



**Karen Human Rights Group**  
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

**Thematic Report**  
July 2, 2014

## **Chapter: The impact of Anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire**

*The following chapter appears in a KHRG report entitled [Truce or Transition?](#), published on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2014. The report documents trends in human rights abuse and civilian responses in Southeast Myanmar since the signing of a preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Myanmar government and the Karen National Union (KNU) in January 2012. The chapter below focuses on the impact of mine contamination on local communities, and documents a decrease in the planting of new mines by armed actors since January 2012, whilst also noting that the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Border Guard Forces (BGFs) continued to plant mines in some areas. Ongoing landmine contamination was reported across six out of the seven locally defined Karen districts and has led to dozens of deaths and injuries, as well as the severe restriction of villagers' movement and livelihoods. The Tatmadaw and EAGs have begun removing mines, but such efforts have ended prematurely due to accidents, lack of technical skills and coordination issues. The report recommends a comprehensive ban on the new use of mines by armed actors; inclusive and participatory consultations with villagers on mine action and removal, including international support for mine action and removal efforts; and the free provision of healthcare to all victims of mine accidents. Villagers continue to develop protective mechanisms, such as requesting that soldiers remove mines, choosing alternative routes and working with armed actors to mark the location of mines.*

### **Anti-personnel and other mines**

Throughout the two decades leading up to 2012, KHRG documented the extensive use of anti-personnel and other mines by a wide range of actors in the seven Karen districts in Southeast Myanmar. Tatmadaw forces have planted anti-personnel mines around forward military outposts to maim or kill EAG combatants and civilians deemed to support them, and to stop people returning to villages from which they have been forcibly relocated.<sup>1</sup> Outnumbered, EAGs have employed the heavy use of mines in order to hold territory when in conflict with the Tatmadaw.<sup>2</sup> Mine use by both groups has led to civilian casualties, particularly among displaced people. Civilians in a small number of IDP areas, hiding sites and some established villages have also

<sup>1</sup> For background information and examples of Tatmadaw forces laying mines, see [Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#), KHRG, August 2010, pp. 32-45; see also [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 18-21.

<sup>2</sup> For background information and examples of EAGs laying mines, see [Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#), KHRG, August 2010, pp. 37-38; see also [All the information I've given you, I faced it myself: Rural testimony on abuse in eastern Burma since November 2010](#), KHRG, December 2011, pp. 34-37; see also [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 22-25.

used mines to provide protection of their settlements, by impeding Tatmadaw incursions and providing early warnings, allowing them time to flee. They have also used mines to protect food stores, or to guard agricultural land to allow them to work without fear of government troops.<sup>3</sup>

Mine contamination in Southeast Myanmar has for decades presented threats to human security, through exposure to physical harm and significant restrictions on movement and livelihoods. In response, villagers have employed a range of methods, documented throughout the past 20 years by KHRG, to avoid physical harm and maintain steady access to food and income.<sup>4</sup> Despite government restrictions on humanitarian interventions and security impediments, local organisations have provided limited support to these efforts through Mine Risk Education (MRE), with some assistance from international actors.<sup>5</sup>

Since January 2012, the ceasefire process has enabled the discussion of systematic mine removal among armed actors and by the Government. The Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC), together with international humanitarian mine actors, has formed the Myanmar Mine Action Center (MMAC). The entity aims to coordinate mine removal activities throughout the country, but has made little progress thus far.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Tatmadaw, BGFs and EAGs have made attempts in some areas to coordinate their own efforts to decrease contamination.<sup>7</sup> As is evidenced below, these armed actors currently lack the technical skills to safely remove mines and to guarantee that areas have been comprehensively cleared.

A mine is defined by the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) as "a munition designed to be placed under, on or near the ground or other surface area and to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person or a vehicle." The MBT bans the use of anti-personnel mines, defined as "a mine designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person and that will incapacitate, injure or kill one or more persons."<sup>8</sup> While the Tatmadaw have produced or imported fragmentation

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<sup>3</sup> For background information and examples of civilians using mines for self-protection, see [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 81-87; see also [Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#), KHRG, August 2010, pp. 90-91.

<sup>4</sup> Local communities have shared information about mined areas, identified areas deemed safe to travel, used alternative travel routes, maintained relationships with armed actors that enabled them to gain warnings about mined areas, and requesting the marking or removal of mines, see [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 30-31 and 42-43.

<sup>5</sup> The Committee for Internally Displaced Karen Persons (CIDKP) has undertaken mine risk education activities with assistance from Danish Church Aid (DCA) in Kayin State, while KDHW has conducted MRE activities in Tanintharyi Region; see [Landmine Monitor Report 2009: Toward a Mine-Free World](#), International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Myanmar Country Report, pp. 1029 - 1040.

