



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Interview

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## Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, February 2016

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*This Interview with Saw A--- describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, including clashes between armed groups, restrictions on freedom of movement and landmines.*

- *On February 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, fighting broke out between Border Guard Force (BGF) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). The fighting broke out in B--- village at around 1:00 PM.*
  - *During the fighting, BGF prohibited B--- villagers from fleeing from their village. They incorrectly assumed that the villagers had been in contact with DKBA and so they restricted their freedom of movement.*
  - *An unknown villager in B--- village stepped on a landmine which villagers believe had been planted by BGF before the fighting took place.*
  - *After the fighting there were unexploded mortars left in the village. The BGF asked village children to find them and told them that they would pay 2,000 kyat (US \$1.54) for each unexploded mortar found.*
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## Interview | Saw A---, (male, unknown age), 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 6<sup>th</sup> 2016 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received along with other information from Dooplaya District, including five other interviews and 41 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Buddhist

**Marital Status:** Married

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

**Occupation:** Farmer  
**Position:** Villager

**What is your name?**

My name is Saw<sup>3</sup> A---.

**What do you do?**

I work on a plain farm.

**What is your religion?**

Buddhist.

**Do you have your own family?**

Yes, I have my own family.

**How many children do you have?**

I have four children.

**You have four children?**

Yes, I have four children. There are six people in my family including my wife and myself.

**Can you tell me what you know about what happened last night?**

The people said that they [a villager] stepped on a landmine which had been planted by them [Border Guard Force (BGF)]<sup>4</sup>. They [BGF] planted it after they heard the people [Na Ma Kya under the control of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)]<sup>5</sup> would come back [to the

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<sup>3</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>4</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 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.

<sup>5</sup> The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was re-formed on January 16th 2016 as a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (2010 – present). During fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA Benevolent throughout 2015, there was internal disagreement within the DKBA Benevolent which resulted in a number of commanders being dismissed in July 2015. These former commanders then issued a statement in January 2016 declaring the formation of a new splinter group. This organisation has phrased the formation of this group as the revival of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army which was formed in 1994 until it was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the still-active DKBA Benevolent. The group is led by General Saw Kyaw Thet, Chief of Staff and General Saw Taing Shwe aka Bo Bi, Vice Chief of Staff. Other lower ranking commanders in the DKBA Buddhist splinter group are San Aung and late Kyaw Moh aka Na Ma Kya (reportedly killed on August 26th 2016). The group is currently based in Myaing Gyi Ngu area in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State. This DKBA Buddhist (2016 – present) should not be confused with the DKBA Benevolent (2010 – present) from which it broke away in January 2016, or with the original DKBA (1994 – 2010) which was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the DKBA

area]. We did not know anything [about DKBA coming to the area], we had only heard the gunfire but we did not see any group come here.

**Can you tell me the date of the incident in B--- village?**

Yes, the people said that at the present time the situation is not good and one person stepped on a landmine which had been planted by them [BGF].

**When did it happen?**

It happened last night at about 1:00 AM.

**Was it at 1:00 AM?**

Yes, at about 1:00 AM.

**Did it happen on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2016 at about 1:00 AM?**

Yes, it happened on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2016 at about 1:00 AM.

**How long was there gunfire for?**

It lasted for over 30 minutes.

**Have any livestock been injured in your village?**

I have not seen any livestock or villagers being injured in the village.

**Has the fighting damaged people's property, such as household items?**

Yes, it has damaged some people's property.

**Have any villagers been injured?**

No, none of the villagers have been injured.

**After the fighting, did they [BGF] permit you to stay here or not?**

They permitted us to live here. They told us, "if you flee from your village, we will set your houses on fire." Even though we did not flee, they still fired artillery at our village. Since they did not allow us to flee, they should not have opened fire on the village. They fired guns in the village but we did not see any group that they were [supposedly] fighting against.

**How many times [rounds of] artillery did they fire at the village?**

I think it was over 30 times [rounds].

**Did they all explode?**

Some of them exploded and some did not explode.

