



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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**Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township,
November 2016 to January 2017**

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District between November 2016 and January 2017, including updates on education, healthcare, military activity and development transactions.

- *High school students' mock-examination pass rate was low in Thandaung Myo Thit High School, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, and teachers were called to a meeting and urged to teach extra classes in order for the students to pass their final exams.*
 - *On November 7, 2016, an A--- villager named Saw B---, 39 years old, was injured in a blast caused by accidentally hitting old artillery in his cardamom plantation in Maung Nwe Gyi village tract, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District.*
 - *Between November and December, 2016, Tatmadaw sent out rations and ammunition to their frontline military camps in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District by military trucks with numerous horses inside. The convoy started from Toungoo Town and went to Baw G' Lee. This panicked local villagers since the action represented particular military movement that they perceived to jeopardise the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.*
 - *Road construction and the construction of a telecommunication tower have been conducted in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District without villagers' consultation or agreement. Villagers were unsatisfied about the development actors' response regarding compensation for the loss and damages of their lands and plantations.*
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**Situation Update | Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District
(November 2016 to January 2017)**

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG on February 2nd 2017. It was written by a community member in Toungoo 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

Situation Update

This Situation Update describes events happening in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the time between November 2016 and January 2017. It includes education, healthcare, military activity and business/development projects.

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.

Education

The school pass rate for mock exams, especially at 8th Standard and 10th Standard² (high school students) was low and students underestimated [the difficulty of] their lessons in the high school of Thandaung Myo Thit Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. Therefore, the high school headmistress Daw San San Myint organised a meeting with students' parents and teachers in order [to discuss how] to ensure that the students can pass the government examination. In the discussion, they established that the teachers approached teaching with a lack of effort [motivation]. Therefore, teachers were urged to put more effort into teaching during class time, rather than outside class [where they teach extra classes for extra pay]. Though the students' parents agreed for their children to attend extra classes, there were additional problems including the lack of motivation from teachers, the students' lack of understanding about the lessons, and the general low-quality of teaching. As students did not progress well with their lessons, the headmistress Daw San San Myint planned to arrange more frequent parents' and teachers' association meetings, once every two weeks [in order to further discuss how to improve the education]. However, the teachers refused [to attend these extra meetings] and said that they could not give their time because they have family issues [other commitments].

Some teachers complained about the differences between some students who learn well and some students who do not, [by saying] that it depends on the student's parents as well. Only 10 out of 141 students in 10th Standard and 46 out of 154 students in 8th Standard passed the mock exam [test] in Thandaung Myo Thit High School [in the period between November 2016 and January 2017]. According to headmistress Daw San San Myint, teachers needed to place more emphasis on their teaching in order for students to adequately pass the government examination. The reasons given about the students who did not pass or do well with their mock exams were that their basic knowledge was weak, and that there was a problem with the motto saying 'everyone must pass' [because students who fail the exam have to re-take it until they pass]. According to students' parents, another problem was that failed students were given another chance to take the exam again in order to pass their academic year even after they had failed the first time.

Some students' parents said that majority of teachers who were teaching the 10th Standard class are from the Sagai Development School but that did they even did not pass their high school [exams]. Only a few [teachers] had graduated from college. This meant that students found the teaching difficult to understand [as they teachers were not well skilled] and some teachers could not even teach.

Students' parents also said that there were students attended school whilst there were no teachers to teach them as the existing teachers had resigned [and not been replaced].

There is a branch of a middle school which has been a self-funded school for about 30 years in Mate Thalin Taung village, Late Tho town, Thandaunggyi Township. It is difficult [for the teachers] to teach in because [of the building]; the school's walls were bamboo-made [not of good quality]. Moreover, there are currently 191 students and only eight teachers. Most of the students are from different places which are far away from the school. They came to stay in the church dormitory and attended the school. Although the need for a school renovation has been reported to the Township education office, there has been no response.

In addition, there is a primary school in Mate Thalin Taung Out, Mate Thalin Taung village tract, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. This school has been a self-funded school for 20 years. The teachers were hired through the arrangement of the village. However, the school

² A standard refers to a school year in the education system of Burma/Myanmar. The basic education system has a 5-4-2 structure. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 5, lower secondary school is Standard 6 to Standard 9, and upper secondary school is Standard 10 to Standard 11.

was recognised as a [Myanmar] government school and the [Myanmar] government teachers were sent to teach there after KNU [Karen National Union] and Myanmar military government³ signed the preliminary ceasefire.⁴ They started sending [Myanmar] government teachers in 2014.