<sup>6</sup> See "Mine Action Program" in the [Landmine Monitor Report 2013: Toward a Mine-Free World](#), International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Myanmar Country Report, Myanmar Country Profile, last updated October 30<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>7</sup> In February 2012, in Hpa-an District, KNLA Battalion #101 and BGFs agreed to jointly remove mines where they had both previously planted them, as villagers in the area had repeatedly requested their removal. An estimated 30 mines were removed until a BGF soldier accidentally detonated, and was injured, by one of their own mines. Clearance efforts then halted and did not resume; see "[Pa'an Situation Update: T'Nay Hsah Township, September 2011 to April 2012](#)," KHRG, July 2012. In June 2012, the BGF, DKBA and KNLA joined efforts to remove mines in Myaing Gyi Ngu, reportedly removing at least 50 mines during the process; see "[Landmine clearance in Myaing Gyi Ngu nearing completion: Karen groups](#)," Mizzima, August 21<sup>st</sup> 2013.

<sup>8</sup> [Mine Ban Treaty](#); see Article 2 (1).

and blast anti-personnel mines,<sup>9</sup> EAGs have typically used victim activated improvised explosive devices (VAIEDs),<sup>10</sup> both of which are anti-personnel mines banned under the MBT.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, both the Tatmadaw and EAGs use anti-vehicle mines, which are defined as mines “designed to be detonated by the presence, proximity or contact of a vehicle as opposed to a person, that are equipped with anti-handling devices.”<sup>12</sup> The MBT does not ban anti-vehicle mines, however customary international humanitarian law requires that “when they are used, particular care must be taken to minimise their indiscriminate effects.”<sup>13</sup>

While Myanmar is not currently a signatory of the MBT, in July 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Myanmar was considering accession to the MBT as part of its reforms. It was also reported that the Minister said that the Tatmadaw is no longer using mines and is pursuing a peace pact with EAGs, which would include banning the weapon.<sup>14</sup>

### **New planting of mines by Tatmadaw and EAGs since January 2012**

KHRG has received reports of mines planted by the Tatmadaw or EAGs in only two districts since January 2012. This is a sharp contrast to the period immediately before the ceasefire. During 2011, KHRG documented the planting of new mines by Tatmadaw soldiers in six out of seven districts,<sup>15</sup> and in four districts by EAGs.<sup>16</sup>

*“If we look back [at the period of time] since the ceasefire agreement between the KNU and the Myanmar government, we can be sure that no new mines have been planted. We only have old mines from the past which have not been removed.”*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, Toungoo District/ Northern Kayin State (February to July 2013)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Myanmar produces the MM1, which is modeled on the Chinese Type-59 stake-mounted fragmentation mine; the MM2, which is similar to the Chinese Type-58 blast mine; a Claymore-type directional fragmentation mine; and a copy of the United States (US) M14 plastic mine. For additional information on the types of mines produced in Myanmar, see the [Landmine Monitor 2012: Myanmar/Burma Country Profile](#), Production, stockpiling and transfer section, updated October 30<sup>th</sup> 2012; see also [Landmine Monitor 2004](#), Production, stockpiling and transfer, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> The KNLA and KNDO typically make VAIEDs from glass bottles, metal pipes or cans, wooden blocks or sections of bamboo. Unlike factory manufactured mines, these homemade devices typically become inactive only six months after they are deployed, but can last for longer periods of time.

<sup>11</sup> The MBT uses a designed-based definition to ban anti-personnel mines and both stake-mounted fragmentation mines as well as VAIEDs are weapons that meet this definition.

<sup>12</sup> An anti-handling device is “a device intended to protect a mine and which is part of, linked to, attached to or placed under the mine and which activates when an attempt is made to tamper with or otherwise intentionally disturb the mine”; see [Mine Ban Treaty](#); see Article 2 (1).

<sup>13</sup> See ICRC Customary IHL Database, [Rule 81: Restrictions on the Use of Landmines](#).

<sup>14</sup> U Wunna Maung Lwin made these statements to the President of the Eleventh Meeting of States Parties, Prak Sokhonn of Cambodia, at the time of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012; see “[Myanmar seriously considering landmine treaty as part of its state reforms](#),” Press Release, Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit, July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012. For a detailed summary of the Myanmar government’s commitments to end the use of mines, see the [Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor: Myanmar/Burma Country Profile](#), Mine Ban Policy, updated October 30<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Thaton, Toungoo, Mergui-Tavoy, Hpapun, Dooplaya and Hpa-an; see [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 18-21.

<sup>16</sup> Toungoo, Hpapun, Dooplaya and Hpa-an; see [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 22-24.

<sup>17</sup> See Source #262.

