



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

January 26, 2016 / KHRG #15-49-S1

Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Doh Soh Township, January to June 2015

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Ler Doh Soh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between January and June 2015, including the settlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), militarisation, arbitrary taxation, education situation, healthcare improvements, and villager livelihoods.

- *The Karen National Union (KNU) is set to arrange land for the IDPs in Ler Doh Soh Township who were originally displaced from Htee Hta Sway delta area in Ayeyarwaddy region due to the Nargis cyclone happened in 2008.*
 - *The Tatmadaw demand a tax at their checkpoint when the villagers go to Thailand to trade their buffalo and cows. Moreover, if the villagers wish to transport timber to their village, they also have to pay 50,000 kyat (US \$38.43) per truck at the checkpoint, even if they only use the timber as building material for their houses.*
 - *Since the 2012 ceasefire, it has become easier for the villagers from Ler Doh Soh Township to travel to Da Weh village tract, as they do not get questioned like they used to.*
 - *The healthcare sector has also improved since the ceasefire, as there is now a clinic set up in each village as well as many hospitals set up in this township. In addition, the KNU is planning to set up another hospital in Law Ther village, Da Weh village tract.*
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Situation Update | Ler Doh Soh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (January to June 2015)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in June 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

I would like to mention the situation in Ler Doh Soh Township as reported from January to June [2015]. The main topics that I would like to mention are the situation of the villagers, the situation of KNU [Karen National Union], the situation of Tatmadaw, the situations of healthcare, education, travelling, and villager livelihoods, as well as the problem of land, and the situation of NGOs.

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.

The situation of the villagers

There are three areas [village tracts] in Ler Doh Soh Township which are Ka Moh Thway area [village tract], Da Weh area [village tract], and Htee Ler Klay area [village tract], and Htee Ler Klay area [village tract]. There are Burmese villages and *Ta Ler* (Mon)² villages in Htee Ler Klay and Da Weh areas. There are two IDP villages in Ler Doh Soh Township. These villagers [originally] came from Htee Hta Sway [delta area in Ayeyarwaddy region]. Due to the Nargic cyclone happened in 2008, they came to move in Ler Doh Soh Township for their livelihoods. Since they do not have a place of residence, they have to stay in other people's rubber plantations and set up small huts. However, the KNU will arrange land for them to own.

The situation of the KNU

In Ler Doh Soh Township, the KNU office has been built in Hkler Poo village, Ka Moh Thway area. However, it is a temporary office. The [permanent] office is going to be built in Koh Hkee village [Ka Moh Thway area] in the summer. Since the the KNU organisation [employees] are not paid a salary, they ask help from the villagers [to work for the KNU on a voluntary basis]. There is a [KNU] checkpoint situated in Htee Hkee road, Da Weh area, Ler Doh Soh Township.³ This road belongs to ITD (Italian-Thai Development) company.

Villager's livelihoods, education, travelling

In Ler Doh Soh Township, people mostly plant betel nut trees and they work in agriculture for their livelihoods. Moreover, villagers planted more rubber plantations. Traditionally, these Karen people work on hill fields. Some are panning for lead⁴ for their livelihood. In the past, Karen people did not have a chance to attend higher education. Now, [I see that some] Karen people have finished their high school and they are working for NGOs in the country. There is no Karen school in Ler Doh Soh Township. However, [Karen language] is taught for 45 minutes once a day in the [Burma/Myanmar] government school. There is a school in each village in the township. Nevertheless, since there is only middle school in the village, if the children finish middle school, they have to go to Dawei [Town to continue their education]. Before the ceasefire⁵, it was not easy to go to Dawei [Town] because villagers were questioned [by armed actors] a lot. Now, the travelling situation is better.

The situation of NGOs

² The Mon people are believed to be some of the oldest inhabitants of Southeast Asia. Most live in the central Myanmar government demarcated areas of Mon State, located in the south of Burma/Myanmar and bordering Kayin State, Bago Region (formerly Pegu Division) and Tanintharyi Region (formerly Tenasserim Division). These areas overlap to an extent with KHRG's research areas, which follow a locally defined system of demarcation.

³ According to the KHRG community member who wrote this report, this checkpoint is manned by Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers. They demand 100 Baht (US \$2.75) from businessmen who wish to cross. The KNU also tax villagers living near the checkpoint 500 kyat (US \$0.38) and two baskets (49.8 kg) of rice per house each year.

⁴ Although the KHRG community member writes that villagers pan for lead, it is possible that he meant they engage in gold panning, in which lead products can be used in the process.

⁵ The KHRG community member is referring to the preliminary ceasefire agreement that was signed on January 12th 2012 between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see ["Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups,"](#) Reuters, October 15th 2015.

There are many NGOs entering into the township and they give support [to the villagers]. [They are] water related group, medicine related group, and an environment preservation group. Since I do not know the names of these organisations, I am not going to mention [any more] about them.

The situation of the Tatmadaw

The Tatmadaw army camps are mostly located along the road which goes from Da Weh area [village tract] to Yangon. They are Infantry Battalions (IB) #408 #409 #410 and #282. All of these army camps are in Da Weh area. They do not have military activity in the township. They are [mainly] active in the upper part of Burma. However, there is a Tatmadaw checkpoint 2 or 3 miles from the other side of the river in Hkaw Paw village, Ka Moh Thway area. They demand [villagers pay] a tax when the villagers go to trade buffalo and cows in Thailand. Moreover, after the villagers went to log trees for building their houses and were carrying them back [to their village], they [the Tatmadaw] demanded 50,000 kyat (US \$38.43)⁶ per truck. The soldiers in this checkpoint rotate once every six months. Now, this checkpoint is controlled by Infantry Battalion #62. The military activity has reduced a lot compared to the past.

The situation of healthcare

There are many hospitals that have been built by the government in many different places in our township. KNU has a plan to set up a hospital in Law Ther village, Da Weh area [village tract]. There are no serious diseases happening in our township. However, children are suffering from malaria and the flu. In the past, there was no hospital and they had to go to the hospital in Dawei [Town]. Now, since there is a clinic in each village, they do not have to go to other places [to receive treatment]. After the ceasefire, the healthcare sector has been improving.

Conclusion

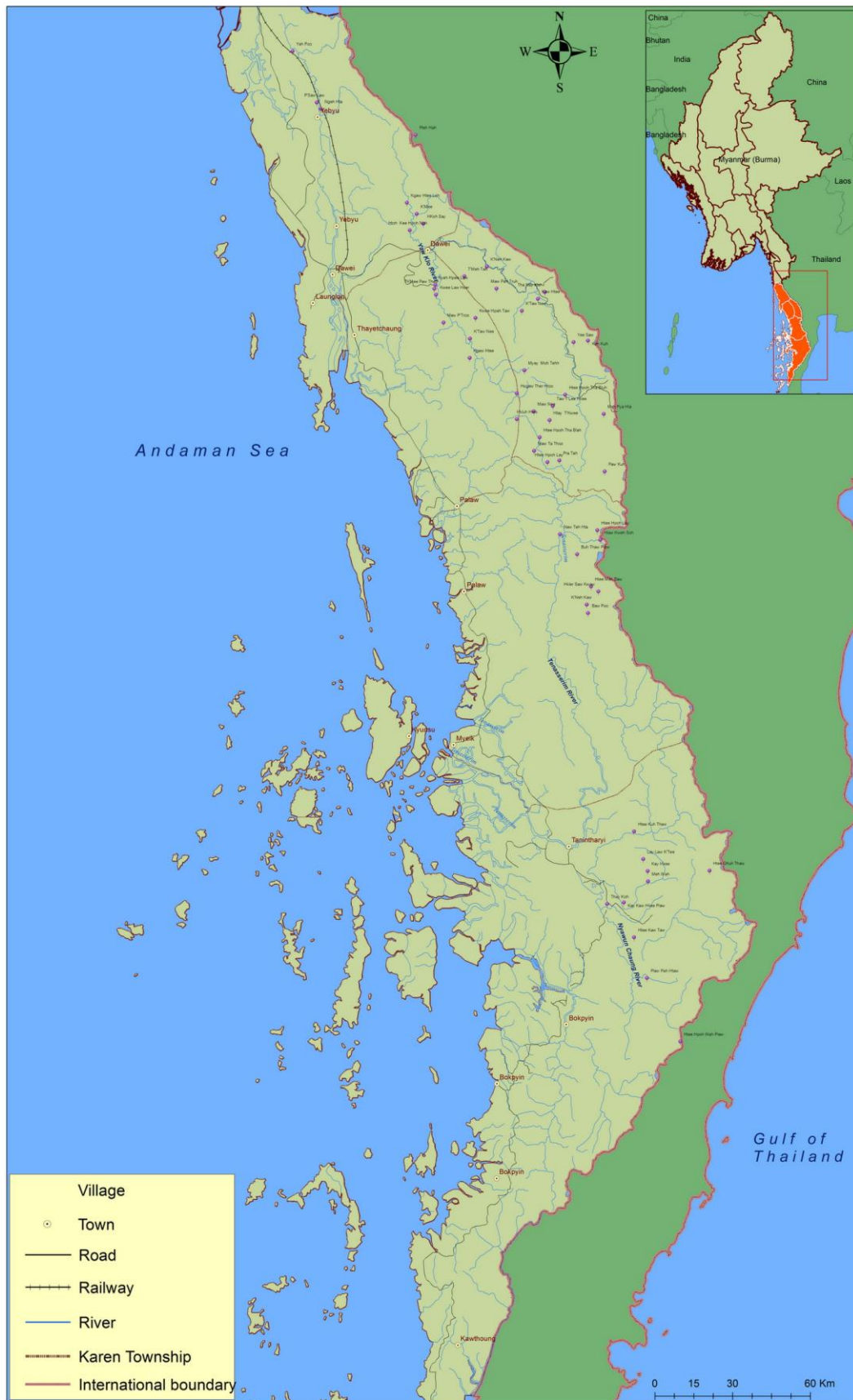
All of the above information that I mention is the situation in Ler Doh Soh Township. The information in this report is not the complete [comprehensive] information yet but I am going to write up [more] in an upcoming situation update.

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

- “Mergui-Tavoy Short Update: Ler Muh Lah Township, 1998 to 2013,” (November 2015)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ta Naw Th’Ree Township, January to May 2015,” (November 2015)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Ler Muh Lah and Ta Naw Th’Ree townships, January to June 2015,” (October 2015)
- “‘With only our voices, what can we do?’: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar,” (June 2015)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Photo Set: The impact of development in Mergui-Tavoy District, May 2014,” (February 2015)

⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 15th 2016 official market rate of 1, kyat to the US \$1,301.17

Mergui/Tavoy (Thanintharyi) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)