



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

September 16, 2016 / KHRG #16-58-S1

Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe and Paingkyon townships, March to May 2016

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Hlaingbwe and Paingkyon townships, Hpa-an District between March and May 2016, including the building of stupas, road construction, taxation and healthcare.

- *In April 2016 Sayadaw U Thuzana instructed his followers to build stupas in A--- village, Kwee Lay village tract, Hlaingbwe Township. Some stupas were built in villagers' house compounds and one was built in an Anglican church compound.*
 - *In March 2016 a Border Guard Force (BGF) Commander and a Karen Peace Council (KPC) Commander joined hands with the Steel Stone Company to construct a road at the bottom of K'Lee Ma Mountain close to the KPC headquarters in Naw T'Yet New Town, Nabu Township. This road construction project was permitted by the Karen National Union (KNU) Hpa-an District administrators.*
 - *The KNU, the KPC, the BGF and the Tatmadaw collect taxes every year in Hpa-an District.*
 - *In 2015 the KNU built three hospitals in Paingkyon Township. The Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW), Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU), Emergency Obstetric Care (EmOC), community health workers (CHWs) and Maternal Child Health (MCH) are working together in these hospitals.*
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Situation Update | Hlaingbwe and Paingkyon townships, Hpa-an District (March to May 2016)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in May 2016. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an 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 Hpa-an District, including two incident reports, and 185 photographs.²

Introduction

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 information was documented from March 1st to May 19th 2016 in Ta Kreh [Paingkyon] Township, Hpa-an District, and covers road construction, a rubber plantation that was set on fire, pagoda [stupa] building, education, healthcare, logging, gambling, taxation, recruitment [of soldiers] and armed actor activities.

Rubber plantation was set on fire

This incident occurred on April 13th 2016 beside B--- village, Noh Hkwee village tract, Ta Kreh Township. The BGF [Border Guard Force]³ Company Commander Dee Ter Ler,⁴ also known as Bo Kyaw Hein and who is 50 years old, accused a villager because his rubber plantation was set on fire.⁵

Building stupas

Monk Myaing Gyi Ngu [Sayadaw U Thuzana]⁶ built [several] stupas in A--- village, Kwee Lay village tract, Lu Pleh [Hlaingbwe] Township. This incident occurred in April 2016. The stupas were built by Sayadaw U Thuzana in A--- village, Kwee Lay village tract, Lu Pleh Township, Hpa-an District. The stupas were built from one side of the village to the other. Some of them were built on villagers' land and [another one] was built in an Anglican church compound. He built a stupa in the western part of the church [compound]. He built the stupas eight cubits⁷ high and five cubits wide. The distance between each of them is 20 arm spans.⁸ He built them in front of people's houses and another one at the end of the bridge.

No one dares to talk about this issue and the people who helped him to build [the stupas] are [villagers] from C---, D---, E--- and F--- villages and some of the villagers from A--- village. I also consulted with some of the villagers there and they told me that some people [his followers from the above villages] strongly believe in the monk [as a religious leader]. Some people said that they are not real stupas; they are only conflict stupas [built to provoke conflict].

³ 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.

⁴ KHRG has received previous reports involving human rights violations by Border Guard Force (BGF) Company Commander Kyaw Hein, also known as Dee Ter Ler, including land confiscation in Paingkyon Township. See, "[Hpa-an Incident Report: Land confiscation in Paingkyon Township, May 2015](#)," KHRG, August 2015.

⁵ For more information about this incident, see "[Hpa-an Incident Report: Villager accused of burning BGF rubber plantation in Paingkyon Township, April 2016](#)," KHRG, August 2016.

