



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2015 to January 2016

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, Toungoo District between November 2015 and January 2016, including military activity, education, healthcare, land confiscation, drugs, and landmine information.

- On December 29th 2015, the Tatmadaw in Toungoo District sent rations to Than Daung Gyi, Kler La, Kaw Thay Der, Buh Hsa Hkee, and Klaw Mee Der army camps. They sent rations using 100 horses and 30 trucks. On January 19th 2016, they sent more rations to Kler La army camp using 40 trucks.
 - The Tatmadaw confiscated 5,000 acres of land in order to build Bu Yin Naung military training school and 1,500 acres were confiscated by Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #104 in Than Daung Gyi area. Light Infantry Division (LID) #106 and Infantry Battalion (IB) #73 confiscated 3,000 acres of land in Leik Tho area.
 - The villagers from Hseik Pu Taung and Nan Ga Mauk village tracts held two protests on December 5th 2015 and on January 12th 2016, respectively, in order to get back the 2,400 acres of land which were confiscated by Kaung Myanmar Aung Company.
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Situation Update | Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, Toungoo District (November 2015 to January 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in February 2016. It was written by a community member in Toungoo 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 This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including 109 photographs and five video clips.²

Introduction

This Situation Update was collected from two townships in Taw Oo [Toungoo] District. It was collected from November 20th [2015] to January 30th [2016]. The below topics [cover] issues

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.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern 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.

which occurred in Toungoo District, including Tatmadaw activity, the civilian situation, education, healthcare, land confiscation, the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] situation, drugs, and landmine information.

Tatmadaw [army camps] location and activity

The MOC [Military Operation Command]³ #5 is situated in Toungoo District but we are not sure whether they have already changed their location or not. LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]⁴ #124 is based in Than Daung Gyi permanent army camp and Bu Yin Naung military training school is based there [Toungoo District]. LID [Light Infantry Division]⁵ #603 and IB [Infantry Battalion]⁶ #73 operate in Leik Tho area. The Burma/Myanmar government military [Tatmadaw] operate in Toungoo District [in the same way] as they have operated before. They always [normally] send rations [to their army camps] every three or four months. They not only sent rations, but they also sent military equipment and artillery to Buh Hsa Hkee and Klaw Mee Der army camps. On December 29th 2015, they sent rations to Than Daung Gyi, Kler La, Kaw Thay Der, Buh Hsa Hkee, and Klaw Mee Der army camps. They sent rations by 100 horses and by 30 trucks. On January 19th [2016], they [again] sent rations to Kler La area [army camp] by 40 trucks. Moreover, Kler La and Kaw Thay Der villagers reported [to a KHRG community member] that they brought Muslim [people] with them in a truck. But we do not know their activity [purpose] behind it [bringing Muslim people with them]. We have recently heard from the villagers that they have seen thieves [gangs] going around rural areas but they [the village authorities] have not arrested them yet. We do not know the [details of the particular] case behind it but it brought worry and fear for the villagers.

Civilian situation and livelihood

Most of the civilians who live in Toungoo District earn a living from plantations and farms. In plantations they plant cardamoms, betel nuts,⁷ durians, and coffee seeds. The farmers plant paddy, green gram, and mung beans. Regarding their livelihood, some villagers produce enough [food] each year but some of them do not produce enough. For the villagers who do not produce enough food for a year, they have to work as labour workers and some of them go to work in Maw Hkee [area]. The villagers have faced livelihood problems because commodity [cooking ingredients] prices have increased. The villagers reported that the fruits that they are producing from their plantations have a very low market price but the [cooking ingredients] they buy from the market have a very high price.

At the present time, the villagers can travel freely because the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement⁸ (NCA) was signed [in 2015]. But some of them remain worried because the

³ Military Operations Command. Composed of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁴ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁵ Light Infantry Divisions (Tatmadaw) are commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. Light Infantry Divisions are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

⁶ Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for garrison duty but sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁷ In Burmese, 'betel nut' and 'betel leaf' are referred to as *konywet* and *konthih*, respectively, as if they are from the same plant. The Burmese names are also commonly used by Karen language speakers. Betel nut is the seed from an areca palm tree, *Areca catechu*; "betel leaf" is the leaf of the piper betel vine, belonging to the *Piperaceae* family.

