



Year review

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Grave Violations: Assessing abuses of child rights in Karen areas during 2009

The UN Secretary-General has listed the SPDC Army, as well as other armed groups in Burma, in five consecutive reports to the Security Council for violations of children's rights. It has been more than two years since the UN established a formal mechanism for monitoring child rights violations in Burma. As the year closes, however, KHRG research indicates that grave violations of children's rights increased during 2009. This report provides details on these grave violations, covering the period of January to December 2009.

In July 2005 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 1612 on Children in Armed Conflict (UNSCR 1612). The resolution, which expressed the UNSC's "deep concern" regarding violation of "applicable international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict," formalized a mechanism for reviewing state's progress implementing the requirements outlined by the resolution. In June 2007 this mechanism was applied to Burma.¹ Child rights violations monitored by the mechanism established in UNSCR 1612 are divided into six categories, referred to in a group as "grave violations." These grave violations include:

1. Killing or maiming of children;
2. Recruiting or using child soldiers;
3. Attacks against schools or hospitals;
4. Rape or other grave sexual violence against children;
5. Abduction of children;
6. Denial of humanitarian access for children.

Two and a half years later after the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and non-state armed groups in Burma were put on notice that child rights would be monitored, these violations continue; in Karen areas of eastern Burma² where KHRG conducted research, grave violations of children's' rights increased during 2009.

¹ For more on UNSCR 1612 and Burma, see *Growing up under militarisation: Abuse and agency of children in Karen State*, KHRG, April 2008.

² During this reporting period, KHRG did research in Kayin State, Mon State, eastern Bago Division, a small portion of southern Kayah State and Tanintharyi Division. In this report, this is referred to in aggregate as "Karen areas." Districts, townships, villages and rivers in these areas have both Karen and Burmese names, and we have tried to be consistent throughout this report and favour the names referenced by the local people interviewed by KHRG. While districts are identified with Burmese names, their boundaries follow designations used by the Karen National Union (KNU), but not the SPDC. This practice stems from KHRG's origins in 1992, when the KNU controlled large swathes of territory in the eastern border areas. Though the KNU controls much less territory today, KNU district designations remain more commonly referenced than those outlined by the SPDC. Under SPDC designations, sections of western Nyaunglebin and Toungoo Districts fall within eastern Bago Division, while western Thaton and Doooplaya Districts form part of Mon State. Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships – which the SPDC locate in Bago

The following report provides information regarding child rights violations documented by KHRG during the period of January to December 2009. The report is organised into six sections, each corresponding to one of the grave violations covered by UN Security Council Resolution 1612. Trends are identified where possible.

Conclusions about each reporting area are briefly summarised below:

1. Recruitment and use of children increased significantly in 2009, primarily because of attempts by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) to expand by 3,000 troops prior to transforming into a Border Guard Force under at least nominal State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) control.
2. Sexual violence remains under-reported in Karen areas. However, KHRG documented one case of rape of a child during 2009.
3. Killing and maiming remained a persistent threat for children in Karen areas, particularly for villagers attempting to evade SPDC control in the upland areas of northern Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Papun districts. In these northern Karen districts, it is likely that this threat decreased slightly during the first five months of 2009 following the abandonment about at least 30 frontline SDPC army camps. By May 2009, however, villagers reported that patrols had resumed their normal frequency. Risk from landmines has likely increased, as conflict between joint SPDC and DKBA forces and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) increased after June 2009, mostly in Pa'an District but also Doooplaya and Papun districts.
4. Abduction remained a persistent threat for children in Karen areas, particularly in government controlled areas where villagers are routinely forced to work as unpaid labourers for the SPDC and DKBA. Compounding ongoing demands for forced labour, increased military recruitment by the DKBA means that abduction of children should be understood to have increased in 2009.
5. Attacks on schools and hospitals remained a major concern during 2009. Most notable in 2009 is the series of attacks launched by joint SPDC and DKBA forces on KNLA 7th Brigade in Pa'an District. It is not clear whether these attacks intended to target civilians, but more than 4,000 fled the area. As a result, health services and schools had to be abandoned. These have remained abandoned, primarily because of landmines laid since June 2009. Health services designed specifically for children were destroyed by the attack, including an immunization program and a targeted feeding program for malnourished children under five years old.
6. Denial of humanitarian access increased in 2009, particularly in Pa'an and Papun districts, where the SPDC and DKBA expanded their areas of operation.

1. Use or recruitment of children

A. Children in the SPDC army

KHRG has documented recruitment and use of children by all major armed groups active in Karen areas, including the SPDC Army, DKBA, KNU/KNLA, KNU/KNLA-Peace Council³, the KNU's militia organisation the Karen National Defence Organisation

Division – roughly correspond to Kyauk Kyi, Shwegyin and Mone townships of Nyaunglebin Districts on KHRG's maps. All other locations are in Kayin State. A map of Karen areas in which KHRG conducted research during 2009 is included as Appendix 6. More detailed maps of individual districts can be found on our website, at <http://www.khrg.org/maps/index.html>

³ The KNU/KNLA-Peace Council was formed in 2007 by Maj-Gen Htain Maung, formerly a Brigadier-General and Commander of KNLA's 7th Brigade in Pa'an District.

(KNDO) and independent local militias.⁴ While data collected by KHRG in 2009 primarily concerns the SPDC and DKBA, this is not sufficient to determine whether the KNU/KNLA, an actor previously cited in the Secretary Generals 8th annual report, has ceased the recruitment and use of children.

KHRG's information regarding children in the SPDC Army during 2009 primarily comes from deserters interviewed during this period. While this is not sufficient to indicate any broad trends, these testimonies, at a minimum, confirm that children continue to be within the ranks of the SPDC army. In April 2009, for instance, KHRG spoke with Maung Ht---, 16 years old, after he deserted from his SPDC Army battalion. Maung Ht--- provided this single statement:

"In the past, when I was staying in the SPDC Association [SPDC Army] I suffered many troubles. I was exploited with an insufficient salary of rations. And furthermore, as I didn't have a high level of education, I had to remain at a low-rank. They [SPDC Army authorities] ordered [the soldiers] as they wanted. I had to meet all of their needs. Because I couldn't endure this treatment, I fled when I got in contact with the KNU. After escaping, when I was staying with the KNU, there were no divisions between enemies and friends. I was treated fairly, fed and cared for by them. I was able to have full rights, so I could do as I wanted. Therefore, I'm so happy. I can't thank the KNU enough. In the same way as me, I pray that the child soldiers who remain with the SPDC Army will be quickly released from oppression and torture."⁵



Maung Ht---, a 16-year-old SPDC army deserter, is shown here in April 2009
[Photo: KHRG]

KHRG also interviewed a number of adult SPDC Army deserters, many of whom confirmed that their former battalions continue to contain children.

Some people were just 12 or 13 years old they hadn't attend 7 standards yet, but some just graduated from 7 standards and went to their parents. Before they arrived home they were arrested on the way and sent to the army. After the training we were sent to battalion #381 at Kachin state. The battalion commander name is called Zaw Ko Oo, and the deputy commander name is called Zaw Win Ning. The age of my battalion was over 40 and the deputy commander also around with him. There were 4 companies in my battalion. My personal number is ---. Apart from the military training I didn't have to attend any other training.