⁶ U Thuzana is an influential ethnic Karen Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see "[Inside the DKBA](#)," KHRG, March 1996. In 1995, KHRG reported that U Thuzana had collaborated with the Tatmadaw, and met with then-Southeastern Commander Major General Maung Hla to obtain weapons and supplies for 4,000 soldiers in his monastery. As a result of the agreement, U Thuzana's headquarters and main monastery in Myaing Gyi Ngu, in northern Hpa-an District, reportedly developed a reputation as a mystical safe haven for villagers avoiding Tatmadaw abuses. See "[Karen Human Rights Group commentary](#)," KHRG, February 1995. More recently monk U Thuzana has been implicated in forced labour demands and of stoking religious conflict by confiscating land to build Buddhist stupas. See "[Hpapun Field Report, January to December 2013](#)," March 2016, and "[Myanmar Religious Officials Decry Buddhist Monk's Pagoda-Building Spree](#)," Radio Free Asia, May 2016.

⁷ A cubit is a standard measurement for the length of bamboo poles, commonly referred to in Karen as the length from one's fingertips to one's elbow, about 45.7 centimetres or 18 inches.

⁸ An arm span is a unit of measurement equivalent to six footsteps (kaw yaw), 6 feet, 2 yards or 1.8 metres.



The above photos were taken on May 15th 2015 in A--- village, Kwee Lay village tract, Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District. The pictures show the stupas built by Sayadaw U Thuzana in villagers' house compounds and in an Anglican church compound. [Photos: KHRG]

Logging [road construction]

In March 2016, BGF Cantonment Area #2 Commander Saw⁹ Kya Aye,¹⁰ who is 52 years old, and the KPC [Karen Peace Council]¹¹ Operations Commander Maung¹² Shway Kyaw, who is 47 years old, gathered together to cooperate with Steel Stone Company in order to construct a road at the bottom of K'Lee Ma Mountain which is situated close to KPC headquarters in Naw T'Yeh New Town, T'Nay Hsah [Nabu] Township. It passed through Ta Kreh Township at the bottom of the west side of Ta Naw Mountain and it passed through Pee T'Hka village tract, Noh Hkwee village tract, Kyeh Too Ra village tract, Pray Htaw Roh village, Meh Pa village tract and Ta Moh village tract. It affected the residents' land and plantations.

⁹ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

¹⁰ KHRG has received numerous reports involving human rights violations by Border Guard Force (BGF) Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye, including land confiscation and extrajudicial killing. See, "[Human rights violations by BGF Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, February 2013 to July 2014.](#)" September 2014.

¹¹ The Karen Peace Council (KPC), also known as KNU/KNLA Peace Council, is an armed group based in Htoh Kaw Koh, Hpa-an District, which split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signed a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC government in 2007. The KPC subsequently refused to comply with orders from the then-SPDC government to transform into a Tatmadaw Border Guard Force in 2010. The KPC signed a preliminary ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government on February 7th 2012, and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15th 2015.

¹² Maung is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

The road constructors went to do logging on the top of T'Moh Hkee Mountain, T'Moh Hkee village tract. They logged the mature trees and moved them down to Shway Ko Ko [village]. They brought two bulldozers, six backhoes and some front loaders when they were constructing the road. Each of them [workers] has their own task [as part of the road construction]. They firstly go with two bulldozers, then with six backhoes and then the front loaders follow them. The road has been completely built. They did not need to spend a lot of time building the road. They finished the construction in one week and [the road] reached the top of [T'Moh Hkee] Mountain.

Regarding this case, the builders of the road went to get permission from the [Karen National Union (KNU)] Hpa-an District administrators [before they built the road] and then they started the construction. The information [that the road had been built] was announced very recently; therefore I was not able to meet them [the villagers]. I will confirm and report more detailed information [in the future].

Healthcare

The Burma/Myanmar government attempt to construct clinics in Ta Kreh Township. [Some] NGOs [Non-Government Organisations] also try to access the area to support healthcare. Moreover, the KNU also attempt to build clinics. The ADRA [Adventist Development and Relief Agency], an NGO, also enter to operate in our area in Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District. They have built toilets and clinics, and dug wells [for the villagers]. JTI [Japan Tobacco International] have also installed water pipes.

