



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

August 30, 2016 / KHRG #16-14-A4-I1

Dooplaya Interview: Naw A--- February 2016

This Interview with Naw A--- describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, from July 2015 to February 2016. She reports that fighting broke out between Border Guard Force (BGF) and Na Ma Kya Group, who split from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA). The fighting broke out in July 2015 and carried on to February 5th 2016. After villagers fled, six villagers' and three DKBA families' houses were set on fire by the BGF Deputy Commander Dit Kyaw Naw.

Interview | Naw A---, (Female, 35), B--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (February 2016)

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 February 5th 2016 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 five other interviews, reports and 41 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

Position: Villager

What is your name?

My name is Naw³ A---.

How old are you?

I am 35 years old.

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.

³ *Naw* is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

What is your religion?

Buddhist.

Are you Buddhist?

Yes.

Do you live in B--- [village]?

Yes, I live in B--- village.

What do you do for a living?

I am a farmer.

Do you have a family?

Yes.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

Sister, we would like to know about the incident that happened in your village, related to the issue of you having to flee from your village. So, can you tell us?

I do not know how to tell you.

How did the incident happen and why were your houses burnt down?

We fled because we were afraid [of the Border Guard Force and Na Ma Kya].⁴

You should not be afraid of us, because we are working with Karen Human Rights Group. We document human rights abuses, therefore we want to know how the villagers are being abused. So, can you tell us as much as you can?

How can I tell you? I am going to tell you about [why] we fled. We fled because of the fighting [that] broke out.

Can you tell us about the fighting [that] broke out and who burnt down your houses?

⁴ 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 Burma/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. Na ma kya is a Burmese phrase which directly translates as ‘Deaf Ear’. Na ma kya in this context refers to the name of a Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) unit based in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. According to local villagers, this group often acts with impunity, ignoring both the local people’s input as well as the higher DKBA authorities’ orders. For more information see [“Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, March 2015,”](#) KHRG, April 2015 and [“Two separate clashes between armed actors in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, February 2015,”](#) KHRG, May 2015.

The people who burnt down our houses were BGF [soldiers]. We heard they burnt our houses but we did not dare to go back and check our houses.

The BGF burnt down your houses?

Yes.

Which group were they fighting against?

They fought against [the DKBA]⁵, therefore we were not confident to live in our village and we fled.

Your houses were burnt down, and what about food [that you had saved]? Was it also burnt?

No, because we brought some food with us when we were fleeing. We also went back to take some belongings before they burnt down our houses, but we could not collect them all to carry with us. Thus, some of our furniture and rice was burnt.

What about other belongings like clothes and money?

No. Money was not included. The houses were set on fire, including my house. We newly built the house and [we were] almost about to build the walls but we had not finished building. Unfortunately it was set alight when the fighting took place. It was set on fire when we fled from our village.

How many houses were set on fire?

Five of the villagers' houses [six houses] were set on fire.

⁵The 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 Kilo Htoo Baw Battalion and DKBA-5, and was led for many years by General Saw Lah Pwe aka Na Khan Mway who passed away 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/Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, southern Kayin 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.



The above photos were taken on February 5th 2016 in C--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. They show B--- villagers, who fled to live in their relatives' houses when the fighting broke out between the BGF and DKBA Na Ma Kya Group. The houses of these villagers were set alight after they fled from their village. [Photos: KHRG]

What about the other houses?

[The] other three houses were houses of soldiers' families.

Are you confident to go back to your village? Did anyone ask you to go back and live in your village after the incident?

People asked us to go back but we are not confident to go back because we are afraid.

Why are you afraid?

We are afraid the fighting [will break out again].

Who asked you to go back to live there [in your own village]?

The BGF.

So if you go back, will the DKBA allow you to live there?

That [is] why we are still afraid of them. They asked us to go back but we are not confident.

Have the DKBA told you to go back?

We never meet the DKBA, therefore we do not know whether they [would] allow us [to go back] or not. They [BGF] told us to go back but we do not dare because we do not know what will happen to us after we go back to our village. We want to go back and live in our own village but we do not know what will happen to us. We are not sure if something [could] happen [or if] they [DKBA or BGF] might lead us into trouble. We [doubt] the situation, that [is] why we are not confident enough to go back to live there.

How many households are there in your village?

In B--- village?

Yes.

Over [censored for security] households.

Only [censored for security] households?

[censored for security] households.

Were they all set on fire?

Not all of them were set on fire.

Only nine households were set alight?

Yes [six villagers and three DKBA families' houses].

What did you do with your livestock, such as cows, buffalos, and also your farm? Did you take some of them with you?

We did take some of them with us, but some of them [were] left [behind in the village] and the people ate them all.

Do you have buffalos?

Yes I do.

Do you also have cows?

Yes, I have cows. Some of my buffalos got injuries and lost a leg. We were not able to [treat] them and also not able to use them to work.

Did they step on landmines?

Yes.

Can you tell me when the incident happened?

The incident has been happening since July 2nd [2015], until the present time.

They [BGF and DKBA] were not satisfied with each other therefore [the fighting is ongoing] until February 5th [2016]?

Yes the fighting is still ongoing until the present time.

Is it February 5th 2016 today?

Yes.

Do you want to add more information that I have not questioned you [about]?

I cannot add more information, but we are facing food problems.

Are you currently facing food problems?

Yes, because we are not able to find food.

Are you living with a relative?

Yes, I currently live with my brother in D--- [village]. In the rainy season I went to plant paddies in the people's farms and get some food, but at the present time [summer season] there are no jobs to do.

Do you collect many [plenty of] rice in a year?

No, we are not collecting many [plenty of] rice because some people pay us in money. We get paid 300 baht (US \$ 8.67)⁶ per day.

I meant how many baskets⁷ of rice can you produce from your own farm?

We can produce 100 baskets of rice per year from my farm.

Thank you very much for the information that you shared with us. We are researchers and document human rights abuses. We are not going to do anything to make you hurt.

Thank you.

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

- "Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women's testimonies from southeast Myanmar," (August 2016)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkaik Township, August to October 2015," (July 2016)
- "Growing drug use and its consequences in Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts, between February and December 2015," (May 2016)
- "Dooplaya Photo Set: Road construction and expansion results in destruction of villagers' plantations in Kyonedoe and Kyainseikgyi townships, December 2014 to July 2015," (March 2016)
- "The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar" (February 2016)

⁶ All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the 26th August 2016 official market rate of 34.57 baht to US \$1.

⁷ A basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg or 46.08 lb of paddy, and 32 kg or 70.4 lb of milled rice. A basket is twice the volume of a big tin.

Dooطلا District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)