KHRG researchers reported that, as of November 2013, the KNLA and villagers continue to plant anti-personnel mines around IDP sites in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District due to ongoing fear of attack by Tatmadaw troops.<sup>18</sup> Also in Hpapun District, KHRG documentation provides evidence that the KNLA planted an anti-vehicle mine on a road specifically to deter the continuation of a BGF-backed development project in February 2013, which exploded shortly after it was planted killing five civilians.<sup>19</sup> In Nabu Township, Hpa-an District, a KHRG researcher reported that the local BGF and DKBA soldiers continued to plant new mines in 2012.<sup>20</sup>

*"In 2012, BGF soldiers planted mines. The armed actors are still planting new mines. Saw A--- stepped on a mine on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 in A--- [village]. The mine was new and it was a DKBA mine."*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District/  
Central Kayin State (June 2012 to February 2013)<sup>21</sup>

### **Areas known to be mined**

Since January 2012, KHRG field documentation described ongoing mine contamination in Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, Hpapun, Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts.

#### **Toungoo District**

KHRG researchers reported that mines remain in the ground in both of the townships in Toungoo District.<sup>22</sup> In Htantabin Township, KNLA mines remain along the Naw Soh - Bu Hsa Hkee road<sup>23</sup> and around the Tatmadaw's Bu Hsa Hkee army camp,<sup>24</sup> while Tatmadaw mines remain near Wa Soh village/army camp.<sup>25</sup> Further north in Thandaunggyi Township, KHRG reports describe mine contamination around K'Thwee Dee village, which is near an abandoned Tatmadaw base,<sup>26</sup> and around Kaw Thay Der and May Thay Der Mountain where *"the Tatmadaw planted an unknown number of mines after a KNLA ambush"* in the mid-2000s.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Nyaunglebin District**

KHRG has documented anti-personnel mine contamination in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, where six villagers were seriously injured in mine accidents between February and June 2013.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, an anti-vehicle mine which was

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<sup>18</sup> This information was provided to KHRG by Hpapun District researchers during a consultation in November 2013.

<sup>19</sup> See Source #307, in which explains that the KNLA planted the anti-vehicle mine after instructing the Green Hill Company to stop their activities multiple times. For additional reports on this incident, see Sources #84, #279 and #295.

<sup>20</sup> See Source #155.

<sup>21</sup> See Source #155.

<sup>22</sup> A Toungoo District researcher explained that the KNLA in the area do not feel it is time to remove the mines. Furthermore, the researcher explained that while the KNLA informs villagers about the locations of the mines, the Tatmadaw do not; see Source #32.

<sup>23</sup> See Source #358.

<sup>24</sup> The report also explains that the KNLA are not certain where the mines remain, making removal difficult; see Source #261.

<sup>25</sup> See Source #331.

<sup>26</sup> See Source #27.

<sup>27</sup> See Source #324.

<sup>28</sup> See Source #370 for documentation of villagers injured by mines on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013 in Nga Lauk Tet village; on February 13<sup>th</sup> at a logging site near Kyun Pin Seik village; on March 2<sup>nd</sup> while looking for vegetables in Meh Pok old village; and on April 20<sup>th</sup> one mile from Kyaung Su Kyi in the La

planted by the KNLA in 2011 reportedly remains between the Tatmadaw's Kat Pe base camp and Mu Theh village.<sup>29</sup>

### Hpapun District

Mines remain near abandoned army bases or camps<sup>30</sup> and around operational bases housing BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014 in Meh Seik<sup>31</sup> and a BGF Battalion #1015 base in Meh Pree<sup>32</sup> in Bu Tho Township.<sup>33</sup> Mines also remain underground in Lu Thaw Township,<sup>34</sup> including near the Tatmadaw's See Day base<sup>35</sup> and around IDP villages,<sup>36</sup> as well as in Dwe Lo Township.<sup>37</sup>

### Doooplaya District

Kawkareik Township in Doooplaya District remains contaminated with DKBA, KNLA and Tatmadaw mines planted in 2010 and 2011. The mines remain around abandoned army camps, on the grounds of a church,<sup>38</sup> in and around villages,<sup>39</sup> in villagers' plantations, at the source of water channels and on mountains.<sup>40</sup> In Kyainseikgyi Township, some mines remain near the Tatmadaw base outside U Kray Htar village.<sup>41</sup>

*"I saw that DKBA soldiers had stuck two red warning signs to two trees along the way to signal that mines had been placed there. I [also] saw two signs along the path from Htee Ther Leh to K'Law Ghaw village ... Mines also exist at the source of the water channel on the Wah Hsguh Poo Mountain as well. Between Htee Ther Leh and Waw Lay, and Waw Lay and U Kray Hta, there are smaller amounts of mines. This is due to the fact that these places are situated close to the Tatmadaw Phyu Ha Kon army camp. DKBA Battalion #907 and Kaw Thoo Lei [KNLA] planted those mines, whereas Burmese soldiers [Tatmadaw] just plant mines around their camp. There are more mines between U Kray Hta village and Wa Mee Hta village. Since 2010, villagers have dared not go there to gather leaves due to DKBA Battalion #907 mines. ... Mines exist in the KNLA Battalion #18-held area, situated to the east of the Dawna mountain range and the KNLA's Battalion #103-held area, which stretches from Kya K'Wa village to Per Kler village."*

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Myaing Region; see Source #370. On February 2<sup>nd</sup> a villager stepped on a mine in the Maw Lay forest, between KNLA #8 and Tatmadaw LIB #599 army camps. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, a villager stepped on a mine at Chauk Kway, between two Tatmadaw army camps (Ket Pa and Pa Dah); see Source #263.

