



Report from the Field
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Mortar attacks, landmines and the destruction of schools in Papun District

SPDC abuses against civilians continue in northern Karen State, especially in Lu Thaw township of Papun District. Because these villagers live within non-SPDC-controlled "black areas", the SPDC believes it has justification to attack IDP hiding sites and destroy civilian crops, cattle and property. These attacks, combined with the SPDC and KNLA's continued use of landmines, have caused dozens of injuries and deaths in Papun District alone. Such attacks target the fabric of Karen society, breaking up communities and compromising the educations of Karen youth. In spite of these hardships, the local villagers continue to be resourceful in providing security for their families and education for their children. This report covers events in Papun District from May to July 2008.

The majority of villagers in Lu Thaw township of northern Karen State live in villages and areas not currently controlled by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Since this area is not currently under the consolidated control of the Burma Army, the SPDC has designated this region of Karen State a "black area". The SPDC stages attacks on local Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), shelling hiding sites or attacking civilians with heavy artillery. The villagers – often homeless and without food, water and other supplies – struggle daily. Despite living day-to-day in difficult conditions, most of the villagers in this area refuse to move to SPDC relocation camps where the SPDC demands payment of labour, money, food and other supplies regularly. Villagers instead stay in jungle hiding sites distant from SPDC bases where they can at least attempt to pursue their own livelihood activities.



An unexploded SPDC mortar shell launched at Tay Muh Der and photographed on May 18th 2008. Villagers removed the top of the shell so that it wouldn't be accidentally detonated. [Photo: KHRG]

SPDC attacks against displaced villagers

SPDC troop levels have steadily increased in northern Karen state, especially in areas west of the Yunzalin river such as Saw Muh Plaw, Kay Bpoo and Naw Yoh Hta village tracts of Lu Thaw township, which has in turn led to an increase in the number of attacks against local civilians.

From May 14th to May 18th 2008, SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #507 entered Saw Muh Plaw village tract and attacked civilian hiding sites in the areas around Theh Hsa Kee and Theh Kee. On May 16th 2008, soldiers shot and killed Saw Gkaw Ghay, a twenty-seven-year-old villager from Saw Muh Plaw village. During the same period, another SPDC unit based out of Wa Gklay Dtoo launched five shells into an IDP hiding site at Theh Kee while villagers were sewing paddy seeds in a local hill field. Items destroyed by the attack included: 30 baskets of rice belonging to Saw Maw Dtoh Dteh, 10 big tins of paddy seeds belonging to Saw Saw Thay Ber and 6 big tins of paddy seeds belonging to the mother of Wah Hseh Moo.



The SPDC burned down a barn in Tay Muh Der and the owner was only able to salvage this pile of rice and a few farming implements. This photograph was taken on June 6th 2008. [Photo: KHRG]



Civilians from Tay Muh Der village returning to their village on June 6th 2008, after the SPDC had vacated the area. [Photo: KHRG]

In the KHRG field report *Burma Army attacks and civilian displacement in northern Papun District* (June 2008), KHRG reported an SPDC attack on Tay Muh Der village. Included below are newly researched details about this attack.

On June 4th 2008, SPDC Infantry Battalion (IB) #240, operating under MOC #16, attacked Tay Muh Der village and burnt down three flat field farm huts and destroyed 120 baskets of rice. Villagers whose materials were destroyed by the SPDC include: 55-year-old Saw Gkaw Lay, whose hut was destroyed along with rice and a sugar cane juicing machine; 40-year-old Saw Gkyaw So, whose flat field and farming equipment were destroyed; Saw Gkweh Lih Moo, a 43-year-old whose flat field and farming equipment were destroyed. That same day, soldiers entered upper Tay Muh Der and ransacked villagers' residences, searching civilians and looting farms, taking pigs, chickens, goats, ducks and rice. SPDC mortar fire destroyed two houses and also made a hole in the church roof, destroying two speakers, one Yamaha keyboard, four microphones, one guitar and two amplifiers. They also destroyed the fences around fields, allowing cattle to wander off and eat nearby crops.

“When the Burmese came, we would have died if we hadn’t run away. We are afraid of them [the SPDC] because they will beat us, shoot us, or stab us to death. We cannot endure that kind of torture and I don’t want to die yet. The Burmese come just to kill people. Last year, I [harvested] 120 baskets of rice. I couldn’t even take a handful of rice from those 120 baskets because I fled to [Gk--- village] when the SPDC came.”

