed groups abuses villagers' rights we want village leaders and villagers to report it. If you do not report to the higher level leaders, they do not know what things are happening on the ground.

Yes, there is one more problem but this is happening in our village tract so it is our responsibility to handle it. We also brought up this issue and reported it when we attended the [KNU township] quarterly meeting already, about people who come to the village for work or Bamar people who

come from the upper areas of Burma, called *A-Nya Tha*⁷ they are not our ethnicity, but as they live in our community we try to guide them as much as we can. When they came they informed us [that they will be living and working around the village] but after they left, some of them did not inform us [that they were leaving from the area]. Regarding the other ethnicities [non-Karen ethnicities], they come and work in our area, how can we deal with this issue?

Do *A-Nya Tha* workers come and work here live in the village?

No, they come and look after the plantations as plantation caretakers. And we also asked and recorded their identify cards and their names. To be able to work here, they come and show themselves to village leaders, but some of them after they leave, they substitute another person [for their replacement] but they did not inform us, for this kind of case how should we handle it? As you are well educated, you might know about the policy more than me.

Have you ever discussed or talked about it with the local authority [KNU]?

We had already talked about it with the armed groups who operate in our area and the responsible people. If we look at the incidents happening in our area, mostly the problems arise from non-Karen ethnicities who are working on the plantation. There are fewer problems happening among Karen people but there are more problems coming from non-Karen workers who look after the plantation. For the Karen people we can talk and solve and understand the problems easily, but it's very difficult for the outsiders.

Did the local responsible leader deal with this issue [related to other ethnic groups working on the plantation]?

Yes, we even have a written policy and a document to explain the situation [to other ethnic groups who are working on the plantations], but even though we have this, if any problem comes up from those people [other ethnic groups], they do not take it seriously or care about it and the problems keep happening. For this reason, to be able to handle them we have to take serious action to create a policy and rules for them [other ethnic groups].

For this type of case, I think you have to discuss with the responsible person. Have you talked to them?

Yes, but the problem still occurs. But it [the problem] does not occur in our village or our village tract. If something [a problem] occurs [in our area] it will be big but we do not know about the small issues; whether they are happening in our region or not.

How many of them come and work here?

There are many of them [other ethnic groups]. When they come, some of them come with their whole family, but some are only couples, who have left their family at their home.

When they settle here, what are the common problems they normally have?

Mostly they argue and fight with each other, between the workers and with the owner [of the plantations]. Some of the workers work very hard for the owner but when the owner has to pay according to the agreement between them, the owner does not do as they promise, but on the other hand some of the owners pay the workers as they promised to but some of the workers do not complete the work as they promised to. Mostly the problems arise among them [the non-Karen ethnicities] as they live closely together and complain to each other so they fight with each other.

⁷ In the Burmese language, people originating from upper Burma/Myanmar are typically called *A-Nya Tha*.

Does the problem arise just among the workers and the owners? Are there any conflicts between the [Karen] villagers and non-Karen workers?

Not including us [Karen villagers]. However, some villagers have around three to four households who live close to them, they are afraid and also when local people travel close to their area they are afraid of the outsiders [other ethnic groups]. Actually we are residents who have to be afraid of the guests [outsiders]; it should not be like this.

What did the local authority suggest during the discussions?

They suggested that we should strictly control the owners [by making clear policies and rules for the owners to follow] as they are in charge of them [workers]. If they cannot guarantee or be responsible for the workers then they should not hire them. As the regional leader directed, we had a meeting with the land owners and we let them know about the issue. We also have informed the workers that we do not want to see problems among them. We warned them not to do that. Since economic hardship is happening in their area, they come and work here. As they come and find work here, we let them work and stay here so as local residents practice, they should also practice and follow [the same rules] as a resident. For our villagers, we will handle and take action seriously if any issues arise.

Where do the land or plantation owners live?

Mostly the land owners live in other areas. They just come and give the shelter for their workers [to work on and take care of their plantations].

Who are the land owners and where are they from?

They are mostly Bamar, Poe Karen, and Mon ethnicity. Very few Poe Karen are land owners; mostly they are Bamar and Mon.

Which ethnic owners' land is close to the village that led to the locals being afraid while travelling?

Bamar people who are from Upper Burma [Myanmar]. But the owner is from Kyainsenikgyi Town, like the wealthy land owner Khin Zaw. Mostly for him he goes and gets workers by himself. If the issues arise among his workers, he deals with it by himself. [Local KNU] Leaders informed and reminded him [about the potential problems that can happen to the people who he hires] as well. But sometimes we might not know and we miss some of them [issues]. In the past, local people who live here were able to travel and find vegetables freely. Now that the land belongs to someone else it is getting harder for us, but in reality we have not experienced torture or threats but we are just worried that it is going to happen [from outsiders to the villagers] in the future.

Is Khin Zaw the one who constructed the road and the buildings?

Yes, it was him.

Did he buy the land or confiscate it from the villagers?

Mostly he bought it but his workers are mostly non-Karen and people from the upper parts of Burma [Myanmar] [A-Nya Tha].

Were the rubber plantations already planted or were they planted and ploughed after he bought them?

He just bought the land and the rubber was grown after that.

Did you know how much he pay to the road construction workers?

To get that information you would have to ask the road's committee group because this is not relevant to me so I do not know much about it.

What about the plantation caretakers who live close to the village?

We deal with it [any problems] if they live close to our village.

How do they get paid? Do they get paid monthly or daily?

This depends on the type of work. If the owner wants the whole plantation cleared up the owner will pay after the whole plantation is finished. If the owner wants to pay by acre they will get paid based on what the owners and the worker agree. Mostly the owner pays them tree by tree. Some owners give them 100 kyat [US \$0.07]⁸ per tree and some owners give them 150 kyat [US \$0.11] per tree.

Based on the information that you tell me I cannot make any decision and give answers to you. I will need to report it to the upper leaders and they will analyse and decide based on the information that you have explained.

There is not only one rich person, Khin Zaw, here. I want to say it is not only for the rich people or the owner, the workers who live and work in our region; sometimes they create problems for us and among themselves as well. So like this case we want to deal with it effectively.

Do you have anything else to say?

If you do not ask me I cannot tell you as I cannot think of anything in my head but if you keep asking me questions, I can answer you.

Do you have any other issues that you want to report?

Yes, but right now I cannot think of anything. There is one thing that I wanted to say which is that there are many armed groups and organisations in our area. When they come they order and ask us for information that they want and we have to do it for them. Mostly when they come, they will ask us for detailed information [of household numbers and villages] and we have to provide the information to every group as they requested. If women's organisations [Karen Women Organisation (KWO)] ask us for village information, we give it to them and if other organisations ask us for household numbers, we also have to provide it to them. For this kind of situation, it happens every year to us, is that [part of] the activities that the organisations have to do every year? Or because of the information that we provided to them are not insufficient? I am raising it, because we always have to prepare the documents for them and review them whenever they ask for it, which is hard for us to give them every single time they asked for it. In this village tract, there is only one Karen village which is K--- village and mostly the other villages are Mon and Bamar villages so every time when we go to the field to collect the information we have to say and act properly and carefully. This is sometimes very difficult for me. However, we feel much better and much more secure after the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire agreement took hold. As I've mentioned in the past, if we saw any armed group we had to be afraid of them but now we can build close relationships with them and be less afraid of them.

⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the November 28th 2016 official market rate of 1309 kyat to US \$1.

Currently we do not see them committing human rights violation at the moment, but we cannot be sure in the future, but for now the situation is stable.

Thank you very much for your valuable information.

Thank you.

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

- “Ongoing militarisation in southeast Myanmar” (October 2016)
- “Dooplaya Field Report: Military conflict, violent abuse, and destruction caused by development projects, January to December 2015” (October 2016)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, February 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Burma/Myanmar,” (August 2016)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, August to October 2015,” (July 2016)

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)