The Burma/Myanmar government set up clinics and placed some of their health workers in some places but some places do not have any medicine or health workers. They just built the clinics to take the land. In some clinics they stored medicine that is out of date. I got to know this information from the villagers who went to take medicine from the clinics. Because of this issue the villagers and village responsible people reported it to the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU responsible people. After they report this to them, this issue does not usually happen anymore.

The KNU built three hospitals in Ta Kreh Township. They built one hospital between Pee T'Hka village tract and Noh Hkwee village tract. The other one was built in T'Moh village tract and another one was built in Wa Mee Klah [village tract]. They were all built in 2015. The KDHW [Karen Department of Health and Welfare], the SMRU [Shoklo Malaria Research Unit], the EmOC [Emergency Obstetric Care], CHWs [community health workers] and MCH [Maternal Child Health] are working together in those hospitals. But they [these hospitals] are run by the [KNU] Ta Kreh Township leaders, Hpa-an District leaders and the KNU headquarters. These three hospitals have OP [Out-Patient] and IP [In-Patient] departments. [The health workers] always go to the villages and collaborate with each other so I have seen more villagers gradually use their services.

Gambling

This happened in February 2016 in T'Nay Hsah [Nabu] Township, Lu Peh [Hlaingbwe] Township, Ta Kreh [Paingkyon] Township, and Doo Yaw [Don Yin] Township in Hpa-an District. Each year the BGF and the KPC leaders usually hold [gambling] competitions on Ar wer day¹³ in summer [dry] season. It usually happens in summer. The BGF and the KPC usually raise funds for their income. They hire done dance [traditional Karen dance] groups for three days and provide many different games. They [these games] are Baw Nee Taw, Cards, Hee Poh and other [kinds of Burmese/Myanmar gambling games]. It wastes a lot of people's money. The

¹³ 'Ar Wer day' is a term coined by DKBA, BGF and KPC and used to describe special days, hence the expression 'Ar Wer day.' Ar Wer day events typically involve celebrations to mark a special occasion such as the building of a new pagoda or to honour these armed groups. Sometimes people also engage in illicit activities such as gambling and drug use on Ar Wer days. The Ar Wer Day is primarily celebrated by armed groups to serve as a main fundraising activity for them.

names in Pwo [Karen] of some of these done dance groups are: Ba Ae P'Lon [Ba Love P'wo Karen]; P'Lon Sod Kyon Kyon [Pure Pwo Karen]; Mya Thein Kaing; Don Yaung Po [Doo Yaw villagers]; P'Lon Sod Sa Khee [Pwo Karen Culture]; and many other groups that I do not know the names of. They do it for more than one month in the summer. They [the BGF and KPC] collect a gambling tax every night to pay the done dancers. They pay each group between 700,000 kyat (US \$574.87)¹⁴ and 1,000,000 kyat (US \$821.24) for three nights.

Most of the BGF leaders who organise [the gambling] are from Battalion #1015¹⁵ and #1016, and the KPC Operations Command #3 Htaw Meh Pah soldiers and leaders. They do it every year in summer. It is a way for them to raise funds. The gambling violates human rights [affects the environment] because lots of rubbish bottles, cigarette stumps, clothes, plastic and fruit shells [are left behind]. When the event finishes each year, farm owners always complain. It [the gambling competition] takes place on four to five villagers' farmland each year. Villagers who are farm owners reported this issue to the village leaders, monks, KPC soldiers and BGF soldiers. After this issue [the damage caused to the environment] is widely known [in the area], I have seen they have changed where the event takes place to unfarmed land where the villagers do not plant paddy.

Therefore this [the gambling competition] has caused problems for the villagers who do gambling. They lost their gold, money, property and love from their families. Therefore I would like to let the above leaders know about the gambling that is happening in Hpa-an District, T'Kreh Township, and which is organised by the KPC and BGF for their fundraising and [causes] other human rights abuses that I know about.

