



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

**Report from the field**  
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## **Attacks, killings and the food crisis in Papun District**

*SPDC abuses against civilians continue in northern Karen State, especially in the Lu Thaw and Dweh Loh townships of Papun District. Abuses have been particularly harsh in Lu Thaw, most of which has been designated a “black area” by the SPDC and so subject to constant attacks by Burma Army forces. Villagers who decide to remain in their home areas are often forced to live in hiding and not only face constant threats of violence by the SPDC, but also a worsening food crisis due to the SPDC’s disruption of planting cycles. This report covers events in Papun District from August 2008 to January 2009.*

State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) troops continue to patrol much of Lu Thaw Township in Karen State’s Papun District. The combination of regular fighting in Papun and villagers’ resistance to forcible relocation has led the SPDC to designate much of Papun as a ‘black zone’, allowing SPDC troops to freely shoot-on-sight any Karen man, woman or child who is discovered in the area. Due to these often brutal SPDC military tactics, some civilians have chosen to flee to refugee camps across the border in Thailand. In order to remain close to their homes, other Papun citizens have chosen to live in hiding in the nearby forest despite the constant physical and food insecurity that is entailed. Finally, some residents have decided to remain in their homes in these non-SPDC-controlled areas, cultivate their crops and cope with the surrounding instability as best they can. No matter which route villagers choose, there is certain to be hardship.



Grubs like the one shown above kill paddy plants when Papun farmers are forced to flee SPDC patrols and are thus not able to regularly tend their crops. This picture was taken in September 2008. [Photo: KHRG]



These villagers are pounding and sifting their rice at a hiding site near an SPDC military base in Lu Thaw Township during September 2008. [Photo: KHRG]

Those who have chosen to stay in their homes are trying to find a way to survive with less and less arable land. In addition to the constant threat that the SPDC will burn down their fields, climate change has negatively affected many hill and flat fields in the region. Rain

isn't falling as much as it has in past rainy seasons and the increasing amount of rain that is falling during the dry season prevents farmers from lighting the fires that are required to properly clear the brush from the farm fields. Moreover, an increasing number of paddy plants are destroyed by the infestations of ants, grubs and termites. Hardships are often similar for those Lu Thaw villagers who have chosen to live in hiding. Because these farmers are constantly fleeing SPDC troop movements and attacks, they too are prevented from properly maintaining their crops. Those crops, if not destroyed outright by the SPDC, are also quickly consumed by ants, rats, grubs and birds. These factors are combining to create a dire food crisis in the region – approximately a third of Lu Thaw citizens do not have enough food to eat, according to KHRG researchers working in the area.

*"I came to live here because our enemy [the SPDC] attacks and makes us flee for our lives. I've lived here [at an IDP hiding site] since 2006 and I haven't been able to return to my old village: some of the people from those households came to live here and others went to the refugee camp. We don't have a chance to do our work freely. The SPDC military camps are based at Htee Bpyeh Gkyo and Lay Gkaw Gkyo."*

- Saw Y--- (male, 44), H---village, Lu Thaw Township, (September 2008)

## Killings

Villagers in Lu Thaw are regularly subject to violent attacks by the SPDC. One example of such violence occurred on August 30<sup>th</sup> 2008, and was perpetrated by SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #256, overseen by battalion commander Kyaw Kyaw and based out of Meh Way camp. In the words of a villager who lives near the camp:

*"He [commander Kyaw Kyaw] usually rotated his troops once every four months. During one rotation, he arrived at my hill field with his soldiers. At that time, I was staying in my hut with my children and grandchildren. When they arrived at my hut, they pointed their guns through the wall-slats and shot into the hut. They killed one of my grandchildren, Naw Ree Htoo, who was nine years old, and another man called Saw Myit Thein, who was 39 years old... After that, they pointed their guns at us and told us to follow them. We had to spend two days marching with them."*

KHRG researchers continue to report that, especially in areas with large concentrations of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in hiding such as Lu Thaw Township, the SPDC has continued its patrolling and harassment of local villagers into the first months of 2009. As a consequence, rations and arms have been sent to the region to reinforce SPDC troops, meaning that villagers have to avoid travelling near roadways due to the SPDC's transporting of rations and increased patrolling.



Shown above are bullet casings gathered after SPDC troops shot at villagers staying in a hut in Lu Thaw Township belonging to Saw P---. This picture was taken in September 2008. [Photo: KHRG]



This picture shows displaced villagers crossing a road used often by the SPDC. They were planning on exchanging the rattan basket shown here for some rice. This picture was taken on August 7<sup>th</sup> 2008. [Photo: KHRG]



The above man does artisan welding in exchange for paddy or rice. All the paddy plants belonging to his town have died, so he and other villagers have had to learn alternate trades that they can use to get food. This picture was taken on August 4<sup>th</sup> 2008. [Photo: KHRG]

## Conclusion

The SPDC's continued campaign of violence in Papun District has grievously impacted the lives of local civilians. Villagers are often forced to choose between equally precarious scenarios: remain at home and risk SPDC-sponsored murder and theft; flee into hiding; or try to make the arduous trek towards refugee camps in Thailand. Not only do Papun residents suffer day-to-day, but the thoroughly violent campaign of the SPDC in northern Karen State has long-term consequences as well. The current food shortage will result in an increase in malnutrition among villagers that will mean life-long health problems for many residents. Children's educations are often severely compromised, as villagers are constantly forced to move from place to place and so are unable to construct and effectively manage classrooms. Finally, the psychological and emotional harm to villagers, though difficult to measure, surely increases and spreads in the face of oppressive SPDC rule.

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

- *Village Agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State* (November 2008)
- *Mortar attacks, landmines and the destruction of schools in Papun District* (August 2008)
- *Burma Army attacks and civilian displacement in northern Papun District* (June 2008)
- *Growing up under militarisation: Abuse and agency of children in Karen State* (April 2008)
- *Village-level decision making in responding to forced relocation: A case from Papun District* (March 2008)

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.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).





# Karen Districts



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