



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

December 13, 2016 / KHRG #16-7-A1-I1

Nyaunglebin Interview: Saw P---, December 2015

This Interview with Saw P--- describes events occurring in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District during December 2015, including threats and torture by two KNLA soldiers towards civilians. Saw P--- bought a plot of land along time ago from Naw D--- who lives in A--- village. During that time there were no problems if people did not have official documents for their land. After the 2015 ceasefire, when the situation became slightly more stable, he started clearing his plot of land and working on it. On 26th December 2015, two KNLA soldiers, Mah L'Kee and Hpa Maw Wah, showed up while he was resting in his hut and asked for money for the land that he was working on. Afterwards, he was forced and dragged into the truck and tortured and threatened along with two other villagers in the truck. After the incident of abuse was reported, the KNLA soldiers were punished for 28 days and removed of their ranks.

Interview | Saw P---, (male, 56), Kyaukkyi Town, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District (January 2016)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Nyaunglebin District in January 2016 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Nyaunglebin District, including three other interviews, one situation update and 88 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Field farming

Position: Ordinary villager

What is your name?

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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

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.

Saw P---.

How old are you?

56 years old.

Where do you live?

Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi).

What is your occupation?

Field farming.

What is your religion?

Christian.

What is your ethnicity?

Karen.

What is your responsibility [in the village]?

Just an ordinary villager.

Is what we heard true; that you were arrested and tortured at your hut?

I saw drivers and I went out to their truck for a better view, and when I got close to the truck, they asked me what I was doing, and I replied to that I am C---'s father and they grabbed me and put me into the truck and they hit me and punched me. I told them that there was a village leader who they could talk to and they replied that they [the village leader] do not understand [the situation]. Then they drove to [B--- village]. They encountered Saw C--- and asked him to get into the truck. Then heading to [D--- village], they grabbed one of the D--- villagers called Naw F--- and asked her to get into the truck immediately. While driving on the way, they hit me several times. When they arrived at [A--- village], they asked me to pay a fee again and I said I did not know why I had to pay them a fee. And they repeatedly punched me and threatened to slit my throat and put my head in a pan of boiling water. They said they had been authorised by the army [KNLA] and had received order letters from [KNLA] headquarters.

Who grabbed you?

Ma L'Kee and Hpa Maw Wah.

How many people were they with?

The total [was] three including a villager from A--- village and his name is Saw E---.

What did they say to you?

When I got close to their truck they grabbed me, pulled me into their truck and hit me.

Where were you before they grabbed you?

At that time, I was in my hut in the field. I heard shouting and a rock being thrown to the driver and I went closer to see what was happening and I asked what was going on and they looked at me and asked me who I was and I replied that I am C---'s father and then they pulled me inside the truck.

Which driver did they [KNLA soldiers] throw the rock at?

They threw the rock to another car; not the car that they were driving.

Why did they throw the rock to the car driver?

They [KNLA soldiers] said the driver was driving too slowly and their car almost hit the other car.

How did that other driver respond?

The driver just pulled over beside the road and let their car pass.

Was the driver was injured?

I do not know. They probably were hit. When I heard the shouting, my son Saw Q--- and I went out closer to see the situation. When I arrived close to their truck, they asked me who I was and I replied that I am C---'s [his eldest child's] father. And they grabbed me and pulled me into the truck and punched me.

What were they talking to you about when you were in the truck?

They asked me to pay them money for the land that I was working on. I asked them whether the land was theirs. I told them that I bought the land legally with my own money; why did I have to pay them a fee? I told them that they can go and talk to the village head or village leaders about this but they said that the village leaders would not understand [the situation] and after that they hit me and punched me again.

How did this relate to them and why did they ask you to pay a fee?

I think Naw D--- might have mentioned about it to them. For me, I truly bought the land from Naw D---. I did not force her to sell it to me. In fact, she herself tried to sell it to me.

Have you already paid her for the land?

Yes.

What did Naw D--- say then?

Naw D--- said, *"the land area is actually larger than I told you earlier"*. However, I asked her to come and measure the land but she did not and now I do not know what she has said to them.