- Naw D--- (female, 45), Gk--- village, Lu Thaw township (June 2008)

Injured and killed villagers

Many villagers have been injured or killed as a result of increased SPDC attacks and landmines. KHRG field researchers have compiled a list of the injured and dead from January 14th 2006 to June 6th 2008 in Papun District. Among the 51 villagers listed, 24 were killed and 27 were severely injured. There are 7 children listed ranging from 4 to 17 years old.

#	Name	Age	Date injured	Village	Killed/ injured	Note
1	Saw Thoo	48	Jan 14 th 2006	Htee Baw Kee	Killed	Shot to death
2	Saw Dtaw Lay	32	April 13 th 2006	Gk'Leh Loh	Killed	Stepped on landmine
3	Saw Tha Weh Gklaw	30	April 4 th 2006	Pla Koh	Killed	Shot to death
4	Saw Ree Say	17	April 24 th 2006	Bpaw Muh Der	Killed	Shot to death
5	Saw N---	18	April 24 th 2006	Bp---	Injured	Shot
6	Saw M---	40	May 31 st 2006	Ht---	Injured	Shot
7	Saw Hs---	42	July 21 st 2006	Ht---	Injured	Shot
8	Saw Maw Dter	46	December 26 th 2006	Gk'Buh Kee	Killed	Shot to death
9	Saw Maw Ngeh	34	February 23 rd 2007	Gkwee Dtoo	Killed	Shot to death
10	Saw Baw Kah	18	March 16 th 2007	Dtaw Koo Muh Der	Killed	Shot to death
11	Saw Hser Nay Htoo	20	March 16 th 2007	Bpoh Gkla Der	Killed	Shot to death
12	Saw Th'Roh Htaw	40	March 21 st 2007	Gkuh Day	Killed	Shot to death
13	Saw Dtar Yeh Ghay	40	March 21 st 2007	Dtee Thoo Der	Killed	Shot to death
14	Saw Pah Hta Loo	47	March 21 st 2007	Dtee Thoo Der	Killed	Shot to death
15	Saw Aw Kah	67	March 22 nd 2007	Htee Bway Kee	Killed	Shot to death
16	Saw P---	18	March 25 th 2007	T---	Injured	Shot in the leg
17	Saw N---	40	March 25 th 2007	Sh---	Injured	Shot in the stomach
18	Saw Aye Kay Moo	12	March 27 th 2007	Leh Kee	Killed	Shot to death
19	Saw E---	12	April 28 th 2007	Y---	Injured	Shot
20	Saw Dt---	52	April 28 th 2007	T'---	Injured	Shot
21	Saw Pah Ghaw	40	April 28 th 2007	Gheh Yuh Der	Killed	Stepped on landmine
22	Saw Lay Muh Say	30	April 25 th 2007	Dtaw Koo Muh Der	Killed	Shot to death
23	Saw Mee Thay	28	May 12 th 2007	Gkaw Hter Der	Killed	Shot to death
24	Saw Pah Bih Tra	17	May 22 nd 2007	Dtar Keh Der	Killed	Shot to death
25	Saw Bw---	35	May 25 th 2007	T---	Injured	Shot
26	Saw H---	20	May 31 st 2007	L---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
27	Saw N---	26	May 9 th 2007	Ht---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
28	Saw Gk---	27	May 16 th 2007	Th---	Killed	Shot to death
29	Saw P---	30	July 2 nd 2007	K---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
30	Naw S---	4	July 9 th 2007	L---	Injured	Shot
31	Saw Th---	27	August 19 th 2007	L---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
32	Saw Nay Thaw Heh	38	October 7 th 2007	Bih Koh Der	Killed	Stepped on landmine
33	Saw T---	25	October 10 th 2007	M---	Injured	Shot
34	Saw Thay Gkler Moo	58	October 25 th 2007	Thay Baw	Killed	Shot to death
35	Saw Y---	49	October 25 th 2007	Th---	Injured	Shot
36	Naw Gk---	46	October 25 th 2007	Th---	Injured	Shot
37	Naw M---	44	October 27 th 2007	Ht---	Injured	Shot
38	Naw R---	13	October 27 th 2007	N---	Injured	Shot
39	Naw E---	18	October 27 th 2007	N---	Injured	Shot
40	Saw Ht---	62	October 27 th 2007	T'N---	Injured	Shot
41	Saw L---	25	October 27 th 2007	Ht---	Injured	Shot
42	Saw Ht---	20	October 27 th 2007	Th---	Injured	Shot
43	Saw Bler Htee	22	October 27 th 2007	Thoo Kler	Killed	Shot to death
44	Saw Hsoo Doh Wah	28	November 18 th 2007	Dtar Baw Gkoh Der	Killed	Shot to death
45	Naw D---	16	March 15 th 2008	Ht---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
46	Saw Plah See	45	March 23 rd 2008	Kay Bpoo	Killed	Stepped on landmine

