



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Doplaya Situation Update: Win Yin Township, January 2016 to March 2016

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Win Yin Township, Doplaya District during the period between January and March 2016, including activities by the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), education, community livelihoods, business and religion.

- *KNLA soldiers threatened the local villagers in Win Yin Township. Therefore, the villagers were concerned for their security.*
- *The environment and water in A'Nan Kwein village, A'Nan Kwein village tract, Win Yin Township has been polluted due to the removal of stone and sand by machines. The removal of stone and sand was done by the local KNLA checkpoint officer and additional business people.*
- *For the last two years the local villagers have requested that the Kyainseikgyi Township Education Officer (Burma/Myanmar government) legally registers their school in Win Htaung village, Qu San village tract, Win Yin Township. However, nothing has changed.*

Situation Update | Win Yin Township, Doplaya District (January 2016 to March 2016)

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.¹ This report was received along with other information from Doplaya District, including three Incident Reports, four Interviews, 221 photographs and four video clips.²

Introduction

This Situation Update describes events that happened in Win Yin [Win Yay/Waw Raw] Township, Doplaya District during the period between January 2016 and March 2016, including Tatmadaw, KNLA, education, community activities, Tatmadaw and KNLA situation, business and religion.

The situation between the villagers and the Tatmadaw

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 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 year, 2016, the situation between villagers and the Tatmadaw is different compared to 2013, 2014 and 2015. The Tatmadaw had been stopping their activities [militarisation] for a long time, but 15 or 20 Tatmadaw soldiers, with full soldier's uniform, became active in villages, and consequently the villagers were very concerned because of them. On February 22nd 2016, 15 Tatmadaw soldiers led by Captain Nay Myo Lwein came to sleep in O--- village, Win Yin Township for one night. The next day, on February 23rd 2016, they arrived at K--- village. Then they [Tatmadaw] asked the village head a few questions about the number of people and houses in the village. They said they had been asked to do the questioning by the Operations Commander, Aung Kyaw Tat from [Tatmadaw] Strategic Operations Command #1. The villagers questioned whether there was peace and they wondered whether the fighting [civil war] would continue.

However, the Tatmadaw troops tried to help the people by building a pagoda and constructing a monastery. Mostly, the Tatmadaw soldiers stayed in the area of the monastery so it is a problem for the villagers [as they do not feel safe]. However, the villagers do not dare to say anything if an armed group arrives in their village, apart from just agreeing to whatever they ask for, because the villagers are concerned about instability in their village.

The situation between the villagers and the KNLA

The relationship between the KNLA and the villagers is challenging; the villagers' trust in the KNLA is decreasing. For example, on February 23rd 2016 one of the villagers in S--- village told me that a KNLA officer had beaten the village head in April 2015. According to the villager, *"The villagers are afraid of the KNLA soldiers because they [KNLA] have their guns. No one would try and be nice to the KNLA soldiers if they [KNLA] did not hold guns in their hands"*.

After the ceasefire [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)]³ there is still conflict [tension] between the villagers and the KNLA. Therefore, the villagers ask, *"Are they [KNLA soldiers] giving the Karen people's history a bad name?"* However, they [villagers] do not dare to speak to the KNLA about this. According to the villagers, *"The armed group [KNLA] who used to help people, now they torture the people. Why? Do not give trouble to us if you [KNLA] cannot help us"*.

Moreover, some village heads and some village tract leaders cooperated with the ethnic armed group [KNLA] and they intimidated the villagers in complex ways. It is because, for example, one checkpoint officer from the KNLA and a businessman [Kyaw Thel Htoo] from a town worked together to remove sand and stones from the ground in A'Nan Kwein village. The villagers did not dare to talk about anything regarding the removal of stones and sands. However, the villagers had to buy sands and stones from their area, which had been removed by the businessman and the KNLA checkpoint officer, when they [villagers] needed it. Now the environment has been damaged by the removal of very large amounts of sand and stone.

³ 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, 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.