<sup>29</sup> See Source #51.

<sup>30</sup> See Source #304.

<sup>31</sup> BGF #1013 and #1014 have a joint base at Meh Seik and use mines for their security around the camps; see Source #81.

<sup>32</sup> Mines remain planted around the BGF #1015 base at Meh Pree; see Sources #77 and #308.

<sup>33</sup> For other reports of mine contamination in Bu Tho Township, see Sources #79 and #357.

<sup>34</sup> In April 2013, Tatmadaw soldiers began scattering salt to attract buffalos to detonate mines in Ler Muh Plaw, Say Poo, Naw Yuh Htah and Kaw Lu Der village tracts, killing an estimated 20-30 buffalos; see Source #281.

<sup>35</sup> A Tatmadaw soldier was killed after stepping on a mine near See Day base; see Source #369.

<sup>36</sup> During a November 2013 meeting, Hpapun District researchers reported that mines remain around villages in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District.

<sup>37</sup> A cow was killed after stepping on a mine in Hkoo Thoo Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township; see Source document #88.

<sup>38</sup> A KNLA mine remains beside a Christian church, which was planted during DKBA and Tatmadaw fighting in 2011 to prevent soldiers from entering the vicinity; see Sources #137 and #327.

<sup>39</sup> DKBA mines also remain near Aoh Nee and Waw Lay villages; see Sources #221 and #223.

<sup>40</sup> According to KHRG reports, hundreds of DKBA mines remain on the mountain near K'Law Ghaw village and a DKBA army camp, as well as in villagers' farms; see Sources #111 and #327.

<sup>41</sup> See Source #317.

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District/ Southern Kayin State (April to June 2012)<sup>42</sup>

### **Hpa-an District**

Nabu Township, Hpa-an District remains a heavily mine contaminated area due to planting of mines by the DKBA, BGFs, Tatmadaw and KNLA in 2010 and 2011. After portions of the DKBA refused to transform into BGF battalions in 2010, tensions quickly rose between those who refused and those who accepted. Both sides then began strategically planting anti-personnel mines to protect their own bases and limit the other from leaving theirs. Each side also planted mines in villagers' plantations and gardens where the opposition was thought to be operating.<sup>43</sup> In September 2011, a (former-DKBA) BGF battalion and Tatmadaw forces attacked a KNLA base in Htee Wa Plaw village tract in Nabu Township and subsequently planted mines beside villages and in their farms.<sup>44</sup> According to KHRG documentation, Noh Kay, Htee Klay and Htee Kyah Rah village tracts, all in Nabu Township, remain highly contaminated with anti-personnel mines.<sup>45</sup>

### **Mine-related death or injury**

Since January 2012, KHRG researchers in three districts<sup>46</sup> documented specific incidents in which civilian death or injury resulted from mine accidents. Between February and June 2013, six villagers were injured in anti-personnel mine accidents in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. These incidents occurred while villagers were collecting firewood, conducting logging activities, searching for vegetables or traveling by road. Three of these villagers sustained such severe injuries to their legs that they required amputation.<sup>47</sup> Also in Nyaunglebin, a Tatmadaw road construction vehicle detonated an anti-vehicle mine in October 2012 in Kyaukkyi Township, although no one was injured.<sup>48</sup>

*“On April 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, a villager from Mone Township, B---, 23-years-old, was hit by an [anti-personnel] mine at 7:00 am while he went and looked for firewood. He was sent to Mone Hospital and his left leg was amputated. He detonated a mine [by stepping on it] at a place one mile from Kyuang Su, which is in Kyi La Myaung region. Both the KNLA and the Burmese military [Tatmadaw] are active in that place.”*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin

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<sup>42</sup> See Source #128.

<sup>43</sup> See Source #159.

<sup>44</sup> See Source #127.