Healthcare

With regard to healthcare, local villagers mostly suffered from sicknesses such as coughs and colds, and general illnesses caused by changes in the weather, as the weather has been unpredictable. Local villages that are located in isolated areas and are difficult to reach for communication with KNU and Myanmar government face severe hardships with regard to accessing healthcare services. There was only one midwife assigned to take care of two village tracts in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, which are Maung Nwe Gyi and Hkone Taing village tracts where there are seven villages. This assigned midwife came only once a month [to each village], checking the lists of babies born and the mortality numbers along with giving vaccinations a few times. Though there were sick people in the village, she only provided medicine when she encountered the patients [there was no system for the sick people to access her other than on her village visit]. Therefore, the villagers usually sought help from the KNU/KNLA [Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army] health service [military medics] to get treatment.

Landmine explosion

On November 7th, 2016, an A--- villager named Saw B---, male, 39 years old, got injured by the blast when he was cleaning the bushes in his plantation. He hacked and hit an unexploded heavy weapon [unidentified piece of artillery] with his machete when he was cutting and clearing cardamom plants. He sustained injuries on his chest, head, and face. He was still able to walk as soon as explosion occurred, and he headed quickly to a nearby shop which is outside of the village. Villagers assisted him by asking for a favour [medical help] from the nearby government military health service of Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #588 under the Military Operation Command (MOC) #20. However, even though the military health service came to see him, they did not give him a proper treatment. It meant that they only put Betadine [antiseptic] liquid [on his wounds] and sent him to hospital. Villagers sent Saw B--- to Thandaunggyi civilian hospital but health workers there did not give him any treatment, saying that they did not accept patients suffering from weapons injuries. Therefore, he, himself, immediately hired a taxi and went to Toungoo Hospital the same night [November 7th]. When he arrived at Toungoo Hospital, the hospital staff did not pay that much attention to his injuries until an NLD [National League for Democracy] member came to talk [to the doctors] about it.⁵

Military activity

³ The Union Solidarity and Development Party (*Pyi Khaing Pyo* in Burmese, *Pa Ka Hpa* in Karen) is the successor of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It was officially registered as a political party on June 2nd 2010 and was headed by Myanmar President Thein Sein. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) ousted the USDP in a landslide election, winning a majority of seats in parliament.

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 The reason that an NLD member came to discuss Saw B---'s condition with doctors is unclear.

The Myanmar Tatmadaw activity in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, remains the same as the past, before the NCA [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement]⁶ was signed. On November 13th, 2016, Tatmadaw sent out rations using seven military trucks. On November 16th 2016, [Tatmadaw] sent troops and weapons using 13 military trucks from Toungoo Town to Thandaunggyi. On November 17th 2016, they sent again [troops and weapons] using five military trucks. Then, on December 7th 2016, they sent rations again, using 10 military trucks. On December 9th 2016, they sent horses, for carrying rations, weapons, and military equipment, to the camps where the military trucks cannot go, using 20 military trucks. There were six horses in each truck and the total number of horses was 120. The rations and weapons were sent to the frontline [near] to the local villages in the east part of Thandaunggyi Town, using these horses. This action intimidated local residents because the KNU and Myanmar military government had signed NCA [so the residents did not expect to see any more military activity in their community]. Nevertheless, as Tatmadaw regularly were sending rations and expanding their ground troops [as perceived by local residents], villagers felt concerned that the conflict would reoccur like Kachin State⁷ and Shan State

On December 21st 2016, there were a convoy of 30 military trucks which were known as [coming from] the Bu Yin Naung military base in Thandaunggyi Township. On the way, one of the truck's brakes stopped working. The truck lost control and crashed into a tree in front of people's houses and a government building. Though the tree, which was 2 foot in circumference, did not fall down onto the houses, the house owners were staying there were panicked. The truck that hit the tree was transporting six horses. There was no action taken following this accident.

On December 21st 2016, horses were sent by [Tatmadaw] military trucks from Toungoo Town to Baw G' Lee area, for the purpose of [using the horses to] transport rations and ammunitions [to the frontline where trucks cannot go]. After [witnessing] the action of sending more weapons and rations [with the horses], local residents felt at risk, reported one villager.

Whilst trucks were transporting these rations, [Tatmadaw] security troops were guarding the road [and they remained] active [patrolling] constantly. Witnessing this, villagers were worried about their security.

Land confiscation

Tatmadaw has not solved the problem of land conflict. [Specifically] they have not solved the issue of 1521 acres of villagers' land that was confiscated by Bu Yin Naung [army base] and a military tank [regiment] in Kwun Pin village tract, Htantabin [Toungoo] Township, as well as 587 acres [that was confiscated] in Doe Thaung village tract, Htantabin Township. Moreover, they

⁶ 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.