⁸ 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,

Burma/Myanmar military [Tatmadaw] are repairing their army camps and sending more rations [cooking supplies and military equipment] even after [the NCA was signed]. They are patrolling as they used to patrol in the past [before the NCA was signed]. Thus, the villagers have no trust in the Burma/Myanmar military [Tatmadaw]. Moreover, from December [2015] until the present time, we have heard that the Burma/Myanmar government have allowed thieves [gangs] and child trafficking [in Toungoo District]. So, it has caused worry for the villagers there.

Education

There has been no special improvement in terms of education in Toungoo District. The education situation is still the same as before [the NCA was signed] but in some areas the Karen language was allowed to be taught in some [Burma/Myanmar] schools. The Karen language was not allowed to be taught during school hours. It was [only] allowed to be taught before and after school hours. If we look at the present time, the situation of education is gradually improving. But in some villages there is no school. Therefore they have to go to study in other villages.



This photo was taken on December 13th 2015 in Ma Day village, Maing Lun village tract, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. The picture shows the old school. Although some schools have been repaired, some schools, such as the school in this photo, have not been repaired. Therefore the students have to learn in the old buildings. [Photo: KHRG]

Healthcare

Since November [2015 to January 2016], the villagers in Toungoo District have faced common illnesses, such as diarrhoea, coughing, [high/low] blood pressure, flu and malaria. Health is very important for human beings. We are able to earn a living if we have good health but if we do not have good health we cannot earn a living easily. It can also impact our family life and [we] will have no happiness.

October 15th 2015. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see "[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement](#)," *UN News Centre*, October 15th 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe's decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see "[Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#)," *Karen News*, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement 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.

There are two kinds of people [who live in Toungoo District]: the first kind live in urban areas in the towns and the second kind live in rural areas. Living in the towns means they are under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government. The people who live in rural areas are under the control of the KNU and they do not live under Burma/Myanmar government control.

The villagers who live under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government [usually] have to go for medical treatment in government hospitals when they are sick. At the present time, we can say that the situation is improving but there is no special support in terms of healthcare from the Burma/Myanmar government. In some villages there is no clinic. Only nurses are present when they give immunisations. They are not able [sufficiently trained] to treat the patients.

The villagers who live in rural areas go to KNU clinics and hospitals when they are sick. The KNU does not have much funding in terms of healthcare and does not have enough medicine to treat patients. So this has caused problems for the villagers [patients]. Therefore the villagers have to buy medicine by themselves and buy the medicine that they used to use. They [the villagers] treat common illnesses by themselves in the villages and they help each other. But if they face serious sickness and cannot treat patients in the villages they send them to [KNU] hospitals.

Land problems

There have been many land issues [land confiscations] in Toungoo District. Some [plots of] lands were confiscated by military groups and some were confiscated by companies and rich people. At the present time, [many of the] human rights issues occurring [in Toungoo District] are related to land issues. The Tatmadaw have [previously] confiscated 5,000 acres of land in Than Daung Gyi area to build Bu Yin Naung military training school [which has been built]. Military LIB #124 also confiscated 1,500 acres of land in Than Daung Gyi area. LID #603 and IB #73 confiscated 3,000 acres of land in Leik Tho area. The company [Kaung Myanmar Aung Company] confiscated 2,400 acres of land in Hseik Pu Taung and Nan Ga Mauk village tracts.⁹ There are many problems regarding land issues in Toungoo District but we do not know [the details about all of the cases]. In relation to the land issues, the villagers whose land has been confiscated have already held two demonstrations. The first demonstration took place on December 5th 2015 [in Htantabin Township].



⁹ KHRG has previously reported on a different incident in which Kaung Myanmar Aung Company confiscated villagers' land in Htantabin Township, Toungoo District between November 2014 and February 2015. For more information, see "Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014 to February 2015," (July 2015).



