



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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**Trespassing villagers' houses destroyed and burnt down
in Kyaikto Township, Thaton District, February 2016**

This News Bulletin describes how a total of 650 houses and huts were destroyed and burnt down by the local village authority in Kyaikto Township, Thaton District in January and February 2016. A group led by Pe Thi, a hundred household leader of Wa Da Kwin village, attacked the villagers who had built houses in A--- place, an area which Wa Da Kwin village is expanding into. The attacks took place on January 29th and February 1st 2016. The group, which was armed with knives, iron rods, slingshots, and bamboo sticks, destroyed houses and set them ablaze, and also attacked the people staying there. According to witnesses at the scene, one woman died and several people were injured during the attack, and most of the villagers' belongings were destroyed in the fire. Despite attempts to notify the police and Tatmadaw of the attack, the authorities were reluctant to protect the villagers. When they eventually did respond, it was too late: the attack was over and the assailants had left the scene.¹

On February 4th 2016, a KHRG community member met with and interviewed villagers from A---, a newly developed area that Wa Da Kwin village is expanding into, in Moh Hk'Maw village tract, Kyaikto Township, Thaton District. The villagers had had their houses destroyed and burnt down by a group led by Pe Thi, a hundred household leader of Wa Da Kwin village, at two separate occasions, January 29th and February 1st 2016. The villagers reported that a total of 650 houses had been destroyed and burnt down.²

Background

In late 2015 and early January 2016, villagers from different places came to settle and build houses in A---. According to these villagers, they came to settle there because they did not have

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Thaton District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It summarises information from one short update and 13 interviews received by KHRG in February 2016. 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.

² This incident was also reported by the local media sources in Burmese languages on [RFA \(Radio Free Asia\)](#), February 3rd 2016, and [KIC \(Karen Information Centre\)](#), February 8th 2016.

anywhere else to live. According to a 48-year-old H--- villager, Ma C---, who came to settle in A---, nothing was built on the land in September 2015. That month, Pe Thi, a hundred household leader³ of Wa Da Kwin village, and his associate, Nga Myo, met with people in H--- village. Pe Thi persuaded villagers to go and have a look at A--- place. Once there, the villagers were asked if they wanted to invest in A---. They were told they would get two to two and a half million kyats (US \$1,697.54 - \$2,121.93) in profit per year if they invested 500,000 (US \$424.39) or 600,000 kyats (US \$509.26).⁴ As most of the villagers present were fishermen and poor they could not afford to invest 500,000 or 600,000 kyats and they returned home without having made any investments.

In early January 2016, they heard that the plots Nga Nyo had showed them earlier were now available for free. Consequently, many villagers went to the monastery near A--- and started measuring and drawing up plots on the land. People were reportedly grabbing lands on their own in an unorganised manner.

The incidents

Villagers from A--- reported that prior to the incident, at 8:00 am on January 19th 2016, Naing Lin, also known as Htun Zaw Oo, came to A--- along with two Wa Da Kwin villagers: U Win Aung and Saya Than Htein. Naing Lin was dressed in military uniform and had three chevrons on the shoulder of his uniform. He introduced himself as Bo Naing Lin from KNLA Brigade #1 and said that he was there on orders by Bo Htein Kyaw from Brigade #1.⁵ He asked villagers about the leaders in the village and threatened the villagers to bring their village leaders back to his base. When villagers asked him what issue he had with the villagers, he said that some villagers from A--- had broken three stone poles, and he threatened to burn down the entire settlement. He told villagers: *“If you dismantle your houses [by] yourselves peacefully, I can guarantee for you but if you do not dismantle it peacefully, I cannot help you and guarantee for you. [...] I’m in charge of this case and any other groups cannot do anything without my acknowledgement. I was given full responsibility. Other groups cannot disturb me.”*