Taxation

Each year the KNU, the KPC, the BGF, Tatmadaw and the Burma/Myanmar government collect taxes in five townships in Hpa-an District: Lu Pleh, Ta Kreh, T'Nay Hsah, Doo Yaw and Htee Loh townships. Each year the KNU collect [taxes for] betel nut,¹⁶ charcoal mounds, cars, plain farms, fish traps, conical fish nets, muskets, sawmills, chain saws, rice milling machines, logs and stone mining. They also ask for paddy rice and money for food for the military. They collect the taxes every year in each village tract in each township. They strictly do not collect them in the middle of the year. When the KNU collect [taxes] they provide an official tax receipt for every kind of tax every year. This is the main work [source of income] for the KNU each year. They collect the same amount of tax [in each area].

KPC activity

KPC Battalion #706, Battalion #703, Battalion #704 and Operation [Battalion] #3 are operating here [in Hlaingbwe and Paingkyon townships]. They introduced themselves as the Peace Council group and do not collect taxes but some leaders and the soldiers from the KPC broke their rules [by collecting taxes]. KPC soldiers always collect the taxes at unsuitable times of the year [when villagers do not have enough money]. Why? Because they thought that they have many soldiers, battalions, and six operations commands. There are three battalions in an operations command and they divided them [to operate] in many different places. They did not allow any group [from other groups of the KPC] to enter their operating areas; therefore the taxes that they collected would not be collected in the whole of the township. They only collect

¹⁴ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 5 September 2016 official market rate of 1,217.67 kyat to the US \$1.

¹⁵ KHRG has received numerous reports of human rights violations by BGF Battalion #1015, including arbitrary killing of civilians, arbitrary taxation and demands, forced labour, as well as additional cases of land confiscation. For detailed information see, "[Human rights violations by BGF Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, February 2013 to July 2014.](#)" KHRG, September 2014.

¹⁶ In Burmese, 'betel nut' and 'betel leaf' are referred to as *konywet* and *konthih*, respectively, as if they are from the same plant. The Burmese names are also commonly used by Karen language speakers. Betel nut is the seed from an areca palm tree, *Areca catechu*; "betel leaf" is the leaf of the piper betel vine, belonging to the *Piperaceae* family.

taxes in their [operation] areas. The taxes that they collect are not the same amount in each area. They did not provide official receipts for the taxes either. They did not let their leaders know each time [they collected taxes]. They sometimes collect the taxes secretly. They collect fish trap tax, car tax, log tax, saw mill tax, charcoal mound tax and chain saw tax. Moreover, they set up checkpoints and collect cow tax, charcoal tax, log tax for logs sold by the villagers, and motor boat tax. The [KPC] leaders and soldiers did not consult with each other so it caused problems for the villagers.

At the present time we have seen that the villagers do not live silently [with these problems]. They endeavour to let the village heads, KPC leaders and the KNU leaders know [about these problems] in order to help them to stop this repeated taxation.

[BGF collected taxes]

The Tatmadaw's BGF Battalion #1015, Battalion #1016 and Supervisory Group are based in Ta Kreh Township. The BGF are divided into two different kinds of activities. They are military activities and military operation command activities. They [soldiers] do not collect taxes or take any action if some issue happens [in their areas] but they sometimes collect small taxes. They hand over the duty to the responsible people from military operations command to take action if something happens. Military operations command set up checkpoints and collect taxes from the villagers who carry charcoal with tractors. They request 500 [kyat] (US \$0.41) or 1,000 [kyat] (US \$0.82) or 3,000 kyat (US \$2.46) per tractor from the drivers each time they pass the checkpoint. They also collected taxes from cow and buffalo [traders] when they passed the checkpoints. They requested 5,000 kyat (US \$4.11) per cow and buffalo. If they see an elephant pass the checkpoints, they also collect a tax from the elephant [the mahout]. The soldiers who collected taxes are from the BGF Battalions #1015 and #1016 and they collected taxes in Ta Kreh Township. The different battalions from the BGF also collected the same types of tax in other townships. The BGF Cantonment Area Command, officers and soldiers collected car, saw mill, chain saw, motor boat, fish trap, tractor and charcoal mound taxes every year. They also collected [taxes for] cows, buffalo, cars that transport charcoal and dump trucks each time [they pass the checkpoints]. If some issue happens they sometimes take action on it. When they take action the people who committed abuses have to pay money. [However] It [these cases] are not resolved in favour of people who do not have money to pay them because the people who can pay them always win [when the BGF leaders resolve the dispute].