Where does Naw D--- live?

She lives in A--- village.

What is her responsibility in the village?

I do not know.

Did you mention that on the way they also grabbed two other people who are Saw C--- and Naw F---?

Yes.

What did they [these two people] talk about and what was their problem?

Their problems might have also been about the land which concerned Naw D--- as well.

How did you know about it?

Because we were in the same truck. Saw C---, Naw F--- and I.

What about Saw C---, how was this [incident] related to him?

I do not know about that.

What did they do to you when they arrived at A--- village?

Naw F---'s hands were tied up with a rope and they tied my hands tighter than hers and they kept asking me to pay them a fee for the land. They punched me and they said I had to pay a fee for the land and they forced me to sign a document to agree to pay a fee. I had to sign it because if I did not sign it, they would have kept punching me.

Was Naw D--- there when you were tied and tortured?

Yes.

What did Naw D--- say then?

She did not say anything. Even if she had said something, I did not hear because I was tied up and being beaten.

When did they come and arrest you?

On December 26th 2015, around 4:00 PM.

What was in the document that you said they forced you to sign?

The document said that I would have to pay a fee for the land.

Did you pay it?

No, I told them to wait for one week. Then I went back home as they let me go.

How long did they tie you up for?

For the whole time I was there, they tied me up.

Did they punch you?

Yes, more than ten times.

Did both of them punch you?

Hpa Maw Wah only punched me one time. The other one punched me many times.

What did they say to you when they were punching you?

They were threatening me and saying that they were going to kill me.

What did they ask you about the first time when you met them?

I do not know. When I got close to their truck, they just pulled me into their truck. And when I arrived at Naw D---'s house they tied us up inside Naw D---'s house.

Have you talked about it and reported it to the responsible person?

When I came home I informed [Karen National Union - KNU] liaison official and Bo [General] Zaw Win asked me to go to the [KNLA] company base.

What did they tell you?

When the [KNLA] company commander asked about the information, I just explained to him what I have faced.

What did he say to you?

He said he would call them [the KNLA soldiers who committed the abuse] and they would solve the problem at the Township level.

What did they said to you when you went to [KNU] liaison official?

I just explained what happened; them punching and kicking me and tying me up.

Did they [the perpetrators] ever come back to look for you after you were released?

After they released me, one or two days later, when I was going to my land on the way to [D--- village], they showed up and asked when I would pay them the money and I said if they wanted it, they could just follow me. At that time Bo [General] Zaw Win called them on their phone and they went back to their base.

What did Bo [General] Zaw Win tell them?

I do not know.

Did they punch you again when they met you there?

No.

What is Mah L'Kee's position?

He is an [KNLA] army leader and Hpa Maw Wah is a teacher.

Does the field that you were working on belong to them [the perpetrators]?

No, I bought the land by myself and I have never seen them before.

Why did they ask for money for the land if it does not belong to them?

I do not know.

Can you think of any reason?

If they asked for a fee and explained the reason for the fee, that would be reasonable, but they just asked for the money with violent acts and punched and kicked me. They even threatened me and said that only soldiers have power. He said a lot of things but I don't remember everything.

Has the problem been solved?

Now I am just waiting for their [the authority's] response and their phone call. As they have not told me anything yet, the situation has not changed.

How do you feel about this?

I do not feel good about it. The land was bought with my own money and they should not have done this.

Who do you think was wrong?

I do not know.

Did you get the land title when you bought it?

At that time [when I bought it], I did not get a land grant but I truly bought it from her [Naw D--- who sold the land].

When did she sell the land to you?

I cannot remember because it was a long time ago; at the time that DKBA was founded in 1994 and when they had control of the area. When they came to this area they used our land for many years and we only got it back when they left the area. We also asked our leaders to ensure that the land that we took back was legally protected and would completely belong to us and they said yes. At that time Naw D--- was unable to do anything and I asked for my money back [in return for the land] but she refused to pay me back. I went to ask for it two or three times but she still refused to pay so things just stayed the same [without a land title].

What did you ask her to arrange for you?