Maung M--- (Male, 19), SPDC deserter (February 2009)

⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of child recruitment by these groups, see *Growing up under militarisation: Abuse and agency of children in Karen State*, KHRG, April 2008, pp. 140-158

⁵ For the report in which this information was originally published, see "Mistreatment and child soldiers in the Burma Army: Interviews with SPDC deserters," KHRG, June 2009.

*There were many people under 18 years old. There were also 13-year-olds and 16-year-olds attending the military training. There would have been around 50 old people [those aged 18 and above] and the other people were only the people who hadn't yet reached 18 years of age. As for the people who were under age 18, they had been forcibly recruited. After the military training, most of them fled.*⁶

Maung Z--- (Male, 18) SPDC deserter (February 2009)



18-year-old Maung Z--- who deserted from the SPDC Army is shown here in February 2009. [Photo: KHRG]

B. Children in the DKBA

Recruitment and use of children by the DKBA expanded significantly in 2009. This trend, which had been steadily increasing since 2008,⁷ spiked upwards in May 2009 following an SPDC directive issued on April 28th to ethnic ceasefire groups instructing them to transform into Border Guard Forces.⁸ These instructions were reportedly followed by a high level meeting of DKBA commanders at the group's headquarters in Myaing Gyi Ngu, Pa'an District, on May 7th 2009. According to meeting minutes obtained by KHRG, DKBA Chairman U Tha Htoo Kyaw and other senior leaders acknowledged the DKBA's transformation into a Border Guard Force, outlined the conditions for the transformation and identified a need to conscript an additional 3,000 soldiers in order to reach a total stated troop strength of 9,000.⁹ The dissemination of this information was then followed by a May 15th meeting at the DKBA base at Shwe Gko Gkoh, T'Nay Hsah Township, Pa'an District, in which Maung Chit Thu, Operations Commander of DKBA Brigade #999, instructed DKBA officers under his command to increase recruitment. Maung Chit Thu explained that SPDC authorities would provide salaries of 25,000 kyat (approx. US \$27.73) per soldier per month as well as guns for the new recruits.¹⁰ Also on May 15th, Brigadier Pah Nwee, commander of DKBA Brigade #999, informed village heads in Dta Gre and Lu Pleh townships of northern Pa'an District that the DKBA required 605 new soldiers drawn from 15 village tracts in the two townships. Then on May 16th in T'Nay Hsah Township, Maung Chit Thu issued an order directing village and village tract heads to provide villagers as DKBA recruits. On May 18th 2009, DKBA Brigade #333 held a meeting at its headquarters at Oh Daw in Thaton District, west of Myaing Gyi Ngu. In the meeting, Brigade #333 commander Maung Gyi explained to 180 village leaders in attendance that they would each have to provide villagers to serve as DKBA soldiers in numbers proportionate to the size of their respective villages; one recruit would be required for per every 20 households.

⁶ For the report in which this information was originally published, see "Mistreatment and child soldiers in the Burma Army: Interviews with SPDC deserters," KHRG, June 2009.

⁷ "Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District," KHRG, September 2008.

⁸ *Myanmar: Towards the elections*, International Crisis Group, August 20th 2009, p 14.

⁹ Minutes to this meeting, dated May 7th 2009, are on file with KHRG.

¹⁰ See, *Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts*, KHRG, May 2009 and Brian McCarten, "Shoot first, talk later in Myanmar," *Asia Times Online*, June 25th 2009.

This recruitment drive has not targeted children specifically. But the DKBA does not appear to be excluding recruits based upon age, and villagers have reported a variety of methods used to select men and boys to meet DKBA recruitment quotas. On July 8th 2009, for instance, Deputy Battalion Commander Thoung Ma Na of DKBA Brigade #333, Battalion #1 ordered residents from Bp--- and T--- village tracts, Pa'an Township, Thaton District, to attend a meeting at T--- village to discuss the recruitment quota. Thoung Ma Na ordered villagers to record all male residents of the area between ages 12 and 50 so they could be made eligible for recruitment.

The most common method of recruitment reported by villagers and deserters interviewed by KHRG has been a village lottery, which is usually conducted on an ad-hoc basis. In some villages, all male residents have been required to register and participate. In others, lotteries have been organised based upon household, leaving it up to the family to decide which family member should serve or whether a substitute can be hired. These village lotteries are often how younger soldiers are selected; these are the circumstances described by Saw P--- and Pah G---, ages 17 and 14, who eventually deserted after being conscripted and were interviewed by KHRG in June and July 2009. Full transcripts of their interviews are included as Appendices 1 and 3.

In other cases, deserters interviewed by KHRG have described feeling they had to join the DKBA because if they did not their families would be forced to pay unmanageably large fines or see their land seized. This is the circumstance described in October 2009 by Saw C, age 17. His full interview is included as Appendix 4. Some villagers have also described kidnapping and seizures by DKBA soldiers, who have taken recruits by force. This is the circumstance described by Saw K---, age 17. His full interview is included as Appendix 2.

KHRG conducted 20 interviews with DKBA deserters in 2009. Nine of these interviews included discussions of children in the DKBA, either prompted by a KHRG researcher or raised by the deserter; the other eleven deserters were not asked about children in their former battalions. Of these nine discussions, eight described serving with children; the ninth deserter said that the DKBA would be recruiting soldiers over age 18, but did not describe the ages of soldier in his former battalion. The minimum combined total of children in the DKBA described these deserters is 35 children; the maximum is 41. Additionally, one escaped porter, Ah K---, age 16, said there were two or three other porters also age 16, making the minimum estimated number 37. Importantly, these numbers are not representative of the whole DKBA; they are estimates only for the battalions in which the former DKBA soldiers served in prior to deserting. These estimates also do not include general statements from two deserters, who described widespread use of children in the DKBA but did not provide a numeric estimate. S---, for instance, told KHRG: *"Most of the soldiers [commanded by Brigade #999 Operations Commander Maung Chit Thu] are 15 or 16."* Information provided by the deserters regarding children in the DKBA is contained in the table below:

No	Name	Age	DKBA Battalion	Information regarding children
1	Saw G---	25	Brigade unknown, Commander Pu Buh	12 or 13 in his camp.
2	Saw M---	20	Brigade Security Force, Brigade #999	6 soldiers aged 13 in the Brigade Security Force
3	K--- and Pah Y--- (joint interview)	17 and 19	'Loyalty' Battalion #1, Brigade #999	Seized and forcibly recruited along with 10 other boys under 18 years old, of which 5-6 were under 15
4	S---	45	Brigade unknown, Deputy Commander Na Bpay Htoo	4 commanded by Na Bpay Htoo. Said of soldiers in Brigade #999 commanded by Maung Chit Thu, "Most of his soldiers are under 15 or 16."