<sup>45</sup> Reports provide evidence of mine contamination in Htee Klay village tract, where a cow was injured in 2012; in Wah Kaw Lee village in Htee Kyah Rah village tract, where a Tatmadaw soldier was injured in October 2012; and in Noh Kyaw village in Noh Kay village tract, where a villager was injured in September 2012; see Sources #125, #141, #143 and #360. KNLA and BGF mines remain around Taung Thone Lone army camp in Noh Kay; see Source #115. An estimated 40-50 mines have already detonated in the T'Waw Thaw village area; see Source #153. An estimated 300 mines were originally planted and an unknown number remain near Thee Wah, Waw Thaw and Noh Kyaw villages beside villagers' farms and along the Htee Klay-Gho Tho road; see Sources #117 and #124. Mines also remain in the forest near Htee Hpo Kyaw village; see Source #227.

<sup>46</sup> Mine deaths or injury occurred in Hpapun, Hpa-an and Nyaunglebin districts between January 2012 and November 2013.

<sup>47</sup> For documentation of the six mine incidents in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District between February and June 2013, see Sources #263 and #370.

<sup>48</sup> The Tatmadaw D7 road construction vehicle detonated a KNLA mine on the border of Meh Theh village, Kyaukkyi Township, in the Day Law Plaw area; see Source #52.

District/Eastern Bago Region (February to April 2013)<sup>49</sup>

The photo above was taken on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012 in B--- village, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District. This photo shows C---, who stepped on a KNLA anti-personnel mine while looking for yams in the forested area near his village on September 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, requiring the amputation of the lower half of his left leg.<sup>50</sup> [Photo: KHRG]



The above photo was taken on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 in Nabu Township, Hpa-an District, and shows a 36-year old man recovering from the amputation of his right leg after stepping on a DKBA anti-personnel mine in Yaw Kuh Hkee.<sup>51</sup> [Photo: KHRG]

In Hpapun District, KHRG documented an anti-vehicle mine incident on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2013, when a Green Hill Company truck, carrying five workers who were collecting sand and stones to construct a road, detonated the mine, killing all five workers, including the driver and three workers who were under 18 years old (remains of truck pictured in photo). According to KHRG documentation, KNLA soldiers planted the mine after making several requests for the development project to be stopped.<sup>53</sup> In Hpa-an District, five civilians were reported injured in anti-personnel mine incidents, all in Nabu Township, while collecting food or working in their plantations between January and March 2012.<sup>54</sup>



The above photo was taken on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, and shows the remains of a truck that detonated a KNLA anti-vehicle mine in a sand bank beside Yunzalin River, between Shan village and Taung Thu village, killing five civilians.<sup>52</sup> [Photo: KHRG]

<sup>49</sup> See Source #370.

<sup>50</sup> See Source #360.

<sup>51</sup> See Source #227.

<sup>52</sup> See Source #230.

<sup>53</sup> For a full description of this incident, see Sources #84, #95, #279, #295 and #307.

<sup>54</sup> On January 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, a villager stepped on a mine in Yu Ku Hkee village, while the injuries he sustained are unknown; see Source #155. On January 28<sup>th</sup> a villager stepped on a mine while working in a flat field and two villagers stepped on mines on March 12<sup>th</sup> by a river and at the bottom of a hill; see Source #121. On September 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, a villager stepped on a mine in Noh Kay village tract, suffering major damage to the side of his leg; see Source #141.

*“The KNLA [planted the mine]. ... It started when [Ko Myo of Green Hill Company] took some sand for [building] a school, having gotten the permission [from local KNU officials and a village tract leader]. They allowed it [at first] because it was for a school. But later he [Ko Myo] did it for the company [began collected sand for a separate Green Hill Company construction project]; the construction was [backed by] a BGF. They [KNU] do not like it, so they banned it. So the problem began there. Because Ko Myo went there [to collect sand] many times and people [in the KNU] told him to stop and not to take it [the sand].”*

D--- (male), Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District/Northeastern Kayin State  
(Interviewed in March 2013)<sup>55</sup>

### **Movement and livelihood restrictions**

The most commonly reported concern by villagers across Toungoo, Nyaunglebin, Hpapun, Dooplaya and Hpa-an districts regarding mines, is that current mine contamination severely restricts their ability to travel freely and conduct their livelihood activities. Villagers in these districts reported that they are unable to cultivate their plantations, gather food or other materials from forests due to fear of mines.<sup>56</sup> One villager reported that a mine in the sole shaded spot near villagers’ plantations also prevents workers from using the only area suitable for rest during the workday.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, KHRG has documented dozens of deaths of villagers’ livestock, in particular cows and buffalos, which stepped on mines while grazing.<sup>58</sup> Villagers also report that armed actors inform local communities of the locations of only some mines, which also serves to restrict villagers’ freedom of movement, as they cannot trust that a given area is safe.<sup>59</sup>

*“As a result, the villagers from Thi Wah, Tha Waw Thaw, and Noh Kyaw villages said that they do not even dare to think about going into the forest or into the gardens, as some of the villagers have stepped on mines there before, and also their domestic animals were hit by [stepped on] mines.”*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District/Southern Kayin State (April 2013)<sup>60</sup>

*“There are mines which haven’t been taken out yet. I bought a betel nut orchard, but now I dare not go there. I dare not take the direct route. If we take the direct route, there are still mines left.”*

Saw E--- (male), Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District/Northeastern Kayin State  
(Interviewed in February 2013)<sup>61</sup>

### **Local response**

Villagers have responded to these livelihood restrictions by taking alternative routes

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<sup>55</sup> See Source #84.