Tatmadaw [Burma/Myanmar government] activity

They surveyed the land for the villagers in some village tracts but not in all places or in each village tract. The Burma/Myanmar government said they will provide land grants to the villagers but they only provided them to some villagers and some villagers did not receive them. There are more people who did not receive land grants than people who did receive land grants. The [local Burma/Myanmar] government officials from Ta Kreh Township collect money each year. They collect money and donate it to a monastery called Poh Hkoh Monastery. They [usually] collect it from five to six village tracts for three [300,000 kyat] (US \$246.37) or four [400,000 kyat] (US \$328.50) or 500,000 kyat (US \$410.62) per village tract.

[BGF recruitment of soldiers]

The Burma/Myanmar government permitted the BGF to recruit more soldiers so the BGF conducted military training in Ler Gher village tract, Ta Kreh Township. They recruited¹⁷ ten villagers, requested five baskets of rice and also 500,000 kyat (US \$410.62) per village in November 2015. In the training there were 70 soldiers in total. They combined all of them from Ta Kreh Township and Lu Pleh Township. First, they conducted training in Ler Gher village tract, Hpah Ka village tract and T'Moh village tract. The [villagers] in Ta Kreh Township were present in the first training. The second training took place in Meh Pra village tract, Ta Kreh Township, and over 100 soldiers took part in the training. After the [training], villagers [the

¹⁷ KHRG has not received sufficient information to indicate whether this recruitment was forced or voluntary.

recruited soldiers] went to [stay] in their [own] villages. The BGF went to take pictures of the villagers so I got to know that they are becoming BGF soldiers. They requested paddy rice and money from Meh Pra, Pghay Htaw Roh, and Moh Nah village tracts like they requested for the first training. [The second] training was held in February 2016 and each training was one month long.

Telecommunications towers

The Burma/Myanmar government ordered their staff to set up telecommunication posts in Ta Kreh Township. They propose to set them up everywhere in Ta Kreh Township. In March a group of [Telenor]¹⁸ company staff from [working with] the Burma/Myanmar government who live in Yangon Town came along with a travel document [Burma/Myanmar government recommendation letter] and met with Ta Kreh Township [KNU] leaders to set up four Telenor towers in Ta Kreh Township. Ta Kreh leaders permitted them to set up [four towers] but only one at a time. They asked for permission from the township leaders and permission was permitted by the township leaders along with a recommendation letter. The [names of the] company staff who met [with the township leaders] are unknown. They reported it to the Burma/Myanmar government official in Yangon Town and they had already met with Ta Kreh Township leaders last time [when they came]. They decided to set up the first tower in Kyeh Too Ray village, Kyeh Too Ray village tract, Ta Kreh Township. They bought the land from a villager for a good price. It is over half an acre wide and it is large land. They decided to set it up in June [2016].

Regarding the Telenor towers which [were permitted by] the Burma/Myanmar government [and also by the local KNU leaders], the Ta Kreh Township leaders from the KNU also informed their staff and have detailed records [meeting notes] and they informed the district leaders. The villagers really wanted [to access internet from the towers] therefore the township leaders could not stop them [Telenor from constructing the towers]. They permitted them to implement the project step by step. They [Telenor] also have detailed plans and have to implement it based on their plans. They were not allowed to set up all of them at the same time. They have to follow [the plans] and continue the work based on this decision and their permission.

KNU activity

Three [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)] military [battalions] are based in Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District. In Ta Kreh Township there are nine¹⁹ departments which are run by [the KNU] education, healthcare, forestry, land, transportation, taxation, police and court departments. The [KNU] staff have their roles and positions. They organise [activities] to build knowledge for the community members regarding the [2015] ceasefire.²⁰ They attempt to select

¹⁸ Telenor is a Norwegian telecommunications company which in 2013 was granted a fifteen year licence by the Burma/Myanmar government to develop mobile telecommunications networks in Burma/Myanmar. See "[Myanmar To Grant Wireless Licenses To Norway's Telenor, Qatar Telecom](#)," Forbes, July 2013.