47	Saw B---	18	April 4 th 2008	K---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
48	Saw Hs---	18	May 1 st 2008	T---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
49	Saw Gk'---	20	May 3 rd 2008	K---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
50	Saw P---	18	May 17 th 2008	Gk---	Injured	Stepped on landmine
51	Saw Gkler Htoo	39	June 6 th 2008	Hih Po Der	Killed	Stepped on landmine

SPDC and KNLA Landmines

According to KHRG researchers, the SPDC and KNLA have both continued to plant landmines throughout northern Karen State. IDPs in the area have been severely affected by these landmines, with several civilians gravely injured or killed. The KNLA claims to use the landmines to protect civilians (usually informing villagers of the landmine locations). Regardless of the KNLA's intentions, though, villagers who follow KNLA forces for protection often step on them (even KNLA soldiers have stepped on landmines they had forgotten had been planted). SPDC forces rarely, if ever, inform civilians when or where they plant their own landmines.

More reports of the SPDC using Karen villagers as human mine sweepers have emerged recently. Local villagers reported that on June 10th 2008, SPDC LIB #343 battalion commander Myo Min Aung entered H--- village and demanded that five villagers porter army materials to Gk'Hee Gkyo hill.



A May 23rd 2008 photograph of Saw N---, a 24-year-old villager from Htee Moo Kee village. He was cultivating a hill field at Taw Moh Bpleh Meh, near an SPDC base, when he stepped on a landmine planted by KNLA soldiers. [Photo: KHRG]

“When LIB #343, led by battalion commander Myo Min Aung, entered the village, he demanded I go to Gk'Hee Gkyo Camp. I told them that I dared not go because I was tired, having just returned from [portering for the SPDC in] another village. He kept demanding that I go [to Gk'Hee Gkyo Camp] along with the SPDC. [After arriving at Gk'Hee Gkyo camp] we were told to move a second time and [the SPDC] demanded five villagers to porter for them. I told them that we dared not go because there are a lot of landmines on the way. He pled with me to go and I couldn't do anything and I thought 'I will lead them one last time'. I told them we could conscript only four villagers [to porter] and they accepted and we went. On the way, I heard a bomb explode and I looked and saw that one villager had stepped on a landmine. I told them to send the villager to Papun hospital for medical treatment, but they said it wasn't easy and that they would send him first to the camp and then send him back to Papun. It was on June 9th 2008, Tuesday at 9:50 am. When we arrived at the camp, they gave him treatment and on the same day, at 7:00 pm, the villager died. They asked 'what shall we do?' and I told them, 'You have to send him back to the village'. [This man's] family members had to bury him according to Karen tradition. We buried him on June 11th 2008.”

- Naw M--- (female, 40), H--- village, Buh Tho township (June 2008)

After another Lu Thaw villager, Saw KI---, died, his surviving family faced many difficulties. His wife, who now cares for her young children by herself, reported to KHRG that,

"I have had to face a lot of problems since my husband died. My children can't work very well. I can't work for our survival very well myself. I have five children: three girls and two boys. The youngest child is one year and seven months old. Two children go to school. The oldest one had been working with his father and couldn't work very well yet but, since his father died, he has had to work alone. He doesn't know much about the work yet. The crops have become worse and my son told me he doesn't know what to do. If his father was alive, he would know how to rejuvenate the crops."

