



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Photo Set**

August 26, 2016 / KHRG #16-2-PS1

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**Toungoo Photo Set: Militarisation and land confiscation in Htantabin and Thandaunggyi townships, November 2013 to March 2015**

*This Photo Set shows militarisation and land confiscation by the Tatmadaw, military rotations, transportation of rations, road repairs for military use, and land confiscation for military camps in Htantabin and Thandaunggyi Townships, Toungoo District between November 2013 and March 2015.*

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**Photo Set | Htantabin and Thandaunggyi townships, Toungoo District (November 2013 to March 2015)**

*The following photos were taken by community members in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. They are presented below, censored where necessary for security purposes.<sup>1</sup> The 12 photos below were received along with other information from Toungoo District, including 968 other photos, 11 video clips, three general updates on the situation in Toungoo District, three incident reports and 28 interviews.<sup>2</sup>*

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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.

<sup>2</sup> This Photo Set was compiled by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Toungoo 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 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.



The two photos above were taken on November 29<sup>th</sup> 2013, in A--- village, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District. These two photos show Tatmadaw soldiers, based in B--- village, on their way to Koh Day military camp. On November 18<sup>th</sup> 2013, they sent soldiers and two diggers to Koh Day military camp. When one of the diggers slid off the road and was unable to get back up, the soldiers asked villagers for help and the villagers assisted in pulling up the digger. When the Tatmadaw soldiers arrived at A--- village, they met with Toungoo District's Operations Commander (G3) and discussed their travelling arrangements. [Photo: KHRG]



The above photos were taken on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2014, near Leik Tho Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. The photos show land that was confiscated by Light Infantry Battalion<sup>3</sup> #603. The sign set up on the land, seen in the photo on the left, shows that the land was claimed by the Tatmadaw on December 27<sup>th</sup> 2010. The land was previously inhabited by villagers. Since the sign was put up, claiming the land as military land, the villagers dare not work on their land and it has caused livelihood difficulties for many of them. The area is currently being used for a military camp. [Photo: KHRG]

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<sup>3</sup> A Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.



The top two photos were taken on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2015, in C--- village, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District. The photos show soldiers from Military Operations Command (MOC)<sup>4</sup> #5 during a rotation with MOC #20. These photos were taken as soldiers drove 20 trucks through the village on their way to the camp. The bottom two photos were taken on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, in C--- village, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District. They show Tatmadaw soldiers during a rotation transporting rations to their frontline camp near D--- village. The Tatmadaw soldiers belong to camps that are under the control of MOC #5. When they were transporting their rations, the KHRG community member noticed that they had arranged for roadside security and that there were a large number of military trucks, which led the community member to suspect that they might also have been transporting heavy weapons. At the same time, they also came to repair the road. [Photo: KHRG]

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<sup>4</sup> A Military Operations Command is composed of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.



The above two photos were taken on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, in Htantabin Township, Toungoo district, on the road that connects C---, E---, and B--- villages. These photos show government soldiers from the battalions under MOC #5 that are active in Toungoo District. The Tatmadaw soldiers were coming back after repairing the road in E--- village. The soldiers regularly use that road to transport rations and supplies. The photos were taken as they were coming back with a bulldozer and about 300 soldiers. *[Photo: KHRG]*



The two photos above, taken on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, show logging activities in F--- village and G--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, as reported by a local community member. General Ko Ko from the Tatmadaw's Southern Command Headquarters, confiscated land belonging to local civilians and land belonging to F--- village, H--- village, I--- village, in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo, on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2015 and gave it to the Thandaung Peace Group.<sup>5</sup> The group is led by U Saw Pel Goh Moh and U Saw Kwe Moo. The government [Burma/Myanmar military] confiscated 1,350 acres of the local peoples' land for the benefit of the Thandaung Peace Group's family members to work on for their livelihoods, and did not offer any compensation. They gave at least five acres to each Thandaung Peace Group soldier, and more to higher ranking officers. After receiving the lands, the Thandaung Peace Group soldiers did not work on the lands but sold them to wealthy individuals who, in turn, took more land than they had bought. The wealthy people took local people's land that was not confiscated, and cut down the trees to produce wood planks at the saw mill. When they were logging, they logged trees on the local people's land and even though the local people complained to the Thandaung Peace Group and another local group known as *Nyein Chan Yay A'pweh* (see footnote number 5), they did not solve the problem and shouted at the villagers and the villagers were not satisfied. [Photo: KHRG]

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<sup>5</sup> *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh*, or 'Thandaung Peace Group', is a local militia located in Toungoo District. The group split from the Karen National Union in 1997 and was initially led by Khe R'Mun. Reports from the field claim that they are currently led by General Bo Than Myin, have around 300 troops stationed at Leik Tho Base (Battalion Commander Bo Kyaw Win), in Leik Tho Township, and an additional 40 soldiers at Pya Sa Khan Base (Battalion Commander Khin Maung Lwin), near Thandaung Town. It has been reported that they control a number of different illicit operations, including gambling and black market car licencing. They are also allegedly employed as security personnel by local companies and wealthy individuals involved in logging and mineral resource extraction, in addition to having direct involvement in the lumber and mineral business. *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh* should not be confused with *Nyein Chan Yay A'pweh*, which is occasionally translated as Peace Group but refers to the Karen Peace Army (KPA), aka the Karen Peace Force (KPF). Nor should it be conflated with *Aye Chan Yay*, another small militia group also operating in Toungoo District that the Thandaung Peace Group has come into conflict with. It is also distinct from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council, which is also sometimes translated as 'Peace Group.'