5	A---	N/A	N/A	Regarding new recruitment that will occur in 2009, "They will order people [to join the DKBA] who were 18 years old and above."
6	L---	28	N/A	Regarding newly recruited soldiers, "They are around 15 or 16 years old"
7	Pah G---	14	Brigade #555, Battalion Commander Bpo Cho	7 people the same age as Pah G---
8	Ah K---	16	Porter, Brigade #999	2 or 3 porters the same age as Ah K---
9	Saw C---	17	Battalion #5, Brigade #999	4 people the same age as Saw C---

2. Rape and sexual violence

KHRG researchers continue to document cases of sexual violence committed by military forces operating in rural Karen areas.¹¹ On February 27th 2009, a soldier from SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #---, under Light Infantry Division (LID) #11, raped Naw M---, a 13-year-old girl from W--- village, Papun District. Naw M--- was raped while she was travelling to collect water from a nearby river. After the incident, SPDC Company Commander Y--- offered the victim's parents 40,000 kyat (US \$40) and instructed the family not to discuss the case with anyone. Even though the girl's parents were not satisfied with the cash payment, they were afraid to refuse the money.

Payments of this kind, and the implicit or explicit threat that accompanies them, are not unusual. On January 24th 2009, for instance, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) reported a similar response to the December 27th 2008 rape and murder of a 7-year-old girl by a soldier from LIB #350. Following calls for justice from the girl's parents, local village leaders and rights organisations like the Karen Women's Organisation, Captain Thet Khaing of LIB #350 forced ten local business owners to provide a total of one million kyat (US \$1,002) in order to pay off the girl's parents. According to FBR, the girl's parents were threatened and told they had to accept the payment or "face punishment."¹² Notably, reports of the girl's rape were acknowledged in the Secretary General's last report on children in armed conflict.¹³

3. Killing and maiming

A. The 'shoot-on-sight' policy

Ongoing conflict and heavy militarization in Karen areas continues to place children at risk of being killed and maimed. This risk comes chiefly from the SPDC Army's general shoot-on-sight policy, which targets all villagers regardless of age. This policy is employed in contested areas that remain outside of consolidated SPDC control, where SPDC Army patrols treat any villagers they encounter as if they are armed members of the KNLA, which remains active in some Karen areas. In these areas, villagers are routinely shot on sight; villages are shelled and farm fields and food stores burned.

Children living under these conditions are primarily located in northern Karen areas, including Papun, Toungoo and Nyaunglebin districts. The Thailand Burma Border

¹¹ For examples of past rape cases and attempted rape cases in Karen areas, see "Forced Labour, Extortion and Abuses in Papun District," KHRG, July 2006, and "Attempted rapes and other abuses in northern Karen Districts," KHRG, March 2006.

¹² "Burma Army Threatens and Attempts to Bribe Parents of Raped and Murdered 7-yr-old Girl in Karen State," Free Burma Rangers, January 2009.

¹³ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar, 1 June 2009, S/2009/278, p 10.

Consortium (TBBC) has described this area as the most “heavily militarised” in eastern Burma and home to the highest rates of displacement.¹⁴ According to TBBC, as of November 2009, 38,000 internally displaced people [IDPs] in Papun “do not dare to show themselves to SPDC forces...[,] are living in hiding and run away if the Burmese Army troops approach.”¹⁵

The SPDC briefly reduced activity in these northern Karen areas during December 2008 and January 2009, when the SPDC Army withdrew from at least 30 camps positioned in front line areas in Papun, Nyaunglebin and Toungoo.¹⁶ Patrols continued in the areas of the vacated camps, however, as did shelling of villages and hillside paddy fields. By May 2009, KHRG researchers began reporting increased SPDC Army activity, including more frequent patrols. It is important to keep in mind that this is an apparent drawdown only when compared to 2008, which marked the third year of an intensive offensive in northern Karen areas.

On June 18th 2009, for instance, a patrol of 11 soldiers and an officer from DKBA Special Battalion #666 departed from their camp at Meh Mweh in Bu Tho Township. Special Battalion #666 is under the command of Saw Bah Hsee, although he was not a part of this patrol. The patrol headed from the camp up into the surrounding mountains. Upon reaching hill fields belonging to residents of Meh Koo Kee village, the soldiers approached a villager and ordered him to serve as a porter alongside their patrol. The soldiers and officer then proceeded to Maw Ler Kee village. When they reached the farm fields at Maw Ler Kee, the soldiers spotted Naw W--- and her family members – all local villagers. Naw W--- and the others were resting in a field hut after having worked their paddy fields. The DKBA soldiers began firing automatic rifles at the hut and then, after setting up a mortar, fired two shells and two ‘RPG-7’-model rocket propelled grenades at the hut, injuring all those inside.

The soldiers then ceased firing and ordered the villager serving as a porter to go and check on those inside the hut. Upon reaching the hut the porter saw the villagers, all of whom were seriously injured but not yet dead. The porter returned to the DKBA soldiers and reported on the status of those inside the hut. The DKBA soldiers then proceeded to fire their automatic rifles at the hut a second time. After a barrage of gunfire, the soldiers stopped firing and went themselves to check on the inhabitants. By this time, four of the villagers inside the hut were injured, including 7 year old Saw E---, and one was dead. Those injured and dead inside the hut were:

	Name	Sex	Age	Relation	Status
1	Naw W---	female	36	Mother	Injured
2	Saw E---	male	7	Son	Injured
3	Naw M---	female	60	Grand-mother	Injured
4	Saw B---	male	35	N/A	Injured
5	Saw P---	male	70	N/A	Dead

After checking on the injured villagers and dead villager in the field hut, the DKBA patrol left the area and spent the night at Meh Koo Kee village. As other villagers in the area had fled when they heard the gun and mortar fire, there was no one around to check on

¹⁴ *Internal Displacement and International Law in Eastern Burma*, Thailand Burma Border Consortium, October 2008, p.30.

¹⁵ *Protracted Displacement and Militarisation in Eastern Burma*, TBBC, November 2009.

¹⁶ TBBC, 2009. For more details on these troop withdrawals and analysis of their impact on villagers, see “IDPs, land confiscation and forced recruitment in Papun District,” KHRG, July 2009; “Patrols, movement restrictions and forced labour in Toungoo District,” KHRG, September 2009; “Livelihood consequences of SPDC restrictions and patrols in Nyaunglebin District,” KHRG, September 2009.

those in the field hut. The four injured villagers therefore had to spend the night in the hut with the dead body of Saw P---.

The next morning, on June 19th, KNLA soldiers from Company #3 of Battalion #102, 5th Brigade, who had received reports about the DKBA attack, went and examined the place where the attack had occurred. The KNLA soldiers then saw the injured villagers and the dead body of Saw P---. The soldiers collected the survivors and carried them to an IDP site elsewhere in Papun District. Before leaving, the KNLA soldiers asked other local villagers to bury the dead body of Saw P---. When the surviving villagers subsequently arrived at the IDP site and received medical care, it became evident that Naw W--- had been hit by 21 separate pieces of shrapnel, 7-year-old Saw E--- with four pieces of shrapnel and Naw M--- with nine pieces.



This photo was taken on June 19th 2009, the day after DKBA soldiers fired on the field hut of farmers at Maw Ler Kee village in Bu Tho Township. The picture shows seven year-old Saw E---, who was injured in the attack. [Photos: KHRG]

The motivation behind these attacks is not entirely clear. Maw Ler Kee village is under partial SPDC/DKBA control and so the SPDC Army's shoot-on-sight policy has not been implemented in the area. The most likely reason why the DKBA would target these villagers is that Naw W---'s husband is a KNLA soldier. However, Naw W--- told KHRG that she has long had cordial relations with local DKBA personnel, and in particular Saw Gkaw Htoo, who was in the patrol that fired on her and her family. Naw W--- also said that Saw Gkaw Htoo had long known about her husband's involvement in the KNLA, but she had not previously faced any punishment over the issue.

