



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

July 7, 2015 / KHRG #15-7-NB1

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**Violent abuse and killing committed by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, March to May 2015**

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*This News Bulletin describes events in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, including killing, violent abuse and restrictions on freedom of movement, as well as recent fighting between Border Guard Force (BGF) and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers, following increased BGF activity in the area. The first incident involved a villager who was shot and killed by a BGF private from Battalion #1013, while he was travelling at night time. The second incident involved a villager who was beaten until he was unconscious by BGF Battalion #1014 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Tha Beh. The villager was accused of contacting and being supportive of KNLA soldiers. Villagers were arrested, violently abused and killed because of the ongoing conflict between BGF and KNLA soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. In response to recent BGF activity, the KNU further imposed restrictions on villagers' freedom of movement with the intention of catching BGF forces in the villager restricted areas.<sup>1</sup>*

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Since March 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, Border Guard Forces (BGFs)<sup>2</sup> in Htee Tha Daw Hta and Meh Pree village tracts have been very active in the region. Due to this increased activity, from April 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> there were skirmishes occurring in both village tracts between BGF soldiers and the KNLA in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. Since the skirmishes, BGF Battalion #1014's soldiers ordered the villagers from both village tracts not to go out after six pm or before six am. This has caused difficulties for the villagers' livelihoods, for example it has made it difficult to take care of their buffaloes and go to work on their paddy fields. The situation is tense in the region.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, a villager name Saw A---, also known as Saw C---, from R--- village, Htee Tha Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, was shot and killed by a private under the control of Hpah Yuh Khay who is company second-in-command of BGF Battalion #1013. The battalion commander of BGF #1013 is named Maung Hla Kyaing and their army base is located in Noh Hpaw Htee village, Noh Hpaw Htee village tract, Bu Tho Township,

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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 Hpa-an District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. 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> Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

Hpapun District. The BGF officer told the local villagers that they shot Saw A--- by accident because it was night time and they thought that he was a KNLA soldier. According to KHRG's researcher, Saw A---, was sent to Hpa-an General Hospital in Hpa-an Town, but he died on March 16<sup>th</sup> at around seven or eight o'clock in the morning due to his injuries.

Additionally, on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, a villager named Maung D---, 42 years old, who lives in G--- village, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, was arrested and violently abused by Officer Hpah Tha Beh,<sup>3</sup> whose rank is 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant from BGF battalion #1014. The battalion commander of BGF's #1014 is named Maung Chit<sup>4</sup> and their army base is located in Meh Say village, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. According to a KHRG researcher, between April 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, there was small-scale fighting between BGF Battalion #1014 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hpah Tha Beh's soldiers and the local KNLA's soldiers. After the fighting, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hpah Tha Beh arrested Maung D--- and accused him of having contacts with, and being supportive of the KNLA soldiers. He then beat and kicked him until he fell unconscious. According to the KHRG researcher, Maung D--- is still badly injured.

## **Update on the conflict between the BGF and the KNLA in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District**

### **BGF operation in Ka Taing Ti village tract**

On May 11<sup>th</sup> 2015, BGF Battalion #1013 called a meeting with the village heads from S---, H---, M--- and N--- villages in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. In the meeting they told the village heads that they would conduct a military operation in these four villages. They do not intend to attack the KNLA and they do not want any interruptions, for example threats or attacks from the KNLA. If the BGF privates and officers threaten, bully or rob the villagers, the villagers can report it to the relevant BGF commanders. The BGF also warned the village heads that during the military operations, the village heads must inform them if they see the KNLA patrolling.

In the meeting, Battalion Commander Maung Chit stated, *"Since we transformed from the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]<sup>5</sup> into the BGF, we have not travelled anywhere or carried out any duties. So, to make our leader satisfied, we will carry out the military operation on both sides of the road from Hpapun to Ka Ma Maung road."* He added that, *"When we come on foot, we want to return on foot."* By this he meant he does not want any fighting to happen resulting in having to carry the injured back following the end of the operation. They did not inform the village head about the date, their battalions, companies or how many soldiers they will use during the operation.

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<sup>3</sup> KHRG has received numerous reports involving human rights abuses committed by BGF Battalion #1014 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Tha Beh, including violent abuse, forced labour, explicit threats and arbitrary arrest and detention. See ["Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 – January 2014,"](#) KHRG, September 2014; ["Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014,"](#) KHRG, August 2014; ["Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014,"](#) KHRG, August 2014; and ["Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to November 2013,"](#) KHRG, December 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Commander Maung Chit, also referred to as Maw Hsee, is the commander for Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) battalion #1014 in Hpapun District. Maung Chit is not to be confused with Maung Chit Thu (typically referred to as Chit Thu), who is a senior level BGF commander overseeing battalions #1017, #1018, #1019 and #1020 in Ko Ko, Hpa-an District.

<sup>5</sup> The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see ["Inside the DKBA,"](#) KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

### **Karen National Union (KNU) restrictions on villagers**

On May 12<sup>th</sup> 2015, the KNU called a meeting with the village heads from the Ka Taing Ti village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District and warned them that:

- 1) When the BGF carry out military operations in any village area, villagers must not let the BGF stay in their houses.
- 2) Villagers must walk only on the road/path when they go to their farms and work places.<sup>6</sup>
- 3) Villagers must not go to the hills, valley or areas where there is water.<sup>7</sup>

According to an interview with W--- village tract administrator U B--- on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2015, he said, *“We are worried with the situation now. People who are impacted are villagers. A few days ago, the KNU called a meeting with village heads from S---, H---, M--- and N--- villages and informed the villagers not to go in the old areas especially on hills, valleys or areas where there is water. If villagers are going to their work places, they can use the usual path but do not go on the hill or valleys - the old areas where they used to plant the landmines. They [KNU] informed the villagers [that] if the BGF carry out activities they have not planted landmines yet. But they will definitely plant landmines if the BGF start [to] carry out an operation and BGF battalions are on patrol.”*

The area the KNU forbade the villagers from going to is only two furlongs (0.4 km. or 0.250 miles)<sup>8</sup> away from the back end of the village. According to the KHRG researcher, villagers in the area of Htee Tha Daw Hta and Meh Pree village tracts, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District cannot travel from one village to another village freely like before this tension between the KNLA and BGF between March and May 2015 and if they do travel, they do so in fear.

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

- *‘With only our voices, what can we do?’: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar*, (June 2015)
- Press Release: *‘With only our voices, what can we do?’: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar*, (June 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to November 2014,” (June 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo Townships, November 2013 to January 2014,”(June 2015)
- “Hpapun Interview: Daw A---, July 2013,” (May 2015)

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<sup>6</sup> The villagers were asked to do this because the KNU will then know that those people who abandon the path are not villagers and are members of a BGF.

<sup>7</sup> Similarly to the previous footnote, the villagers were asked to do this so the KNLA could ambush the BGF if they see them straying from the path as the villagers have been ordered not to leave the path. The KNLA will shoot anyone who is in the forbidden areas. There are also landmines prevalent in the area.

<sup>8</sup> A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.2 of a km. or 0.125 of a mile.

# Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)