I asked her to go and talk with DKBA [about using his land] but she did not and I asked her to pay me back my money but she did not do that either. That was all that I could do. After DKBA moved out, I asked for help from the [KNU] regional responsible person and they arranged it for me and I was then working on the land. I farmed on the land again and worked on it. And now this is still happening during the ceasefire period.

How many acres of land do you have in total?

26 acres. When I bought the land, I did not get an official land title. At that time it was not necessary to get one because she [Naw D---] said it was her own land so I did not need a land document. Since we thought she could guarantee the land, we thought it would be fine but we did not know what she would do afterwards. At that time we did not dare to call civilians to measure the land; we only called the local [KNU] land department officer to come and measure the land for us. We asked them to come along with her, but she asked other people to come and measure it instead and we do not know what happened after that. I asked them [KNU] to come and measure it because I do not want any more or any less than the actual size of the land; I just want the land that I paid for.

How much did you have to pay for it?

Six million kyat [US \$4610.88].³

When did you buy the land?

It was a long time ago.

³ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 20th November 2016 official market rate of 1301 kyat to US \$1.

Did Naw D--- say anything to you after you were tortured [at her house by the KNLA soldiers]?

Perhaps, she might have said something but I could not hear what she was saying because I was being tortured.

Had you spoken with Naw D--- before [this incident]?

No.

What about in the past?

I asked her to come and measure the land but she was very vague about the exact measurements so it was not accurate, so [I asked her to] come and measure it as I do not want any more or any less than the actual size of the land. I just want the exact amount of acres that I paid for. But she did not come and measure it even though I asked her to.

What did she say to you?

She just said this plot of land has around 20 to 30 acres and the other plot of land also has 20 to 30 acres. Actually, it does not have that amount of acreage but she did not agree. If both plots of land were combined, the land would only be around 27 to 28 or 30 acres. When I asked her to come and measure it she never showed up and I did not feel good because she treated me like this.

Did you work in that field on your own?

No, I shared it with my brother. When we bought the land, there were no land titles and the land document was not provided. We thought that it was not necessary because in the past when we bought land, we did not have to do anything like this. After you bought it, it would automatically belong to you and it's not normally necessary to obtain a legal document if you have a family member and [another] witness; that sort of evidence is enough.

What do you think about this cruel act [the KNLA soldiers torturing him]?

I do not know.

Do you think it is the right thing for them to act like this?

No, there is a village leader and village head. If you want to get money or land then you should go to the village responsible person and explain it to them, but they said the leaders did not understand the situation and so they punched me.

Had you ever had an argument with Naw D--- in the past?

We had just talked about the land that I bought and I asked her to come and measure the land but she refused to come and measure it. She said that the land was bigger and more valuable than what I had originally paid for. I was telling her that I do not need any more or any less land

than what I paid for. I just need the exact amount of land that I paid for. If the measurement of the land is bigger than what I paid for then she could take some of it back and if it is less than what I paid for, then she should refund me some of the money.

Did you go and talk to Naw D--- after they tortured you?

No.

How was Naw F--- involved or related to this case?

It is about the same land issue. As they forced me to sign a document to agree to pay a fee, they released me after I signed it. Then they continued talking to her and I do not know what happened after that.

Have you reported it to the Burma/Myanmar government?

No, I just talked to the relevant local responsible person and the local KNU leaders.

Have they resolved the problem as they promised to?

They said they would but nothing has happened yet.

Why is it taking so long to resolve?

I do not know.

Do you have anything else to say which I have not asked about?

I do not know.

Do you want to say anything else?

No.

Thank you for taking your time talking with me.⁴

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

- “Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw I---, November 2015,” (October 2016)
- “Nyaunglebin Interview: U A---, January 2016” (September 2016)
- “Two separate landmine incidents happened in Hpapun and Nyaunglebin districts, March and April 2016,” (August 2016)
- “Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Mone Township, April to May 2016,” (August 2016)
- Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar, (August 2016)

⁴ After the incident of abuse was reported locally, KHRG received additional information that the two KNLA soldiers were punished for 28 days and removed of their ranks.

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)