B. KNLA, SPDC and DKBA landmines

All parties to conflict continue to place landmines in Karen areas, including areas used by civilians such as roads, forest paths and agricultural land. As there are no de-mining efforts to speak of in eastern Burma, mines continue to pose a threat to villagers in a steadily increasing area of eastern Burma.

Mines are used in three primary ways by armed groups in Karen areas. The KNLA, SPDC, DKBA and sometimes villagers themselves often use mines to create defensive perimeters around camps to prevent attacks, or at least provide warning of approaching soldiers. Mines used defensively in this way are the least dangerous for villagers, especially near long established camps and bases where their general locations are known.

More dangerous to villagers are mines placed offensively by the SPDC, DKBA and KNLA, which are designed to kill enemy soldiers and are laid in places like forest paths, farm field huts, roads and other places frequented by villagers. On September 17th 2009, for instance, 40 DKBA soldiers combined with 20 SPDC soldiers from LIB #219 entered M--- village tract, Bu Thoh Township, Papun District. Over a period of more than a week, the soldiers ordered area villages to provide seven residents each day to do errands and menial tasks such as collecting firewood, carrying water and finding bamboo shoots and mushrooms. Apparently worried about a KNLA attack, the DKBA soldiers laid mines in the M--- village tract area.

Though KHRG has confirmed no cases of children being injured by these mines, included in the area mined by DKBA soldiers after arriving in M--- village on September 17th was the Gk--- village primary school. On September 29th 2009 a KHRG researcher accompanied local KNDO militia members and assisted them in the removal of two mines laid directly in front of the primary school and another next to the path leading to the school. According to the researcher, as of November 2009, teachers and students have not returned to the school because they fear mines remain on the premises. Lessons are currently being taught in the home of the school's teacher, Naw M---.

Also dangerous for villagers are mines placed inside villages and hiding sites attacked by SPDC and DKBA soldiers. Mines laid in these contexts are part of broader attempts by the SPDC and DKBA to push IDPs in hiding into government controlled areas, and are designed to prevent IDPs from returning to their villages after patrols have left the area. In September 2009, for instance, 13-year-old Saw G--- lost his leg after stepping on a landmine near Meh La Ah Hta village, Pa'an District. He and his family had fled in June because of increased conflict, forced recruitment and portering related to an attempt by SPDC and DKBA forces to take control of the area from KNLA 7th Brigade. Before they fled, the family had unsuccessfully attempted to find a buyer for their livestock because many of the area villages had been abandoned. After the family arrived at a temporary refugee site in Thailand, Saw G--- was tasked with periodically checking on the family's buffalo; he had returned to the Meh La Ah Hta area two or three times following flight in June. At approximately 1:30 pm on September 17th, Saw G--- stepped on a landmine when he again returned to Meh La Ah Hta. Carried back across the border into Thailand, he was eventually treated in the Mae Sot General Hospital. His left leg has been amputated; his right leg is broken badly.

At the time of the incident, the area around Meh La Ah Hta was occupied and patrolled by DKBA Brigade #999, Battalion #4, under the command of officer Kyaw Nyaing. Working in cooperation with the DKBA were SPDC troops from LIB #28, under the command of officer Zaw Win. Troops from KNLA 7th Brigade also remain in the area, though their activities have decreased since losing control of Battalions #101, 21 and 22 camps near the Ler Per Her IDP site on June 13th.

All three groups have been responsible for laying mines in Karen areas, and it is impossible to conclusively determine who was responsible for the mine that injured Saw G---. However, precedent and recent evidence from the Ler Per Her area suggest that the mine was placed by the DKBA or SPDC, for three reasons:



This picture, taken in September 2009, shows Saw G---, age 13, who lost his leg to a landmine after returning to check on his family's livestock in Pa'an District. He and his family have been residing in Thailand since June 2009, when they fled conflict and exploitative abuse related to joint SPDC/DKBA attacks on KNLA 7th Brigade near the Ler Per Her IDP site. *[Photo: KHRG]*

First, a group of six DKBA deserters interviewed by KHRG in September said that in August the DKBA began extensively mining villages abandoned by refugees who fled the Ler Per Her area. This area includes Meh La Ah Hta village. Saw G--- had been able to return to his village at least two times prior to August without incident, suggesting that the mine he stepped on in September had been recently deployed.

Second, Saw G--- stepped on a mine deployed in a paddy field. The KNLA does not have a history of mining paddy fields or abandoned villages, and precedent suggests the

group tends to target trails and roads likely to be used by the DKBA or SPDC. Both the SPDC and DKBA have repeatedly mined paddy fields and other areas for civilian use. The DKBA deserters who spoke with KHRG in September, meanwhile, confirmed that paddy fields were among the areas mined by the DKBA since August.

Third, Saw G--- has described characteristics of the blast that suggest the mine was of the type used by the SPDC and DKBA, rather than the KNLA. Saw G--- says that prior to the explosion, he felt something give way beneath his foot; only after he raised his foot to move forward did the explosion occur. This describes the performance of a M-14 antipersonnel blast mine, the type most commonly laid by the SPDC and DKBA. The KNLA typically only has homemade mines, which are designed to explode on impact. Had Saw G--- stepped on a mine deployed by the KNLA, he should not have had time to notice something give way beneath his foot.¹⁷

4. Abduction

Abduction of children, understood to mean taking custody temporarily or permanently by force, threat of force or by coercion, is a frequent occurrence in Karen areas. Children conscripted by the DKBA, as described in Section 1, should be understood to have been abducted. In most cases this conscription is accomplished coercively, via threats of detention, violence, land seizures, monetary fines and other punishments. In some cases, like that described by Saw K--- in Appendix 2, children have been seized and forced to join the DKBA



Villagers engage in forced labour repairing an SPDC-controlled vehicle road from the Htaik Htoo relocation site¹⁸ to Kyauk Kyi Town on April 2nd 2009 as ordered by SPDC Army personnel based at See Bpay Tha Ya army camp, Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. Those ordered to comply with the forced labour included villagers previously relocated from Ay Neh, Bpa Ta Lah, Thoo Gka Bee, Noh Gkaw and Weh Lah Taw village tracts. SPDC Army personnel ordered one person from each household to contribute to the road repair. Women and children were amongst those engaged in the forced labour, and are visible in the photos above. [Photo: KHRG]

In areas where the SPDC or DKBA is conducting a patrol or transporting rations and supplies, villagers are frequently required to act as guides, porters and 'human minesweepers' walking ahead of columns to test for landmines and ambushes. While the majority of reports describing incidents of this type involve adult men and women,

¹⁷ For more details on the types of mines used by the SPDC, DKBA and KNLA, see "Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, February 2009.