The KNLA said they signed the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire agreement⁴ for the people; since 2013 there has been a change as the situation has improved. The people now can travel freely on the Asian Highway, but many villagers' lands and plantations were destroyed because of this road.⁵ The villagers who lost their lands and plantations wanted to do something [about this land loss] but the KNLA told them to just watch the situation. According to a KNLA Officer from Battalion #16 and the Township Governor, Tee Dar Maung Shwe, the people will only receive compensation or land if the Asian Highway is constructed to about 100 feet wide. The villagers asked the KNLA headquarter office regarding its administration rules, *"Before the ceasefire agreement was signed, did they [KNLA] say that this place is a road area or did they say that this place is a forest area?"*

Also, Bo Mu⁶ Tin Hlaing [KNLA Former Battalion Commander] had said that each tree or bamboo was valuable so that everything should be recorded [on official documents]. The villagers want to know, *"Where did all of his words [documents] go? Did they [KNLA] delete all of these records? After the ceasefire, the people were afraid of the KNLA. Should things be like this? Why do the KNLA soldiers hold guns? It is because they love their people? Or do they try to help their people [villagers]? Or do they prepare for fighting?"* The villagers were thinking these things. That is why they raised a lot of questions.



These photos were taken on February 25th 2016 by a community member in Win Yin Township, Dooplaya District. It shows that there is a place in A'nan Kwin village, A'nan Kwin village tract, Win Yin Township, where one businessman, Kyaw Thel Htoo, has been removing sand from the stream. People do not know what company he works for. However, the villagers did not agree [give consent] that the businessman could remove sand from this area. At the present time, he has stopped removing sand from the stream. Actually, it is Mee Ya Htaw stream nearby A'nan Kwin village. The water from that stream has become dirty and irritates people's skin when they touch the water. One of A'nan Kwin villagers, Saw A---, told me about this. [Photos: KHRG]

⁴ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage](#) on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors began in Yangon, see ["Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations," Karen National Union Headquarters](#), March 18th 2015. Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see ["KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders' Summit," Karen News](#), April 22nd 2015.

⁵ For a detailed report on the consequences of the Asian Highway, see ["Beautiful Words, Ugly Actions: The Asian Highway in Karen State, Burma," KHRG, THWEE, KESAN](#), August 2016.

⁶ *Bo Mue* translates as 'major,' referring to the rank of a Tatmadaw officer.

Education

The education situation of the local people has dramatically improved because it is vital to get a good education for their future to be bright. However, there are many places that Karen people are still not able to teach the Karen language. Also, only the local schools beside a main road are able to obtain support and aid from the local Burma/Myanmar government, because top government officials and foreigners could see [visit] those schools if they travelled on the main road. This school [pictured] is located in the middle of a village and also the number of the students in this school is more than other schools. However, no one comes to help and support this school. For two years, the villagers have requested that the Kyainseikgyi Township Education Officer legally registers this school, but nothing has changed. This school is situated in Win Htaung village, Qu San village tract, Win Yin Township, Doooplaya District.

During the rainy season, the students have to go to the school in Par Pya village. The distance between Win Htaung village and Par Pya village is one mile and four furlongs.⁷ It is difficult for the students to go to the school. According to a local Burma/Myanmar government teacher in Win Htaung village, *“If the KNU [Karen National Union] and the Burma/Myanmar government cooperate to work together to promote education for the sake of all ethnic people, then they will be well-educated. Moreover, they will become good citizens and they will be able to build a well-disciplined and developed country [in Burma/Myanmar].”* This was based on a consultation meeting about education with people from five different village tracts. During the period of January 1st 2016 to March 6th 2016, I went to meet with some female teachers and school committee members.



These photos were taken on February 23rd 2016 by a community member in Win Yin Township, Doooplaya District. It shows that there is a nursery school in Win Htaung village, Qu San village tract, Win Yin Township, Doooplaya District. This school is small but there are a lot of students. In the rainy season, it is difficult to teach in the school. There are [censored for security] houses in Win Htaung village and [censored for security] people live there. There are [censored for security] men and [censored for security] women. There are about 100 female students and 100 male students in the nursery school [from Standard 1 to Standard 4]. There are not enough classrooms, so the villagers built a temporary small school at the back. There are no chairs or tables in this temporary school, thus, students have to sit down on the floor when they study. The headmistress of this school in Win Htuang village is Daw U---. There are also Burma/Myanmar government female teachers. The school headmistress has already requested a new school building from [the Burma/Myanmar government] Kyainseikgyi Township Education Office two years ago, but there has been no reply. For the schools located beside a main road it is very easy for them to get support from the Burma/Myanmar government. For the schools far away from the main road it is not easy to get funding from the Burma/Myanmar government. [Photos: KHRG]

⁷ A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.2 km or 0.125 miles.