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Benevolent. Importantly, the DKBA Buddhist has not signed the preliminary or nationwide ceasefire with the Myanmar government whereas the DKBA Benevolent has signed both agreements.



The photo was received by a KHRG researcher on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2016 in B--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District and shows a mortar shell fired by BGF Battalion Deputy Commander Dee Kyaw Naw along with other 20 soldiers who launched 30 60mm rounds at B--- village and hit villagers' property. Some mortar shells did not explode therefore they asked the children to find them for them. They would pay 2,000 kyat [US \$1.54]<sup>6</sup> if the children could find any of the nine mortar shells but none of children are dare to find it for them. *[Photo: KHRG]*

### **Where did villagers flee to hide themselves?**

All of the villagers stayed in the village. We were not allowed to flee because they [BGF] threatened us that if we fled from the village, they would set our houses on fire. If they keep speaking to us like this in the future, we will not listen to them anymore because we only ever see them fire guns at the villagers. They do not fire against their enemy [the other armed groups].

### **What is BGF's purpose for fighting? Did they intend to scare the villagers?**

I think they did not fire the guns with the purpose of fighting against their enemy [the other armed groups]. I think they fired the guns in order to scare villagers because they might think that villagers are supporting DKBA. We do not want to support any armed groups, we just want to live simply as villagers.

### **Are you able to go to your land close to here?**

At the present time, we do not dare to go anywhere. Even when we burn the charcoal just outside of the village, they [BGF] do not allow us to go there.

### **What will they do if they see you outside of the village?**

If they see us outside of the village, they will kill us.

### **Do they not allow you to go outside of the village?**

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<sup>6</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016 official market rate of 1,301.50 kyat to US \$1.

No, they do not allow us to.

**Do they create any rules [for villagers] to follow? For example, no one is allowed to go out after 6:00 PM.**

They do not set up any rules but it [the situation] is very strict for us.

**How have they made it strict for you [the villagers]?**

We do not dare to go out of the village and they do not allow us to go out at night time. It restricts us [our freedom of movement].

**Did they open fire at night aimed at B--- village?**

Yes, the biggest difficulty for us is that they did not permit us to flee from the village but they still fired the guns at the village. Since they did not let us flee, they should not have fired the guns at the village. We only saw one group open fire. We did not see any other group. They asked us, "did you seen any other group?" We did not see any other group.

**Which group questioned you?**

BGF questioned us.

**Who was the leader of that group?**

Dee Kyaw Naw.

**Where is he from?**

He is from Tha Nay Moo village.

**What is his position?**

He is a battalion deputy commander.

**Do you know their battalion number?**

I do not know and I do not dare to ask.

**How many households are there in B--- village?**

There are over [censored for security] households in B--- village.

**What about C--- village?**

It will be around that many too. C--- village is located close to a school.

**Would you like to add anything else to give suggestions [to improve the situation]?**

Some Karen people say they [BGF] love their people but when they open fire, they only fire at the villagers. I do not think they love their people. The people who love their nation will never think in this way. The civilians and military are totally different. I think they only love themselves.

**Do you want to let us know anything about any of your family's problems?**

We face food problems. We are not allowed to collect vegetables even in our plain farm; we can only collect them in our garden [around our house]. We would not complain about anything if they just fought against their enemy [and not against villagers]. They open fire at the village and shout at villagers. As they are soldiers, they should fight against their enemy and not civilians. It is not how soldiers should behave. As we are villagers we do not know anything about them [BGF activities]. How can we know if they do not tell us whether they will come here or not? I want to talk openly.

**Is there anything else left to say?**

No, I only want to say this much.

**Thank you very much.**

Thank you.

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

- "Ongoing Militarisation in Southeast Myanmar," (October 2016)
- "Dooplaya Field Report: Military conflict, violent abuse, and destruction caused by development projects, January to December 2015, (October 2016)
- "Forced recruitment of a child soldier by KNLA in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District, October 2015, UPDATED," (October 2016)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, November 2015," (September 2016)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, February 2016," (August 2016)

## Dooplaya District



## Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)