¹⁸ For more details about the SPDC's forced relocation of civilians to Htaik Htoo and other relocation sites in Nyaunglebin District, see *Cycles of Displacement: Forced relocation and civilian responses in Nyaunglebin District*, KHRG, January 2009.

children are not turned away when sent to meet such demands from SPDC and DKBA soldiers. In other cases, children have been seized directly and forced to work as porters. Ah K---, 16 years old, for instance, told KHRG in an interview during October 2009 that he was seized by DKBA soldiers while attending a pagoda festival in S---, Pa'an District. For the next three months, until he escaped in October 2009, he was forced to carry supplies and equipment for DKBA soldiers operating in Pa'an District. A full transcript of the interview between KHRG and Ah K--- is included as Appendix 5. Notably, Ah K--- told KHRG that there were two or three other children his age working as porters along side him.

Rural villagers in areas with an SPDC or DKBA presence report, more than any other abuse, frequent demands for forced labour. These demands typically require set numbers of villagers to work on a task, or simply require a task to be completed. In many cases, especially road building projects and work at army camps, SPDC or DKBA soldiers directly supervise villagers. In other cases, such as the fabrication of thatch or collection of bamboo and other forest products, villagers are not directly supervised. In either situation, however, villagers working to meet demands for forced labour should be understood to be in the custody of SPDC or DKBA soldiers. Villagers remain at their tasks because of implicit and explicit threats of force, and if they leave and do not complete the ordered tasks they face potential violent retribution. While these demands do not often specifically mention children, SPDC and DKBA soldiers appear to have no qualms about making demands that result in children working as unpaid forced labourers.



Residents of M--- village, Papun District, on April 19th 2009, prepare to carry thatch for SPDC Army soldiers based at the Meh Bplay Kee camp. The villagers had been ordered to provide 100 pieces of thatch roofing, for which they had to collect materials, weave into shingles and then transport on foot. A young girl carrying her sibling can be seen participating in the forced labour. [Photo: KHRG]



Residents of Thoo Gk'Bee village, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, do forced labour repairing a vehicle road on April 30th 2009. The order to do this forced labour was sent by SPDC Army officer U Khin Soe based in Ler Doh Township. U Khin Soe told the villagers that if they did not want to be forcibly relocated, they would have to rebuild the vehicle road and the local school at Thoo Gk'Bee Village. Children participating in the forced labour are clearly visible. [Photo: KHRG]¹⁹

On January 10th 2009, for instance, Min Thu, commander of the SPDC's Gkyo Bpay Seit army camp in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District, ordered villagers in the area to provide thatch shingles and bamboo poles and to build bunkers at the army camp with these materials. Residents, including children, of six area villages engaged in this work

¹⁹ Originally published in "Livelihood consequences of SPDC restrictions and patrols in Nyaunglebin District," KHRG, September 2009.

on January 10th, 11th and 12th 2009. Each village was responsible for building one bunker using the supplies they had brought. The villagers were also responsible for bringing their own food for the duration of the work.

“Yes, we have to do it [forced labour], [including] both women and children. Some of the children are just 11 or 12 years old and they’ve had to go in place of their parents... They [SPDC] have ordered us to work for them such as by building their army huts and cleaning out the compound of their army camps. We sometimes feel weary of working for them. They don’t do their work themselves. They don’t pay us and also don’t feed us anything when we work for them. We have to bring along our own food and water.”

- Saw B--- (male, 46), B--- village, Mone Township (January 2009)

5. Attacks on schools and hospitals

Attacks specifically targeting schools and hospitals are rare. During this reporting period, however, KHRG has received one report of a primary school in Bu Thoh Township, Papun District, being mined during September by SPDC and DKBA soldiers. Full details on this incident are provided in Section 3, page 9. Attacks on villages in contested areas are frequent, however, and when villages are home to a school or medical facility, should be recognized as a grave violation of children’s rights.

In some cases, attacks against specific military targets spill over to nearby villages. This was the case during the first week of June 2009, when 2,000 people from the Ler Per Her IDP site and more than 2,000 people from surrounding villages fled because of fighting and exploitative abuse related to joint SPDC and DKBA attacks on camps belonging to KNLA 7th Brigade. On June 4th, the SPDC Army set up an 81 mm mortar position on top of Bpoo Loo Dtoo Hill, located above the KNLA camps and about five kilometres from Ler Per Her, in Dta Greh Township, Pa’an District. It is not clear if the SPDC meant to deliberately target the Ler Per Her IDP site, but five kilometres is just within range for an 81 mm mortar and at least three shells fell within the site. All told, KHRG counted 12 SPDC-fired mortars or rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) landing in civilian areas during the first week of June. Seven of these projectiles, including three RPGs, also landed in the Thai villages of Noh Boh (Nong Bua) and Mae Salit, in Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province. When four of these projectiles landed in Mae Salit on June 10th, for instance, one landed very near the Mae Salit Luang School (a local Thai government school), but did not explode. The Mae Salit Luang School then closed due to concerns about ongoing shelling by the SPDC and DKBA soldiers crossing into Thailand.²⁰

It is also important to note that the Ler Per Her IDP site was home to schools and health services. No mortars fell on the clinic during the attacks on the KNLA camps, but its surrounding area was heavily mined following flight from the area by villagers and the fall of the KNLA camps on June 13th. According to Saw ---, a health worker from Ler Per Her, fear of landmines now prevents the clinic from being used, disturbing at least two programs designed specifically for children. While the organisation operating the clinic was able to remove medical supplies prior to vacating it, they have not been able to recover building materials including cement, wood and bamboo that had been collected for repairs just prior to the attacks. Saw --- also told KHRG that he felt the clinic had been deliberately targeted:

²⁰ “Update on SPDC/DKBA attacks at Ler Per Her and new refugees in Thailand,” KHRG, June 2009.

"The clinic [in Ler Per Her] was not just for the people in the IDP camp, but also for migrants who came to work in Thailand, but came back to us for health treatment. Many villagers came to get health treatment in the clinic. When the attacks happened, I felt very sad because we had to leave the clinic. When they [the SPDC and DKBA] attacked the KNLA camp close to Ler Per Her, that attack also included the Ler Per Her IDP camp. They knew if they attacked the KNLA camp, the clinic also would be destroyed. Because the villagers came to the clinic from other places farther inside [Burma], and we are a group working across the border, they wanted to break the connection between the clinic and the people."

Saw ---, health worker formerly posted in the Ler Per Her IDP site (December 2009)

"I attended school at Ler Per Her, but the SPDC attacked this area so I had to leave school. I'm living at Oo Thu Hta [temporary new arrival site for refugees in Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province, Thailand] with my parents. I've decided myself that after I graduate from high school, I will work for my people for instance as a teacher. If I'm allowed to go and study in another area I will go."

Naw S--- (Female, 17), M--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District (June 2009)

More often than attacks on specific military targets, SPDC and DKBA forces attack villages and IDP hiding sites. These attacks are not in response to attacks launched from the villages. While the KNLA continues to obtain support from some villages, sometimes staying with villagers or visiting to obtain supplies or levy taxes, activities of this sort are distinct from installing permanent military positions. In spite of this, SPDC and DKBA patrols shell villages and IDP sites, as well as enter on foot, burn them and lay mines to prevent villagers hiding outside from returning and retrieving materials. At a minimum, in cases where patrols move through an area but do not attack a village, schooling and medical services are disrupted while villagers with a legitimate fear of attack flee and go into hiding. For twenty days following October 7th 2009, for instance, schools in Kw---, Ky---, Th--- and Ht--- village tracts, Nyaunglebin District, were closed while residents hid in the jungle following activity in the area by SPDC Army troops led by Deputy Commander Khin Maung Htway.