Healthcare

Regarding the situation of people's healthcare, malaria is much less common now. Since 2013, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have started to treat malaria in villages. As a result, the situation has changed a lot since March 2016, according to the local people. It is important to have good health because we [local people] are only able to work if we are healthy. Yet, the people did not understand why their blood was taken. The villagers said that those who drew their blood were probably from the KNU-side but no one knew exactly. One of the villagers also said that the people suffered severely from dysentery because they breathed in dusty air on the road and ate unclean foods from places beside the road.

Social situation

The social situation in Win Yin Township, Dooplaya District, has changed a lot between January 1st 2016 and March 6th 2016, compared with the period before the ceasefire [NCA] from 2012 to 2015. Currently, many outside organisations such as community based organisations [CBOs], the Karen Women's Empowerment Group [KWEG], the Karen Youth Organisation [KYO], Co-operative Credit Society and volunteer working groups, have come to the rural area. Besides, the rural people are aware of human rights abuses so they know how to defend themselves if their rights are taken away.

However, the villagers told a KHRG field researcher that they are trying to prepare themselves as much as they can. According to the local villagers, *"We have been blind because we were not educated, so we lived in fear. That is why we must get rid of our fear, in order to be able to protect ourselves from forced labour."* They try to eradicate their fear slowly, but they ask whether the situation would improve or the fighting would break out again. Now the local villagers do not follow the rules because they do not know exactly what the rules are. Therefore, *"The KNU should lead the people and raise awareness of the rules,"* said the village secretary.

The situation of the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]

The situation in Win Yin Township, Dooplaya District, regarding the activities of the Tatmadaw and the KNLA, is good. There is no problem with militarisation but the people still feel shocked [traumatised] and frightened. After the NCA was signed Tatmadaw troops did not demand that people work as porters, but they still asked the village head for other types of help. On January 17th 2016 D--- village tract leader said that they [Tatmadaw] demanded four tractors from each village in D--- village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. This action was not agreed in the NCA and the KNLA have not asked for anything from the villagers. The local villagers are afraid because Tatmadaw soldiers are active in the village. The Tatmadaw still rotate their troops from place to place. There is no stability. Also, they [Tatmadaw troops] are still based in some religious compounds or monasteries.

Besides, the KNLA organisations do not have a good relationship with the local people. They just harass the people. They [KNLA] shout to threaten the people. For example, they say, *"I can kill you if I want to"*. These activities showed that they [KNLA soldiers] are not respectful. On the other hand, the Tatmadaw soldiers said they had to wait for orders from their leaders but the villagers complained that they [Tatmadaw] also harassed the local people without a given order. At the present time, the local people do not know whose father or mother they should call [i.e. local people do not know which organisation they should rely on because both the KNLA and the Tatmadaw are not good to them].⁸ When we need help from the KNLA we are harassed and abused, but the Tatmadaw try to help us instead. This is a sign that Karen people could disappear in the future.

⁸ Because the KNU has been active for many decades in southeast Burma/Myanmar, it is common for Karen people to refer to it as the "mother organisation," but this does not specifically indicate an affiliation with the KNU on behalf of the speaker.

Therefore, the people have no reason to be afraid of the Tatmadaw soldiers but they are afraid of the KNLA soldiers. I do not know whether the Tatmadaw wants to challenge the KNLA or not. On January 16th 2015 the Tatmadaw leader Myo Min, who is in charge of Southeast Command Headquarters (Ya Ta Ka), demanded that KNLA soldiers close their gate [checkpoint] in the Lwut Shan area. Also, KNLA soldiers have been asked to take the Karen national flag down. A'nan Kwin Operations Commander, Aung That Kyaw, sent a telegraph message to KNLA soldiers at the gate in Lwut Shan. They [KNLA and Tatmadaw] have had many disagreements but now there is less conflict. In the end the people were scared. They [people] did not dare to do anything; therefore, nothing in the rural area will improve for the people.

At the present time, the local people live in bamboo houses. They have nothing, but most of the KNLA leaders live in expensive houses and have motorbikes and cars. In addition, some of the KNLA soldiers from the checkpoints kept lots of plots of land for themselves. Then they sold those plots of land when the land price increased, but the local villagers were not allowed to sell their land. The people had a problem with their land. If the land that belonged to the KNLA was destroyed, they [KNLA] would cause problems for the people, but no one cares if the people's land is confiscated. Therefore, the people asked whether this will maintain the ceasefire in the long term. The lives of the local people are like, "breathing makes us dizzy, eating makes us crazy" [i.e. even breathing or eating cause's problems and worry for the villagers]. The local villagers want to know whether the KNU headquarters know about people's suffering, as they want the KNU headquarters to help them.

