



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

July 29, 2016 / KHRG #16-20-S1

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## **Doplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, August to October 2015**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Doplaya District between August and October 2015, including fighting, education and healthcare.*

- On August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, Tatmadaw soldiers, including Commanding General Tin Zaw Win, Captain Soe Min Oo, Major Kyi Soe Khaing, and Border Guard Force (BGF) Captain Saw Chit Thu patrolled and maintained security on the Asian Highway as their leaders went to meet with Thai leaders in Myawaddy Town.
  - There was a clash between the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) led by General Kyaw Thet and the BGF on the Asian Highway on August 29<sup>th</sup> 2015. General Kyaw Thet's soldiers opened fire with a grenade launcher on the BGF soldiers who were staying near the village in Kawkareik Township but the grenade did not explode.
  - The fighting has forced the villagers to flee and hide in the hills, which has caused them to experience livelihood problems. It is also difficult for the villagers who have fled to access education and healthcare as they are now hiding in the forest.
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## **Situation Update | Kawkareik Township, Doplaya District (August to October 2015)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in March 2016. It was written by a community member in Doplaya 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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Doplaya District, including one other situation update, one interview, 103 photographs and two video clips.<sup>2</sup>*

### **Introduction**

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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 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.

<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.

This report concerns the situation of the Tatmadaw, the BGF [Border Guard Force],<sup>3</sup> the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army],<sup>4</sup> civilians, and healthcare and education in Kawkaireik Township between August 1<sup>st</sup> and October 30<sup>th</sup> 2015.

### **Subject [Tatmadaw and BGF activity]**

The Tatmadaw were active in Klay village, Kawkaireik Township [during the period of this report]. The Tatmadaw patrolled many villages: Ta Der Hkoh village, Kway Ka Lay village and P'Nweh Poo Law Pa village. They then came back to the Klay village army camp. They patrolled on August 16<sup>th</sup> 2015. They are Light Infantry Battalion [LIB]<sup>5</sup> #3583<sup>6</sup> which is under [the control of] Military Operations Command [MOC]<sup>7</sup> #13 led by Thet Naing. Han Min Tun is the chief of their column. Yan Naing Soe is the [Klay village] army camp commander and the second in charge of the army camp is Aung Thu Hein. There are a total of 50 soldiers in Klay village army camp.

On August 26<sup>th</sup> 2015 at 4:40 pm, Commanding General Tin Zaw Win of Ya Ta Ka Southeast Command Headquarters in Mawlamyine [Moulmein]; Captain Soe Min Oo of MOC #12; G1 [personnel officer] Major Kyi Soe Khaing of MOC #12; and BGF Captain Saw Chit Thu started to patrol on the Asian Highway<sup>8</sup> in Kawkaireik with 22 trucks. They [the above leaders, not

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<sup>3</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>4</sup> The 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 Klo 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011 and then signed the [signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement \(NCA\)](#) on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. The group is based in Son Si Myaing area, Myawaddy/Kawkaireik 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.

<sup>5</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.

<sup>6</sup> The KHRG community member stated this as LIB #3583 even though KHRG understands there to only be three divisions (digits) of the LIB.

<sup>7</sup> Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

<sup>8</sup> The Asian Highway Network is a United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific-supported project that aims to link 32 countries in Asia across 141,000 kilometres of roadway. In Burma/Myanmar the project has involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see [“The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkaireik Town road construction threatens villagers’ livelihoods,”](#) KHRG, March 2015; [“With only our voices, what can we do?: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar,”](#) KHRG, June 2015; [“Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway,”](#) KHRG, October 2009; and [“Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State,”](#) KHRG, April 2007. In addition, fighting continues to occur between the Tatmadaw and the DKBA along the Highway, with the latest clash erupting in early July 2015, resulting in the Highway between Myawaddy and Kawkaireik shutting down for several days, [“DKBA, Tatmadaw fight over illegal highway tolls,”](#) *Myanmar Times*, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015.

including the BGF Captain], are from IB [Infantry Battalion]<sup>9</sup> #231 and IB #230. They came to position themselves on the Asian Highway to maintain security while their leaders went to meet with Thai [government and military] leaders in Myawaddy Town.

### **[Clash between DKBA and BGF]**

On August 29<sup>th</sup> 2015, when the clash happened between the DKBA led by General Kyaw Thet and the BGF on the road [Asian Highway], their [DKBA] followers were separated [from the rest of the DKBA group] on the hill. The villagers also had to flee to hide themselves on the hill [forest]. They [the villagers] also did not bring enough food but no one [none of the villagers] got injured [from the fighting]. General Kyaw Thet opened fire on the BGF soldiers who stayed near the village with four M79s [grenade launchers] and two M16s. Fortunately, the M79s [grenades] did not explode. If they had exploded, they would have injured the villagers.

### **[Effects on villagers' livelihoods, education and healthcare]**

When the civilians were fleeing [from this clash], some of the villagers were not able to work for their livelihoods. They also did not have money to use [to support themselves]; therefore it [the fighting] affects the villagers' rights. Regarding education and healthcare, it is not very good [for the villagers]. When the villagers fled to the forest, this affected their [access to] healthcare and education.

### **Conclusion**

This is about the situation of the Tatmadaw, BGF, DKBA, healthcare and education in Kawkaik Township, as mentioned above.

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

- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi and Kawkaik townships, August to October 2014," (July 2016)
- "Dooplaya Incident Report: Killing in Kyainseikgyi Township, March 2015," (May 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)

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<sup>9</sup> An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

## Dooplaya District



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