<sup>56</sup> For examples of livelihood restrictions due to mine contamination in Hpa-an District, see Sources #117 and #125; in Dooplaya District, see Sources #106 and #221; in Hpapun District, see Sources #79, #292, and #308; in Nyaunglebin District, see Sources #270 and #370; and in Toungoo District, see Source #331.

<sup>57</sup> A villager in Dooplaya District explains that a mine planted in a shaded area six minutes on foot from a plantation has meant that villagers no longer have a suitable place to rest; see Source #327.

<sup>58</sup> For example, approximately 15 cows, buffalos and oxen were killed or severely injured in mine incidents in Nabu Township, Hpa-an District between January and March 2012; see Source #121.

<sup>59</sup> See Source #159 for an example in which KNLA informed villagers of most of the mine locations.

<sup>60</sup> See Source #159.

<sup>61</sup> See Source #79.



to their plantations and informing each other of safe routes;<sup>62</sup> tying up their livestock;<sup>63</sup> renting other villagers' livestock after theirs had been killed in mine incidents;<sup>64</sup> and renting portions of other villagers' non-contaminated farms to cultivate.<sup>65</sup> Villagers living near mine contaminated farms have also transitioned to livelihood activities that can be undertaken within the geographic confines of their village, such as producing charcoal or alcohol, breeding livestock or using materials from trees within their village site.<sup>66</sup> These strategies have economic costs too, as villagers are unable to make as much money by producing goods in their village as they are by cultivating large plantations.

*"A village head explained that, 'Following [fighting between DKBA and Tatmadaw], no one knew how many mines [were planted around] these two villages [Ta Auh Hta and Kwee Ler Hsgu], so it presents big difficulties for villagers who go out to search food.' To protect themselves, villagers advise each other to be vigilant when they go out to find food or work."*

Incident Report written by a KHRG researcher, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District/Southern Kayin State (February 2012)<sup>67</sup>

*"Villagers do not dare to travel and find firewood outside of their village or near their farm, so they mostly find firewood in their village. Their buffalos, cows and goats are tethered with rope. As long as the mines remain in the ground, the villagers have to protect themselves by renting other people's farms that have no mines and they have to buy people's rice to be able to survive. As they have no other way [to maintain] their livelihood, they have to make charcoal, produce alcohol and breed buffalos, cows, goats, pigs and chickens but not in large numbers, just for their daily survival. Moreover, they send their children to Bangkok and ask them to send money back to their parents."*

Incident Report written by a KHRG researcher, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District/Central Kayin State (April 2012)<sup>68</sup>

*"Because there were mines in the forest and around villages, villagers had to cut down trees from orchards in their villages, such as mango trees, jackfruit trees and other plants. The villagers built their houses using trees that belong to them."*

Photo Notes written by a KHRG researcher, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District/Central Kayin State (February 2013)<sup>69</sup>

## Marking and removal

KHRG began to receive reports of mine removal by Tatmadaw and EAGs in 2010,<sup>70</sup> with more coordinated efforts reported in 2012. Villagers have described benefits to

<sup>62</sup> For example villagers in Dooplaya District often advise each other of safe routes to travel, without mines, before they go out in search of food, see Source #111.

<sup>63</sup> For an example of villagers who have tied up their livestock to prevent mine injuries, see Source #115.

<sup>64</sup> See Source #281.

<sup>65</sup> See Source #125.

<sup>66</sup> In Nabu Township, a villager reported that villagers do logging inside their village as the nearby forest is contaminated with mines; see Source #326.

<sup>67</sup> See Source #111.

<sup>68</sup> See Source #125.

<sup>69</sup> See Source #227.

<sup>70</sup> For KHRG documentation of the marking and removal of mines in 2010 and 2011, see [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG, May 2012, pp. 42-51.

mine removal, but have mainly reported challenges faced by armed actors in removing the mines, as well as negative consequences of partial mine removal.

Local communities explain that freedom of movement is significantly increased when mines are properly marked. In one community, villagers coordinated with the local authorities to identify the location of mines and mark them themselves.

*“Travelling by land [in Paingkyon Township] to larger cities has now become more comfortable, easier and quicker. Also [it is easier to access] trees for building houses because there has been no new planting of mines near the area. ... Villagers have marked KNU mines, BGF mines and Burmese military regime [Tatmadaw] mines in a specific area, or have asked the KNU, BGF and Burmese government military, who explain and direct the villagers to where mines are located, so villagers can mark and notify [others of] the location.”*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Paingkyon Township, Dooplaya District/Southern Kayin State (September 2013)<sup>71</sup>

In other areas, however, persistent requests have also been made by villagers for the removal of mines from their plantations,<sup>72</sup> and in one case from beside a church Sunday school,<sup>73</sup> but remain unmet.

Villagers also reported serious obstacles to systematic mine removal, such as the inability of KNLA soldiers to remember where mines were planted<sup>74</sup> and a lack of requisite training or equipment to remove mines from a particular area.<sup>75</sup>

*“...KNU/KNLA [officials] said that they do not have the skills to carry out demining and are afraid to do so. Neither the people from that area nor the KNU know the places where mines have been planted by the Tatmadaw and the Tatmadaw has not informed them.”*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Htantabin and Thandaunggyi townships, Toungoo District/Northern Kayin State (February to July 2013)<sup>76</sup>

While Tatmadaw forces have undertaken mine removal, this appeared to be motivated by a desire to facilitate military operations rather than to ensure civilian protection. In February 2012, the Tatmadaw used bulldozers to clear some landmines from a vehicle road and U Kray Hta village near an army base; however, villagers complained that the U Kray Hta School compound, the village and agricultural areas surrounding the village remained contaminated by mines.<sup>77</sup>

In another instance in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, Tatmadaw soldiers scattered salt to attract buffalo owned by villagers to detonate mines, killing 20 to 30

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<sup>71</sup> See Source #362.

<sup>72</sup> For examples of villagers' requests for mines to be removed from their plantations in Hpa-an District, see Sources #116 and #153.

<sup>73</sup> Villagers in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District have requested that the KNLA remove a mine planted near a Sunday School church, but it had not been removed at the time of the report; see Source #327.

<sup>74</sup> For examples of areas in which KNLA soldiers are unable to remember where mines were originally planted, which presents serious problems for removal, see Sources #159 and #262.

<sup>75</sup> For example, in Toungoo District, the KNU explained that they do not have the technical skills to do demining; see Source #262. In Kyaukkyi, the KNLA is unable to remove an anti-vehicle mine as it would damage a road; see Source #51.

<sup>76</sup> See Source #262.

<sup>77</sup> See Sources #108 and #317.

privately-owned animals.<sup>78</sup> Mine removal must be systematic to be effective. While the Tatmadaw's approach demonstrates little potential to improve local safety, it has instead damaged villagers' livelihood security, as the deaths of livestock impaired their ability to cultivate their plantations and transport materials.

*"The buffalos smelled [salt that had been scattered by Tatmadaw soldiers], went to the areas where it was and stepped on the mines. 20 or 30 of the civilians' buffalos died by stepping on the mines. Because many buffalos have died from mines, people whose buffalos were killed have no other buffalos for cultivation and that causes problems for them because they have to hire other people's buffalos for cultivation. Our work no longer goes smoothly because there are no buffalos left [to use] for work."*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District/Northeastern Kayin State (April to July 2013)<sup>79</sup>

At the request of villagers in Noh Kay and Htee Klay village tracts in Nabu Township, Hpa-an District, a party of KNLA and BGF soldiers, as well as local residents, attempted to remove landmines that had been planted by both armed actors during 2011, whose location had never been marked and which were resulting in landmine casualties.<sup>80</sup> Underscoring the dangers of mine removal without sufficient technical skills, nascent removal efforts were stopped when a BGF soldier was killed after stepping on a mine.<sup>81</sup>

*"In February 2012, KNLA Battalion #101 and Border Guard [Column] #3<sup>82</sup> worked together following an order [stemming from the January 2012 ceasefire agreement] to remove the mines. Those who came and removed the mines were BGF Company Commander Hpah Maw Hkoh, with Sergeant Kee Kyaw, Private Htwee Heh Kay and Battalion Deputy Commander Maung Ngway Heh, and they managed it with 20 of their soldiers. With regards the KNLA, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant K'Loo Koo and Hpah Htwee Maw managed it with about 15 soldiers. Some of the village heads accompanied them. They were able to remove 30 mines altogether. At 3:00 pm on that same day, February 11<sup>th</sup>, a BGF soldier named Htwee Heh Kay was hit by one of their own mines. Because of that, the removal of mines was stopped."*

Situation Update written by a KHRG researcher, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District/Central Kayin State (January to April 2012)<sup>83</sup>

In May 2012, 37 residents in the same area submitted their names and requested that KHRG make known the fact that mines are preventing them from accessing a total of 13 flat paddy fields and 23 cash-crop plantations. These villagers requested that KHRG share publicly their names and that of their village in order to encourage urgent de-mining of this area.<sup>84</sup>

*"We want to ask them to remove [their mines]. Do they dare to remove them? If they dare to remove them, we really want to ask them to do so in order for us to*

<sup>78</sup> See Source #281.

<sup>79</sup> See Source #281.

<sup>80</sup> See Source #124.

<sup>81</sup> On February 11<sup>th</sup> 2012, a BGF soldier was killed while removing mines in a coordinated effort with the KNLA; see Source #127.

<sup>82</sup> This is referring to a column under BGF Battalion #1016.

<sup>83</sup> See Source #127.

<sup>84</sup> For more information about these Thaw Waw Thaw villagers, see [Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma](#), KHRG May 2011, Section III: Source Documents: 2012/May/Pa'an/1.

*travel freely. ... We absolutely must go on that one path [where mines have been planted] because it is the way to our farm."*

F--- (male), Nabu Township, Hpa-an District/Central Kayin State  
(Interview in May 2012)<sup>85</sup>



The above photo was taken on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012 in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya district. This photo shows a sign written in Burmese, Karen and English explaining that there is a mine under those two trees. The mine was planted by the DKBA because, in the past, Tatmadaw soldiers would rest under those trees while travelling. The owners of nearby farms are particularly concerned about this mine because their children pasture their buffalo and their cows near it.<sup>86</sup> [Photo: KHRG]



The above photo shows a KNLA Battalion #102 soldier removing a mine on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2012. According to the soldier, the mine was planted by the Tatmadaw in a farm beside C--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. According to the KHRG researcher, the Tatmadaw did not inform the villagers where they had planted the mine. Birds unearthed it while searching for food, after which villagers saw the mine and asked the KNLA to remove it.<sup>87</sup> [Photo: KHRG]



The above two photos were taken on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2012 and show two villagers from D--- village, Nabu Township, Hpa-an District, an area in which villagers' have repeatedly requested the removal of mines (see above in this chapter). The photo on the left shows Saw G---, whose right leg required amputation after stepping on a BGF mine while attending to his farm in February.<sup>88</sup> The photo on the right shows Saw H---, who sustained serious

<sup>85</sup> See Source #153.

<sup>86</sup> See Source #327.

<sup>87</sup> See Source #356.

<sup>88</sup> See Source #326.

injuries to his leg after stepping on KNLA mine by a stream where he was fishing.<sup>89</sup>

## Recommendations

All armed actors should agree to and enforce a comprehensive ban on the new use of mines. Before such a ban is agreed to, commanders should take responsibility for prohibiting the planting of new mines in civilians' farmlands and pathways and must consistently inform the local community about the location of existing and new mines. Systematic removal of mines throughout Karen areas will not be possible until there is a final peace agreement. This is particularly applicable to KNU-controlled areas, IDP areas and heavily militarised areas, where Tatmadaw, EAGs and villagers were reported to still be using mines for defence and self-protection as of the end of 2013.

As part of any non-technical surveys,<sup>90</sup> international and local actors must conduct inclusive and fully participatory consultations and assessments to determine villagers' opinions and perspectives on mine action and removal. In communities where villagers have determined that mines should be removed, fully trained and equipped national and/or international actors should begin mine removal.

The systematic removal of mines will require proper coordination between different EAGs and the Government, which has not been achieved yet. In all areas where possible, mine risk education experts should work with local communities to support self-protection strategies against mine accidents. Where armed actors intend to begin removal, personnel should be first provided with sufficient expertise and equipment. International mine action actors and the Government will need to ensure not just that necessary support is available to all armed actors, but also that those actors are fully aware of its availability and are able to gain access to it.

The Myanmar government and EAGs should ensure that mine victims have access to free medical care when accidents occur. International humanitarian actors should assist in building the capacity of state and non-state healthcare providers to ensure free access to healthcare for all mine victims.

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<sup>89</sup> See Source #326.

<sup>90</sup> A non-technical survey is typically the starting point for the assessment of land, its categorisation as a suspected or confirmed hazardous area (SHA/CHA) and the associated processes of cancelling, reducing or clearing land for productive use. It involves a thorough investigation of new information about possible mine/explosive remnant of war (ERW) contamination or a previously recorded hazardous area, generally without the use of mine action assets inside the suspected area; see [Non-technical survey](#), International Mine Action Standard (IMAS), June 2009, Amended March 1<sup>st</sup> 2013.

## Mine accidents and contamination, 2012 - 2013



This map includes incidents reported to KHRG between January 2012 and November 2013, but does not show all of the locations which mines may exist nor all of the mine accidents which may have occurred during that period.

**Locally-defined northern and southern Karen districts  
(Kayin and Mon states; eastern Bago region)**



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)

Locally-defined Mergui-Tavoy District (Tanintharyi Region)



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)