The above photos were taken on December 5th 2015 on the road between Htoh Boh and Nan Ga Mauk villages in Day Loh Muh Nuh La section, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District. The photos show villagers whose land has been confiscated by Kaung Myanmar Aung Company gathering together for a demonstration. [Photos: KHRG]

The second demonstration took place on January 12th 2016. The villagers who held the demonstration wanted to get their lands back and to be able to work on their lands peacefully. They tried very hard to get their lands back from Kaung Myanmar Aung Company which had confiscated their lands. After they [first] held a demonstration in Toungoo Town, Kaung Myanmar Aung Company met with them to provide compensation. They [the company] would provide [offered to give] 300,000 kyats [US \$256.63]¹⁰ per acre of land to the owners but the villagers did not accept the compensation. They only need their land back. The main reasons [and demands] for holding the demonstrations were:

- (1) Kaung Myanmar Aung Company, which illegally trespassed and confiscated inherited land that has been worked [on] by the residents' grandparents, should leave immediately;
- (2) To return the land which the residents' grandparents have been working on [for generations];
- (3) To solve land problems according to the law;
- (4) We do not want [Myanmar] Farmers Development Party [to operate in our land];
- (5) We do not want Kaung Myanmar Aung Company [to operate in our land].



The above photos were taken on January 12th 2016 in Toungoo Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, show villagers from two village tracts gathering together on the road in Toungoo Town to hold a land demonstration. It was the second time they held a protest against Kaung Myanmar Aung Company to get their

¹⁰ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 11th 2016 official market rate of 1169.00 kyats to the US \$1.

land back. [Photos: KHRG]

KNLA situation

The KNU [KNLA] Operation Command, Battalion #5, Battalion #6 and four battalions of the KNDO¹¹ [Karen National Defence Organisation] are based in Toungoo District. They plan to improve the quality of their soldiers so they [usually] provide basic military training in the summer season [in Toungoo District]. Each training takes one month.

The KNU have also planned to go to civilians' [villages] to educate villagers about the NCA treaty. On December 29th [2015], they went to Kler La area and explained to villagers about the KNU activities. They held discussions with civilians in Leik Tho Town and KNU headquarters leaders also participated in the discussions. They educated villagers about the NCA and also conducted question and answer sessions with villagers.



The above photos were taken on December 29th 2015 in Leik Tho Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. The photo on the left shows the KNU leaders holding a meeting with civilians and educating them about the NCA. The photo on the right shows Tatmadaw officers from Battalion #603 who also participated in the meeting. [Photos: KHRG]

Drugs

We can say that in Toungoo District there has been no drug selling in previous years. But at the present time methamphetamine has appeared [again since] November 2015. The KNU has already captured them [drugs] twice at KNU checkpoints. In the first incident the KNU seized ten pills of methamphetamine¹² and in the second incident they seized two pills but we cannot remember the date. They seized them on Kler La road, Toungoo [Town]. Regarding this drug issue, a Burmese [villager] who carried the drug for Kler La army camp soldiers reported [the information to a KHRG community member].

Regarding the drug issue, we do not know how many drugs are coming to Toungoo District. It is a problem for the villagers as well as the young people who are affected by this problem.

Landmine information

There is no special information related to landmines. Since the ceasefire [the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement] has taken place, the [armed groups have stopped] planting landmines. Because they have stopped planting landmines it is very good [safe] for human beings [the local

¹¹ 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.

¹² KHRG has previously reported on this incident in "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, July to September 2015](#)," KHRG, July 2016.

community members to travel]. Landmines can smash [injure] our physical bodies and they can kill us.

At the present time, we can say that in Toungoo District the KNU military [KNLA] have no plans to plant new landmines. The Burma/Myanmar government [Tatmadaw] do not plant new landmines either. But the old landmines still exist and they have not been cleared yet. The villagers do not dare to travel in the places where the old landmines still exist.

Conclusion

This Situation Update covered the above topics and the situation in Toungoo District that we know about. There is lots of information that we do not know about. If we look at the events that occurred in Toungoo District the KNU tried to help the villagers solve the problems for them as well as they could. In respect of the land problems, the villagers have met with the KNU leaders and asked for suggestions from them.

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

- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, July to September 2015,” (July 2016)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, March to July 2015,” (March 2016)
- “Toungoo Field Report: December 2013 to December 2014,” (February 2016)
- “The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar,” (February 2016)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Threats and arbitrary demands by Burma/Myanmar Police in Thandaunggyi Township, March 2015,” (February 2016)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)