[The SPDC Army] entered in our area, we couldn't stay in there so we moved to another place... At that time just a few children could attend school and we had only two teachers... We couldn't pay the teachers' salary. Luckily, a local organisation helped us pay the teachers' salary. Each teacher could earn 15,000 baht (US \$450) per year. And they also provided us some teachers. Before we fled, the school had till grade #4 and it was recognized by village tract.

Saw W--- (Male, 41), B--- village, Lu Thaw Township, Papun District (March 2009)

[The children in Gk--- village] can study very well. Except, when the SPDC came last time, we fled and stayed in the forest for two or three days. They can't study during that time.

Saw T--- (Male, 51), Gk--- village, Lu Thaw Township, Papun District (March 2009)

In other cases, SPDC or DKBA patrols attack and burn villages. In places where villages are home to schools or health services, these are burnt as well, along with food stores, agricultural equipment and villagers' other belongings. On October 7th 2009, for instance, troops from SPDC LIB #599 and #390 entered and burned homes in T--- village, Nyaunglebin District.

6. Denial of humanitarian access

The SPDC continues to deny access for international humanitarian aid groups to Karen areas, particularly those with IDP populations and villagers in hiding. Consequently, villagers are often only able to access humanitarian support from groups operating covertly or based in Thailand. Support providers working in IDP areas are, like villagers, subject to the SPDC Army's shoot-on-sight policies and must work to avoid military patrols. Groups operating in government controlled areas, meanwhile, must contend with movement restrictions, particularly checkpoints that seek to profit from them and harass aid workers travelling with supplies of equipment or money for salaries.

"If I have say openly, we have to go in between them [SPDC and DKBA soldiers] when we go inside [eastern Burma] to distribute aid. Especially we have to worry when we cross SPDC vehicle roads between Muh Ser and Ler Doh townships [Nyaunglebin District]. Every time when they go and provide aid, the KNLA and KNDO have provided security for us. We ask help from the district leader. Eight to ten soldiers have to go with us and other soldiers have to go ahead of us to check the situation. Before we distribute the aid the SPDC does not know where are going – only after we have left, two or three days later they know we came. If we are seen by the SPDC soldiers, we would be killed or arrested... Before, a fight happened and one KNLA soldier was killed and four others were injured. It took us two or three days before we could move forward. It made me feel not good because we had to wait and wait and could not go [and distribute aid] as we planned.

Saw Ber Htoo, Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People, coordinator for Nyaunglebin District (December 2009)

"When we distribute the salary and materials for the school teachers in both areas [areas both under government control and where that control is limited and/or contested by the KNLA] we have to be very careful. Especially for the SPDC, they don't want this to happen – 'This is our government school, so we can support it,' they say. But in reality, they do not provide enough for the school. The DKBA and Htain Maung [leader of the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council], it depends on the area. Some of the DKBA and Htain Maung group, they willingly allow us to provide support to schools in their areas. But some, they do not allow it. In the area where the local leaders cannot deal with them, we cannot send the support we would provide. In Dooplaya District, it is very difficult for us to transport materials – we have to cross many gates. About 27 [gates]. People are worried that if they carry a lot of equipment, school materials, they will be in trouble with the SPDC and DKBA. Sometimes we can deal with the local DKBA leaders. Sometimes we try to go around the gates because we do not have money to go through them. In 2007, in Dooplaya District one of our staff was going to deliver salary money [for teachers]. The SPDC heard he was coming and they lay in wait for him and when he arrived, they shot him."

Saw Khoh Loh Htoo, Assistant Executive Director, Karen State Education Assistance Group (December 2009)

Stringent restrictions on trade and travel enforced by the SPDC in some areas also undermine villager's abilities to procure indispensable materials like food and medicine. Though these restrictions are ostensibly to prevent the KNLA from obtaining supplies, they are applied sweepingly and affect children. In Toungoo District, for instance, these restrictions increased in 2009 following the withdrawal of a number of frontline SPDC army camps during December 2008 and January 2009. Villagers report that there are now an increased number of checkpoints controlling roads linking more remote villages in Than Daung and Tantabin townships to the larger towns of Toungoo and Kler Law (Bawgali Gyi). Villagers must purchase local travel permission papers costing 2,000 kyat (US \$2) each, as well as pay additional money for vehicles. Extra payments can often secure the passage of some goods, although travelling with food supplies that could feed more than one person for a day or two is generally restricted. It is not, however, possible to pass through these checkpoints carrying medical supplies, and villagers say people caught with medicine are fined and sometimes arrested. Military camps checking people in this way are located at Kler La, Bper Leh Wah, 20 Mile camp, 18 Mile camp, 13 Mile camp, 4 Mile camp, Than Toung, Sway Nyaw, Bpay and Toungoo, near the Say Toung Myit bridge. Villagers have also reported having their homes searched for medical supplies. In November 2009, a KHRG field researcher in Toungoo relayed a quote from Saw A--, a resident of B--- village who had been stopped at an SPDC checkpoint: "I brought just two small bottles of injection medicine, and they fined me to 600,000 kyat (US \$601)," Saw A--- said. "If I do not pay for it, I will be imprisoned for 3 years."

"The hunger that villagers face now is more serious than any crisis that villagers have faced since 1997. In 1997, the Burmese government used only the army to attack villagers and took control of a few areas. Some villagers fled to Thailand, but the remaining villagers were helped once or twice by KORD [Karen Office of Relief and Development], CIDKP plus other CBOs; later the villagers could support themselves again. Due to the SPDC offensive in northern Karen State [starting in November 2005], the army not only attacks villagers, also now the army controls more land, cuts connections between villages and patrols near hiding sites. Following this, the villagers haven't had enough land to farm and [there are] fewer places to hide."

- Saw L---, KORD relief coordinator (October 2009)

Appendix 1

Saw P--- (male, 17), Pa'an District (June 2009)²¹

Saw P--- was forced to join the DKBA in 2008 because his village instituted a village lottery to meet a DKBA recruitment quota. In June 2009 he was injured by a landmine during fighting with KNLA forces around the Ler Per Her IDP camp and subsequently sought medical treatment in Thailand. Saw P---, whose right leg was amputated below the knee, explained his experience to KHRG thus:

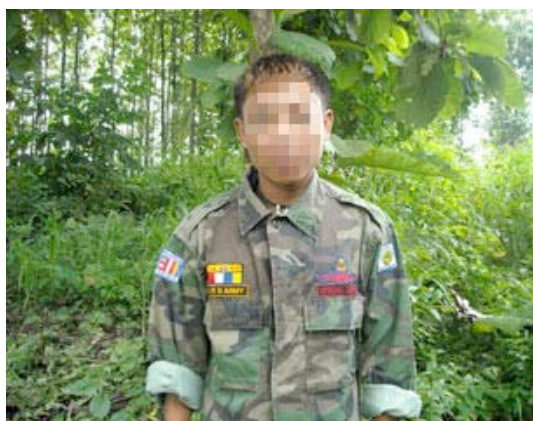
"My village is Ht---. In 2008, the DKBA recruited 10 villagers in my village to join the army. I had to draw a lottery ticket and then [due to the ticket that he drew], I had to join the DKBA for three years. A DKBA commander told me along with the other villagers who had to join the army that after three years in the army, we would be paid 180,000 kyat [approx. US \$163.64] each. For this attack in Pa'an District, the order came from the SPDC. The SPDC told the DKBA commanders that if they could wipe out the KNU camps in Pa'an District, the SPDC would give them an opportunity to do business trading logs. Also, the SPDC added that if they won the attack against the KNU camps in Pa'an District, the SPDC would give a car to each DKBA commander as an award from the SPDC. Also, each of us [soldiers] would be awarded with a watch that costs 4,000 [Thai] Baht [approx. US \$116.48]. Those DKBA commanders plan to attack Thaton District after attacking Pa'an District. The DKBA came to attack Pa'an District along with 200 Burmese troops and 1,000 DKBA soldiers. DKBA soldiers asked the SPDC soldiers to go and attack at the frontline but the SPDC soldiers didn't give them any regard and didn't do as they said. However, DKBA commander Saw Hsar Muh Say of Battalion #207 ordered us to go and fight at the front line. Commander Saw Hsar Muh Say stayed behind along with the Burmese Army and gave an order that the soldiers had to fight at the frontline and also had to plant landmines. It's like the DKBA commanders ordered us to die."



This picture, taken on June 23rd 2009, shows a 17-year-old DKBA child soldier named Saw P--- recovering at a hospital in Thailand after being injured during fighting with the KNLA near the Ler Per Her IDP camp, Pa'an District. [Photo: KHRG]

²¹ First published in "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009.

Appendix 2



19-year-old Saw P--- is shown here after deserting from a DKBA training camp in Shwe Gko Gkoh, Pa'an District. He told KHRG that he fled because he did not wish to fight the KNU/KNLA. [Photo: KHRG]



Saw K---, 17 years old, who fled along with Saw P---, did not wish to become a DKBA soldier. After being arrested in Pa'an District and forced to attend military training, he fled. [Photo: KHRG]

Saw K--- (male, 17), Pa'an District (July 2009)²²

Saw K---, aged 17 was seized by DKBA soldiers along with his friend Saw P---, aged 19, and ten other people while working on a farm near their village in Pa'an District. The teenagers were forcibly recruited into the DKBA and taken to a military training camp in Shwe Gko Gkoh, southeastern Pa'an District. On July 20th 2009, just one month after they were initially seized, the boys deserted. KHRG conducted a joint interview with them on July 23rd. This interview is reproduced below:

How did you join the DKBA?

We were arrested and tied up by DKBA soldiers when we were farming.

Do you know who arrested you?

We only know that they are a group lead by Pu K'Done.

Can you explain some more about where they took you and how you were treated?

They took us to Shwe Gko Gkoh and told us to attend training. During the training, we had to clear underbrush without taking a rest. If they saw us rest, they beat us and hit our heads.

Where were you arrested?

We were arrested at the farm of M--- while we helped them farming.

How many people were arrested along with the two of you?

More than ten people were arrested.

²² First published in, "Forced recruitment of child soldiers: An interview with two DKBA deserters," KHRG, August 2009.

How many people arrested with you were under the age of 18?

Ten people.

How many people arrested with you were under the age of 15?

Five or six people who were included [in the group] with us.

How many days were you in the training?

One month.

What did you do in the training?

We cleared underbrush in the teak field. Our hands and fingers hurt very badly, but if we rested, they kicked or hit us. We could do nothing.

Who owned the plantation?

It belongs to [DKBA Brigade #999 Operations Commander] Maung Chit Thu.

Do you know any of the trainers?

We only know the names of Chaw K'Eh and Kyaw Doh.

Do you know who ordered that you work on the teak plantation?

It was Maung Chit Thu.

How many people were at the training?

Three hundred people were in the training.

Did they tell you anything during the training?

They said they would drive us up to the frontline of [KNLA] Brigade #7 [in Pa'an District].

Were you allowed to use real guns in training?

No. We were only allowed to use models in the training. The training course wasn't finished yet.

How was the food they gave you?

They gave us only small amounts of rice and salt. So, we haven't had enough to eat for some time.

Did they have a hospital for sick people?

Yes, they had a hospital for patients. It had a shortage of medicine.

How do they support soldiers or families of soldiers or ex-soldiers with wounds or injuries?

They provide no support. People have to work on their own.

Appendix 3

Pah G--- (male, 14), Y--- village, Nyaunglebin District (October 2009)²³

Pah G'klo Doo was recruited by DKBA soldiers in his home village of Yaw Bpo during the 2008 rainy season, though he could not remember an exact date. Before the interview, he explained that he joined the DKBA because his family was required to send someone as a soldier and no other family members could go. Initially recruited when he was age 13, he fled in October 2009 when his battalion approached the Thailand border. He was interviewed by KHRG on October 13th 2009. This interview is reproduced below:

How many people are in your family?

There are four people in my family.

Why did you leave school?

Because the leaders came to recruit military soldiers.

Who were the leaders?

DKBA leaders; Commander Bp---. He served as a battalion commander.

Did you need to attend military training?

Yes, they brought me to the military training centre at Myaing Gyi Ngu.²⁴ I had to attend the training for two months and then they sent me to Pw--- for a year.

Why did you escape?

I didn't enjoy living with the DKBA military. I was oppressed by them. They just gave orders to us. If we refused to do things for them they punished us such as by beating and punching us. I can't even remember how many times they beat me while I was staying in the military.

What did they feed you in the military training centre?

They fed us fish paste. They gave it to us twice a week. We had to attend the training at Myaing Gyi Ngu. At that time there were more than a thousand people attending the training, including Burmese people. For me, I had to carry an AR gun²⁵ after the training.



This photo, taken on October 13th 2009, shows Pah G---, age 14, after he deserted from the DKBA in October 2009. He was forced to join the DKBA at age 13, and subsequently sent to a front line conflict area. [Photo: KHRG]

²³ First published in, "Forced recruitment, forced labour: interviews with DKBA deserters and escaped porters," KHRG, November 2009.

²⁴ Myaing Gyi Ngu is the DKBA central headquarters, located in northeastern Hlaing Bwe Township, Pa'an District.

²⁵ He is likely referring to an AR-15, a type of rifle commonly used by both the DKBA and KNLA.

Could you tell me about the areas that your commander is usually active in?

Yes, he is usually active in Meh Gkaw Hta and Ter Ler Po Day.²⁶

Did he torture the villagers?

Yes, if the villagers refused an order, they [the DKBA] beat them. They also forced villagers to be their soldiers. If the villagers dared not to go [and be soldiers], they had to pay them [the DKBA] money. The villagers had to be DKBA soldier for the rest of their life. Each person was hired for more than 100,000 [kyat; approximately US \$104]. For the people who couldn't pay, they had to go by themselves even though they were afraid.

Did anyone escape during the training?

Yes, they returned to their military camp.²⁷ The DKBA conducted this training. We had to attend the training for two months. After that we had to go back to our battalion.

How many people escaped with you?