- Naw L--- (female, 37), H--- village, Buh Tho township (May 2008)



This photograph, taken on June 26th 2008, shows 18-year-old student Saw B--- from Kay Bpoo village. Saw B--- stepped on an SPDC landmine while he was fleeing an SPDC attack on his village. [Photo: KHRG]

Women, children and education

As a result of increasing SPDC attacks in northern Karen State, village communities struggle to ensure that their children have access to at least rudimentary educations. It is difficult to provide the security and stability necessary to build and maintain schools (which are often destroyed by SPDC attacks) and when villagers move their schools to different, more secure areas, it is difficult for them to find teachers or provide salaries. Classes are frequently split up when villagers flee SPDC advances.

In addition, wives have to assume increased responsibilities when their husbands are killed by SPDC attacks. These widows are often also asked by the community to take care of orphaned children or to take up teaching whilst also trying to provide food for their own families. One woman described her life trying to earn a living for her family after her husband was killed:

"We asked the mothers that couldn't go to work outside the village to stay at home and teach in the school. A mother whose husband was shot dead [by the SPDC] looks after the children who are of school age. These school teachers also have many difficulties because they also have to look for food themselves. Some teachers have to be mother and father to their children and also give their time to teach children in the school."

- Naw Gk'--- (female, 39), Gk--- village, Lu Thaw township (May 2008)

Increased responsibilities for women, combined with the food shortages and other hardships associated with displacement, have made it difficult for children of Nah Yoh Hta and Ler Muh Plaw villages to obtain educations. In particular, many students have had to stop their schoolwork and help their families earn their livelihoods.

"I feel sad. We are children, we should study in the school peacefully and smoothly but now we have to run and stay in the forest and study in the forest"

instead. Even though we are in the forest, we are still afraid of the enemies [the SPDC]. They have come and disturbed [sic] our rights and I wish this kind of army would not exist in the world anymore. I heard that armies protect their people, but this army frightens its own people. They came and attacked the village, arrested villagers and killed the villagers and burnt down the village. They shelled Hta La Koh with six mortars and five of the mortars exploded. Villagers and animals were injured and killed. Six villagers were injured, including two students and myself [also a student]. At that time, I was walking and the mortar hit my waist, my upper bladder and my thigh.”

- Naw S--- (female, 14), Ht--- village, Lu Thaw township (May 2008)

Older students who have had to deal with constant displacement sometimes become frustrated that they are not advancing to higher grades and will often stop their educations altogether. These students instead often marry young and work with their parents to help support their families. One young man who had to help support his village and was injured by an SPDC landmine told KHRG,



A May 28th 2008 photograph of Naw S---, a 14 year-old student injured by mortar shrapnel from an SPDC attack on Nah Yoh Hta. [Photo: KHRG]

“We stay in our village and do not disturb the SPDC, but they disturb us. It becomes difficult to do our work because we normally have to move around. Moreover, when we flee, our food runs out. We have to

protect ourselves and support our village but, on the other hand, our villagers dare not work. Villagers who don't collaborate with the KNU [Karen National Union] soldiers are afraid to stay in their villages. So, we, the house guards [village militia] cooperate with the KNU in order to receive protection for our villages and villagers. We [the villagers] face a big problem when the enemies [SPDC soldiers] come to our village. We have to carry our food through the fighting, which is dangerous for us. All boys and girls have to climb the mountain [in order to temporarily flee] and hardly have time to do the farming. But if we don't do the farming, we don't have any food to eat.”

- Saw B--- (male, 18), K--- village, Lu Thaw township (June 2008)

Conclusion

The current SPDC offensive in northern Karen State has been responsible for a myriad of abuses, including the injury or murder of hundreds of civilians. Survivors have had to make do with very little and children are often taken out of their schools in order to help support their families and communities. Malnutrition, scarce livelihood opportunities and limitations on education make life difficult for the villagers. However, residents living throughout Lu Papun District continue to find means of survival in the face of these continued attacks.

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

- *Burma Army attacks and civilian displacement in northern Papun District (June 2008)*

- *Video evidence of forced labour in Papun District (December 2007)*
- *Increased roads, army camps and attacks on rural communities in Papun District (November 2007)*
- *SPDC Army atrocities in Ler Muh Bplaw village tract in the words of a local resident (October 2007)*
- *Road construction, attacks on displaced communities and the impact on education in northern Papun District (March 2007)*

Photos documenting attacks on villages, displacement and other abuses in Papun District are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008 (June 2008)*; *KHRG Photo Gallery 2007* (updated November 2007) and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2006* (updated March 2007). These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at www.khrq.org.

Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles