



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## News Bulletin

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### **Villager accused of witchcraft is killed by Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) soldiers, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, November 2014**

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*This News Bulletin describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District in November 2014, including the killing of a villager by soldiers from the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO). On November 9<sup>th</sup> 2014, three KNDO soldiers, Saw Kler Say, Saw Kyaw Gay and Saw Nyo Thoo Hpaw, attacked Saw D---, a W--- villager, who was believed to be practicing witchcraft. The soldiers choked Saw D--- to death with a rope and then hung him from a tree to make it seem as if he had committed suicide. The soldiers were investigated after family members reported the case and were arrested after admitting to the murder. Saw D---'s remaining family members reported that they have been struggling since Saw D--- was killed as he was the primary livelihood earner in the family.<sup>1</sup>*

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Three soldiers from the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)<sup>2</sup> killed a W--- villager named Saw D---, a 38-year-old farmer who was believed to be practicing witchcraft.<sup>3</sup> The perpetrators of the killing were Saw Kler Say, Saw Kyaw Gay and Saw Nyo Thoo Hpaw. They have since been arrested.

The incident began when villagers who went to help plant Saw D---'s paddy<sup>4</sup> became angry as he did not agree with the way they were planting his crops. Helping to plant each other's crops is an ordinary thing that villagers do in order to help one another finish faster. Despite this, he told the villagers to leave if they were not going to do it properly.

Among the villagers who went to plant his paddy was KNDO soldier Saw Kler Say's younger brother. After the younger brother returned from planting Saw D---'s paddy he became sick to the point where his parents had to admit him to the hospital. Upon discharge from the hospital,

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<sup>1</sup> This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It summarises information from one incident report and one situation update received by KHRG in March 2015. 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 redesigned Website.

<sup>2</sup> The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

<sup>3</sup> Another killing case stemming from accusations of witchcraft occurred in Hpa-an District in June 2013. See, "[Hpa-an Incident Report: Extrajudicial killing in Paingkyon Township](#)," KHRG, May 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.

the younger brother returned to his home but was still suffering from dizziness. According to a KHRG community member, Saw D--- had been rumoured to be practicing witchcraft, although prior to this case he had not been accused of practicing against others. It was also reported that when the sick villager was admitted to hospital the doctor told him that his symptoms were due to gastric problems. Despite this, the patient's parents strongly believed that Saw D--- had used witchcraft on their son. Later, Saw Kler Say's father, Saw Yeh Bweh, went to see the psychic Saw Nyah Hper to find out if someone had used witchcraft on his son. The psychic only told him to be careful around Saw D---.

Another villager named Naw F--- also reported that her husband got sick after coming back from planting Saw D---'s paddy. She went to ask the psychic if Saw D--- was using witchcraft on her husband but the psychic would not tell her anything. After the murder occurred, Naw F--- stated, *"I whined about my husband being sick in front of Saw Kler Say and carelessly said that it would be great if somebody killed Saw D---. I never thought my words could have such an impact. Now I understand how wrong what I said was."* It has been reported that other villagers also held the same feeling about Saw D---.

Before the murder, Saw Kler Say discussed killing Saw D--- with two other soldiers, Saw Kyaw Gay and Saw Nyo Thoo Hpaw. At first, they considered shooting him with a gun or beating him with a stick but they worried that the wounds on his body would be used as evidence and lead to an investigation. Therefore, Saw Kler Say wanted to kill Saw D--- in a way that made it appear as if he had committed suicide and developed the idea that they would hang Saw D--- from a tree after killing him.

On November 9<sup>th</sup> 2014, Saw Kler Say told Saw Heh Nay, the nearby Klaw Pah village head, to call Saw D--- to his home, intoxicate him with alcohol and then let Saw Kler Say and the others know when Saw D--- was on his way home. Saw Kler Say then waited on the route with the two other soldiers. When Saw D--- came back along the route, Saw Kler Say attacked him and strangled him with a rope. He and Saw Kyaw Gay held the rope until D--- died, while Saw Nyo Thoo Hpaw muzzled Saw D---'s mouth to prevent him from shouting. After Saw D--- was dead, Saw Kler Say hung his body from a tree to make it seem as though he had hung himself.

The case was reported by the family and the perpetrators were later investigated and asked to re-enact the event. Eventually, the perpetrators admitted their wrong doing and were arrested. Saw D--- has left behind a wife and children, who reported that they are having livelihood problems since he was killed.<sup>5</sup>

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

- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, January 2014," (April 2015)
- Home guards attacked by Tatmadaw in Lu That Township, Hpapun District, February 2015," (April 2015)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, October to November 2014," (April 2015)
- "Tatmadaw artillery fire directed at villagers working on hill field farms in Hpapun District, February 2015," (March 2015)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, January 2013," (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)

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<sup>5</sup> This information was included in an unpublished Incident Report and an unpublished Situation Update received by KHRG in March 2015 from a KHRG community member from Hpapun District.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



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