¹⁹ Although the community researcher stated this as nine departments, KHRG understands that Ta Kreh Township has eight departments.

²⁰ 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

village tract leaders in each village tract. Why [do the KNU do this]? [Because] The Burma/Myanmar government selected villagers to hold [local] administrator roles. [Therefore the KNU did this] In order to not let villagers be selected by the Burma/Myanmar government.

Land confiscation

Another case is about the Burma/Myanmar government confiscating villagers' land. After Ta Kreh Township [KNU] leaders held consultations with the Burma/Myanmar government, we have seen that many villagers have got their land back from the Burma/Myanmar government. If issues occur, the township leaders take action on it. They surveyed the pieces of land for the villagers and provided them with land titles so they can have ownership. They maintain the fish, frog, forest, stone and sand to save them from [being damaged]. They surveyed the monastery compound, the church compound and the cemetery compound. They reserved the forest as community land and they protect the forest to protect the animals and fish. The type of animal known as gibbon lives in Ya Kay Koh village tract and Naw Boh Hpa Doh village tract in Ta Kreh Township but no one hunts it. It was protected by [the KNU] forestry department. There are also three waterfalls situated in Wa Mee Klah village, Pee T'Hka village tract and Pghay Htaw Roh village tract. In total there are three places. They are all famous and they are popular places to go on holiday. The above information is about activities that are implemented by [the KNU staff] who are based in Ta Kreh Township.

[KNLA] Battalion #19 and Battalion #22 ensure the security of the [KNU] staff so they can work [safely] in Ta Kreh Township. When they do something they go together. They also have [KNU] rules that any organisation which operates in the [KNU-controlled] areas must comply with so they have to get a permission letter from the KNU to be able to access the area. [The people who] Construct the roads and do logging are not allowed to go if they do not get permission from the KNU headquarters. They are operating in these areas and also protect the land for the villagers.

KNU-KNLA activity

The KNU military [KNLA] which operate in and are permanently based in Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District, are Battalion #19 and Battalion #22. [The KNU] Ta Kreh Township staff are also there so there are three groups [in total] based in Ta Kreh Township.

[KPC activity]

The KPC Battalions #703, #704 and #706, and [KPC] Operations Command #3, which is Htaw Meh Pa [group], are also operating in Ta Kreh Township. Some of them do logging, work as day labourers, collect taxes from cow and buffalo [traders], collect charcoal tax, and some of them stay at home [and do not work]. There are not many organisations working for civilians and conducting awareness [of healthcare and security issues]. As they [KPC] are a peace group they live very peacefully.

BGF activity

The BGF soldiers do not usually patrol [in Hlaingbwe and Paingkyon townships]. They stay at checkpoints and collect taxes. They were permitted by the Burma/Myanmar government to do development projects for road construction for villagers, [to provide security] for the [Burma/Myanmar government] school teachers, and to provide security for the health workers who are from the Burma/Myanmar government. [They] Take action on the abuses which occur [in the area]. They collaborated with a company to conduct stone mining and collect gravel for the company from the river. They do not usually consult or hold meetings with villagers [before taking action]. If they celebrate BGF Day [the anniversary of the formation of the BGF on August 20th] they always collect taxes in the whole of Ta Kreh Township. They also sell plots of land

preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

which have been confiscated from the villagers. These are the activities which are conducted by the BGF in Ta Kreh Township.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpa-an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Beautiful Words, Ugly Actions: The Asian Highway in Karen State, Burma,” (August 2016)
- “Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe Township, February to April 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Hpa-an Incident Report: Villager accused of burning BGF rubber plantation in Paingkyon Township, April 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Hpa-an Interview: Saw H---, February 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar,” (August 2016)

Hpa-an District