⁷ Fighting between Myanmar army and KIA (Kachin Independence Army) was restarted in 2011 after the 17-year-long ceasefire broke down. See "[Scores Displaced Following Fighting in Kachin State's Mansi Township](#)," *The Irrawaddy*, September 21st 2015.

[Bu Yin Naung army base] were conducting military training practice, such as shooting with actual guns. On December 14th 2016, during military training at Bu Yin Naung camp, [Tatmadaw] fired artillery within the local village tract- Maung Nwe Gyi village tract, Thandaunggyi Township. [Residents] assumed that this action might have been to assist in the security of the trucks that were transporting military rations. There was no notification letter [sent to the relevant authorities/KNU regarding the artillery practice in the village tract].

Development

The development projects that are [currently] being conducted in Thandaunggyi Township are road construction, telecommunication towers, and an underground communication pipeline. However, all of these were developed without consultation with local villagers. The negotiation surrounding the development of these projects was between only the Myanmar government administrators and the local authorised KNU government, and without villagers' willingness [support].

The underground [communication] pipeline would be implemented from Toungoo to Loikaw [capital city of Kayah State]. By digging holes on villagers' land for placing an underground pipeline [for a communications cable], damage was caused to villagers' gardens and plantations along the pipeline's route. Villagers were unsatisfied regarding the damage caused to their seasonal plantations such as cardamom, coffee, dog fruit, and other valuable plantations that support their livelihood, therefore the village administrator reported the case to the level of the township administrator in order to address the issue. [However], the township administrator [unofficially] took the side of the company and said that it [the pipeline] had already been authorised by the [Burma/Myanmar] government [therefore they could not stop it]. This explanation did not satisfy the local villagers so they reported [their concerns] again to the KNU. The KNU relevant personnel in Toungoo District responded that, as the state government already approved this [project], it might not seem pleasant of them to ban the project [they do not want to damage relationships with the state government]. KNU said that they only given the permission to do the project and urged the villagers to negotiate individually [for compensation] regarding land damage. According to the KNU responsible personnel, the affected villagers requested for appropriate compensation [from the company/authorities involved] after the [telecommunications] company manager Han Win Aung said, during the meeting with villagers, that he would not pay for any compensation [for land or damages] because the project had already been authorised by the KNU. According to one KNU authorised person, KNU had only given the permission to conduct the project [and therefore the KNU were not responsible for the land problems]; the company was supposed to negotiate and consult with the villagers in order to solve the land problems [and requests for compensation].

One militia officer of *A Htoo Day Tha Nyein Chan Yay* [local armed group for village security] named Bo⁸ Kyaw Win, is the owner of the Way Hpone Kyaw Company. [This is the company] which dug up the land to construct the road from Leik Tho Town to Shan Lel Pyain. The group led by Bo Kyaw Win is the militia and monitored by [under the control of] the Tatmadaw. They did not consult with local villagers about this road construction. Moreover, they did not disclose about the width of the [affected] area, the expenses relating to the road construction, and about any compensation for [land] damage. Local residents [who were affected by the construction] did not dare to confront Bo Kyaw Win for they were afraid of him. During the road construction, they [Way Hpone Kyaw Company] also grabbed and sold the trees belonging to villagers in the local area. However, the villagers did not dare to report the issue though they knew the militia group sold the wood, because the villagers had already experienced oppressive actions from Bo Kyaw Win [therefore they were fearful of retaliation if they reported this new issue]. In addition, the construction workers operating the truck exchanged their militia uniforms to civilians' clothes, and the security were holding guns [this concerned the local residents as they could no longer identify who was working for the militia]. This road construction was based on company

⁸ Burmese prefix meaning 'officer'

interest, without involving the agreement of villagers. The soil [from the road construction] also covered the clean water [stream] that the villagers used to consume. Worse than having polluted water, there was a water shortage in summer [which was worsened by this road construction], one villager said.

Conclusion

Development projects should firstly go through the negotiation and consultation stages with local villagers and therefore [the leaders of the development projects would] understand their concerns. Both Burma/Myanmar government and KNU government should acknowledge the villagers [as stakeholders in these development projects] and consider the difficulties and losses for villagers [which are caused by land destruction from development]. Every development project actor needs to comply with general rules and regulations [about protection, compensation, conservation, etc.].

The military [Tatmadaw] should not do any action that intimidates the civilians in any form but they should try to preserve the civilians' trust and support [in the Tatmadaw and in the ceasefires].

With regard to health and education, I think that the [Myanmar/KNU] government should give sufficient support to health and education staff members by providing them with relevant equipment/materials.

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

- "Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, January 2016," (February 2017)
- Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, November 2015," (February 2017)
- "Toungoo Field Report: Slow transitions towards real change, January to December 2015" (January 2017)
- "Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, December 2015," (November 2016)
- "Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, October 2016," (November 2016)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)