Business situation

There is a difference between 2013-2015 and 2016, regarding the situation of the local people's businesses and livelihoods in Win Yin Township, Doooplaya District. In 2016 the local people could earn a living by selling their products freely, such as coconuts, black pepper and tea leaves, and some people were able to work in bridge construction. In some villages, they tried to find money for their village during the rainy season. Then they built a village office and they bought a car to make travel easier for the village. The people who fundraise for the benefit of the village receive 5,000 kyat [US \$3.75]⁹ per day. It can also support their livelihoods in a different way. Some people are struggling to earn their livings, although they are poor. The villagers from Kwein K'Saw Kyi village still do not get money from a private business company for stone, because they [company] took the stone [for road construction] from the villagers' river but the villagers from the other villages had already received a stone fee. That is why KHRG field researchers asked permission from Si Thu Tun, who is in charge of road construction, for an interview, but he refused to meet our researchers. It is obvious that nothing is improving for the local villagers.

According to one of the village tract leaders only businessmen are getting richer and richer, but for the local villagers who live in Than Phyu Zayat Town and Ba Yar Thone Hsu [three pagodas pass] area the benefit they get is only dusty air to breathe. They [villagers] get nothing. If the villagers had one leader who was willing to lead a road construction project for them they would not give up. However, the local villagers are afraid of the local KNLA battalion because they [local KNLA] arrest them and scold them if the villagers try to change something. That is why the villagers do not dare to do anything regarding road construction. In other working areas the villagers are allowed to work because the KNLA thinks it is good for them.

Religion

In 2016 there are some problems in Win Yin Township, Doooplaya District regarding religion, because people do not have freedom of religion and freedom of expression. There is tension between the Christian community and the Buddhist community. KNU headquarters should know

⁹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 14th December 2016 official market rate of 1331 kyat to US \$1.

about this issue. In the past Karen people were divided because of religion. Some pastors said that they do not want it to happen again after the ceasefire. People should have freedom of religion. The Township Administrator, the District Administrator and KNU leaders from the KNU headquarters must be aware of this religious issue. People want KHRG to report their views on behalf of them.

KHRG field researcher's opinion

During the period from January 1st 2016 to March 6th 2016 we have seen that the Tatmadaw activities are increasing in Win Yin Township, Dooplaya District, if compared to the previous years. I do not know exactly the purpose of their [Tatmadaw] activities. According to the local residents, they [Tatmadaw] tried to convince people to support them. They stayed in the monastery. They also relocated their army troops. On February 24th 2016 I saw Tatmadaw troops come to the village in five military trucks and two ordinary cars. The way they are active is a bit risky for the local villagers, but it could also keep the villagers safe, because the KNLA soldiers hide among the villages like a hunter. It is very dangerous for the people.

Besides, women and children do not feel secure. Many issues such as sexual rape, human trafficking and intimidation are rising. When the Tatmadaw are active in the village and the villagers do not have any problem. Also, people start to drive their motorbikes carefully [in accordance with the rule] at night. Besides, KNLA soldiers are patrolling and walking around the village but the villagers do not have any issue with it. Currently, they [KNLA] just stay on the main road and sometimes they just go to their office. There is not any particular activity regarding militarisation. KNLA police officers are careless in doing their jobs. The villagers want to rely on the KNLA but now the villagers look down on the KNLA instead. Local KNLA soldiers just want to bully the villagers, even though they are also Karen ethnicity.

Regarding livelihood, people are free to participate in business, but it does not improve a lot because of their lack of experience in business [trade]. There has been an improvement in education but not every subject is allowed to be taught in the school. The social situation is not very good because people do not get on very well together. Besides, freedom of religion is very limited. These things are happening due to a poor relationship between the local villagers and the KNU, because they followed the law of the Burma/Myanmar government. For example, the former Township Department Organising Officer, A'Dee, called five villagers to join him and they went to measure Win Ka Na road in Pan Aung village, A'nan Kwin Township. It concerned the villagers a lot because they worried that their lands would be confiscated. K---, who is in charge of a Mon-Karen checkpoint, talked about these things. People want the local KNLA organisations to come and handle the situation. When the villagers begin to learn how to work they [KNLA] should be together with the villagers. If no one is with the villagers, then the villagers will not be able to do anything. In conclusion, I would like to say that the local KNLA authorities should work together with the villagers, in order to support them.

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

- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkaik Township, June 2015 to August 2016' (December 2016)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw B---, March 2015," (November 2016)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, February 2016" (November 2016)
- "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)

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)