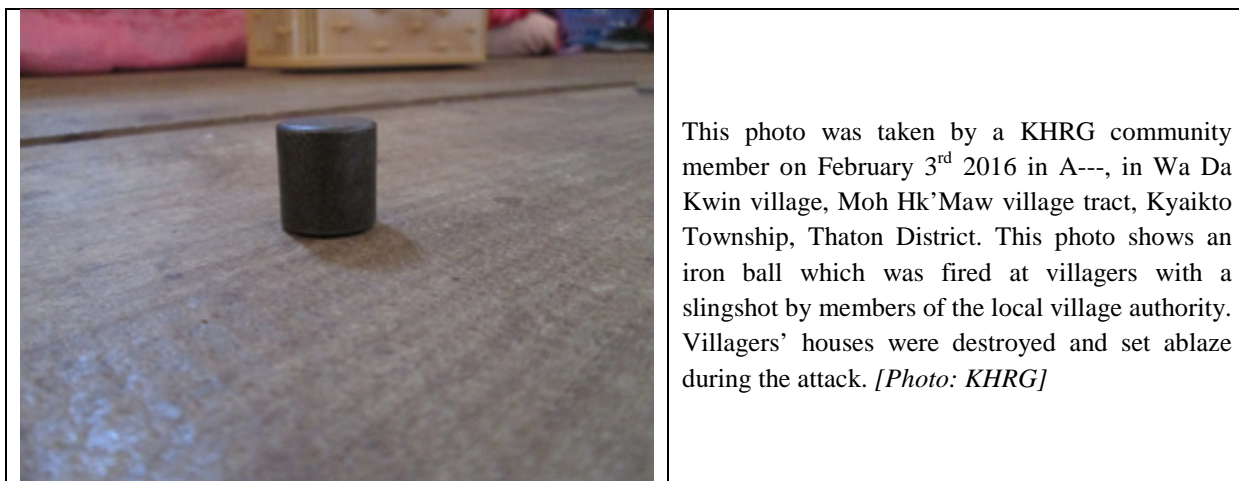
At about 9:00 pm or 10:00 pm on January 29th 2016, a group of people led by Pe Thi and Nga Myo arrived at A---, armed with slingshots. They shot at and beat people and asked people who were inside their houses to come out and they apprehended them and beat them.

³ In larger villages located near towns in Burma/Myanmar, one leader is elected per one hundred households to take responsibility for them.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 15th 2016 official market rate of 1,178.18 kyats to US \$1.

⁵ KHRG followed up with the local community member and learned that Naing Lin is a member of KNU-KNLA PC aka Karen Peace Council.

One villager named Maung G--- was attacked while he was outside his house. The attackers asked if there was anyone inside the house and he replied: *"I'm right here."* They shot at him with slingshots and hit his forehead. At that time he said: *"Don't do like that"* and he covered his injured eye with his hand but they continued to shoot at him and hit his left hand.



Another villager named U D---, was seized by a group of people then punched and beaten until he was unconscious. They thought that he was dead so they left him on the ground. He was hospitalised that night.

A male A--- villager retold what happened to him:

"They came to my house and I stepped out in front of my yard because I was worried that a student girl who was sleeping [in my house] would wake up and get scared of the situation. They shouted: 'Is there anyone inside the house?' I replied 'yes' and they said: 'We don't care if people are inside [the house].' Then they kicked me in the chest and I fell down. They punched me one [time] in each side, and they kicked me twice in the back. Then they told me: *'You cannot live here anymore. You have to leave immediately.'* I told them that I have nowhere else to go and I begged them to let me stay one more night, and they did not do anything else to me."

According to that male A--- villager, the invaders dragged a woman who ran a shop beside his house, and her three children from their beds and ordered them out of the shop. Then, they destroyed the shop and took various food items, and ordered the woman and her children to leave the place immediately. The woman's husband was not at home that night and she and her children did not have a place to move to, so they stayed the night at the old Wa Da Kwin monastery.

Maung K---, a witness to the attack in A---, repeated what Pe Thi and Nga Myo had told their people prior to the incident: *"If you still see people from this section [area] in the morning, do not*

keep any of them alive at night.... do not keep any of them in this section. This section does not belong to them. This section belongs to Wa Da Kwin village."

Villagers noted that every time they came they threatened villagers with these words.

A female villager stated that, *"We requested them [Wa Da Kwin villagers] to meet with any leaders from the government office. In this open [official] situation, charge us if we were wrong but [give] notice [to] us. If it is true that they own the land and we trespassed on their land, they should have done it [asking the A--- residents to leave] in the meaningful [right] way. Right now, they did a meaningless thing and they did it at night time, so are they rebels or robbers?"*



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on January 30th 2016, in the A---, Wa Da Kwin village, Moh Hk'Maw village tract, Kyaikto Township, Thaton District. The photos show villagers' houses that were destroyed by members of the local village authority. [Photos: KHRG]

On February 1st 2016 at 8:20 pm, a group of people with one full truck and 13 motorbikes, all wearing military uniforms, came and burnt down the villagers' houses. According to villagers, the attackers took a break for a while, then they started burning the houses again at 2 am and they finished burning all the houses at 4 am, February 2nd 2016. They burned 650 houses in total and there were 350 of these houses where the owners and their family members were there [when the incident happened]. For other houses, the owners were not there because their children are studying in town so they have not moved to the place [A---] yet. They just came and built the houses first. The invaders went back to Zi Pyaung road. When they came, they brought iron rods, sharp bamboo sticks, long blade knives and slingshots.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on February 3rd and 4th 2016, in A---, Wa Da Kwin village, Moh Hk'Maw village tract, Kyaikto Township, Thaton District. The photos show villagers houses that were destroyed and burnt down by members of the local village authority on February 1st 2016. [Photos:

While the incident happened, villagers contacted and requested help from both local Tatmadaw and Burma/Myanmar government police but they said that they cannot help with the case. Villagers reported: *"We phoned the Tatmadaw last night, and they replied: 'We don't have authority to do anything and we cannot go.' We phoned the police and they also replied: 'We cannot go.'"*

However, after a group of women from A--- went to the Tatmadaw army camp at Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #207 and begged them to help these villagers whose houses were burning down, around 20 Tatmadaw soldiers went to the incident place. At that time all the attackers had already left.

According to villagers from A---, they ran with their children to a nearby forest to escape the attack and left all their belongings behind. They noted that three male villagers sustained serious injuries during the first attack and many sustained minor injuries. One elderly woman died while she was running and one man was hospitalised at Bago Hospital after he was beaten. Almost all villagers' properties were set on fire, while some items were stolen, and some villagers' money was confiscated by the assailants.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on February 2nd 2016 in A--- place, Wa Da Kwin village, Moh Hk'Maw village tract, Kyaikto Township, Thaton District. The photo on the left shows female villagers from A--- and their children sleeping under a tree after their houses were burnt down. The photo on the right shows villagers' properties that survived the fire. [Photos: KHRG]

On the next day, February 2nd 2016, after the villagers' houses had been burnt down, villagers brought the case to the Burma/Myanmar government police station in Their Zayat Town, and the police officer at Their Zayat Police Station submitted the case to Kyaikto Police Station in Kyaikto Town. They made an appointment to meet on February 16th 2016, however, when KHRG followed up with a community member in May 2016, that meeting never took place and

many villagers were still at the local monastery. KHRG has not received further information on how the case is being handled by the Burma/Myanmar police.

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

- “Thaton Situation Update: Thaton Township, July to October 2015,” (April 2016)
- “Thaton Situation Update: Bilin Township, October 2015,” (February 2016)
- The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar, (February 2016)
- “Thaton Photo Set: Land Confiscation in Thaton Township, January – October 2015,” (February 2016)
- “Thaton Short Update: Hpa-an Township, October 2014,” (February 2016)

Doo Tha Htoo (Karen)



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