There were three people that escaped with me, one was named Gky--- and another one was Gkl---.²⁸ We escaped from Brigade #555. There were around 30 people in our battalion. If we couldn't escape successfully, when they recaptured us we would be killed because the commander gave an order that if escaping soldiers were recaptured they would be punished with death.

What is your future plan?

I will find work [in Thailand]. Now my parents have been arrested by the DKBA military. I will save money and send it to my parents.²⁹

How many people the same age as you were serving in the same battalion with you?

There were seven people around the same age as me. The other people were older than me.

What was your responsibility while you were serving as a DKBA military soldier?

I had to clean my commander's living compound.

Did you get a salary?

No, I didn't get a salary. If we had money we could buy things. After the training they provided us two pairs of our military uniforms.

²⁶ These areas are just north of the Ler Per Her IDP camp, indicating that Pah G--- was sent to a front line conflict area.

²⁷ DKBA soldiers are typically recruited by an individual battalion, after which they are sent to a central training camp before returning to the battalion that recruited them. In this case, Pah G--- is saying that soldiers fled the training camp to return to their original battalions.

²⁸ These men were not interviewed by KHRG; their whereabouts are currently unknown.

²⁹ Relatives of deserting soldiers are sometimes arrested and detained by the DKBA until other family members can pay for their release and/or hiring of a new soldier.

Where did your other siblings live?

They were in Y--- village. None of them served as DKBA military soldiers. For me, I was forced to become a DKBA military soldier.

Did you bring anything with you while you were fleeing?

No, I had just one suit of clothes on my body. It took me more than one hour when I fled. I started fleeing at N--- and went to M--- by car. When I arrived at M--- I did daily work such as breaking corn and after that I planned to work on a peanut farm.

Do you plan to return to your village?

No. If I'm recaptured they will kill me.

Appendix 4

Saw C--- (male, 17), Ht--- village, Pa'an District (October 2009)³⁰

Saw C--- was recruited in August 2008 when he was 16 years old. He told KHRG that his family's land and shop would have been confiscated by the DKBA if he had not allowed himself to be recruited as a soldier. After serving for more than a year, he fled in October 2009 and was interviewed by KHRG on October 13th. This interview is reproduced below:

How many standards of school did you complete?

In the past I lived in Kw--- and I graduated only from grade three. After that I visited S--- and at that time there was a flood so I couldn't go back to Kw---.

What battalion were you assigned to?

I stayed in Battalion #---, subordinated to Brigade #999. I had to follow La---. He was a communications officer. And the battalion commander's name is Le---. I was recruited by the DKBA. One person from individual households had to be a DKBA soldier. There were 17 people who had to join the DKBA military [at the same time he did] and four people were the same age as me.

Do you remember when you entered in the DKBA military?

I was recruited in August last year [2008]. I served as a DKBA soldier for more than a year. If I didn't join the military, our [his family's] land would have been confiscated by them [the DKBA]. So my mother suggested I join the DKBA. She told me to escape to Thailand if I was not released after one year and six months. While I was serving as a DKBA soldier, I visited my mother two times. And if I didn't go [and serve with the DKBA] we would have had to leave S---. My Aunty is living in Kw--- so when I fled I went to stay at her home. I also had an adopted sister³¹ living there. Before I was a DKBA soldier, I also had stayed at M--- for more than two months working selling petrol. My boss disliked me smoking cigarettes, so I left the job and returned to S---. In the military,



This photo, taken on October 13th 2009, shows Saw C---, age 17, after he deserted from the DKBA in October 2009. He was forced to join the DKBA at 16 to stop the group from seizing his family's land. [Photo: KHRG]

³⁰ First published in, "Forced recruitment, forced labour: interviews with DKBA deserters and escaped porters," KHRG, November 2009.

³¹ Younger Karen and Burmese people sometimes refer to a very close friend as a "brother" or "sister" when the two parties have agreed to look after and support each other as if they are family. There is no word in Karen specifically dedicated to this relationship. In Burmese, the term in this case would be 'mway sah ama.'

there were seven or eight soldiers staying in a single military camp. I dared not go to the frontline. I always got beatings from them [the DKBA].

Did you attend military training?

No, I didn't attend military training because I was sick during the training time. When I got better I went to be with my adopted brother in Battalion #---. I was also beaten by La--- with five punches because I fell asleep while serving sentry duty. I had to carry bamboo poles all day.

Does a permanent DKBA soldier get a salary?

Yes, for soldiers who have a family they can get rations. For people who don't have family they don't get rations. If they need money for cigarettes, they can ask their commander. For the soldier who has family, if he has two children he will get one big tin of rice. If he has four children he will get one sack of rice.

How many kinds of taxes did you have to pay to the DKBA?

There are two or three kinds of taxes. When DKBA soldiers die they collect money and also when the villagers die they collect money. If we have money we can give 50 baht [US \$1.50], if we don't have we can give 15 or 20 baht [US \$.45 or \$.60]. And they also collect money for New Year. Before I joined the DKBA I always had to do forced labour. After I joined the military no one in my household needed to do forced labour.

Were you happy being a soldier?

No. I'm afraid to shoot a gun. I preferred my life while I was staying with my parents.

Why did you escape?

They always gave us orders. At nighttime we had to serve sentry duty and in daytime they ordered us to carry water and do other things. So I escaped. Now some people who remained in the battalion, they also want to escape. I escaped during the day when my commander fell asleep. My friend and I crossed the river to the Thai side. I took my bag off my back and let the water take it away.

What are your plans for the future?

I will find work here while I stay with my Aunty. I will save money and ask my Aunty to send it to my mother. Now my mother knows that I'm in Thailand. I will ask my family to come and stay with me here.

What is your opinion of the DKBA?

They are terrible; they always order and torture people.

Appendix 5

Ah K--- (male, 16), Ht--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (October 2009)³²

Ah K---, 16 years old, was seized by DKBA soldiers while attending a pagoda festival in S---, Pa'an District. For the next three months, until he escaped in October 2009, he was forced to carry supplies and equipment for DKBA soldiers operating in Pa'an District. His full interview with KHRG, conducted on October 13th 2009, is reproduced below:

Where did your parents live?

Both of them are already dead. I used to stay with my older sister in Gk--- village. My mother and father died when I was an eight-year-old son. But I didn't like living in Gk---, so I moved to S--- [Pa'an District].

How were you recruited to be a porter for the DKBA?

The DKBA came and arrested me to take me as a porter when I was visiting a festival. I was arrested during the nighttime. I didn't see the commander. On that night, I came from my hill field and entered the festival. I wasn't at my home when I was arrested.



This photo, taken on October 13th 2009, shows Ah K---, age 16, on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. He was seized by DKBA soldiers while attending a festival and forced to work as a porter carrying supplies. *[Photo: KHRG]*

How many months did you have to serve as a porter?

It was already three months. They arrested me at S--- [Pa'an District] and then I had to serve as a porter to Me---. I had to carry their rations. At that time there were more than ten porters. The soldiers were around 400. We had to sleep on the way for three or four days to reach Me---. We came there on foot. We had to start carrying the DKBA things starting from S--- to M--- and then to Me---

Did they torture you?

Yes, when we stayed in their military camp they ordered us to do things for them. If we refused they punished us such as by making us stand up and then sit down 50 or 100 times in a row.

³² First published in, "Forced recruitment, forced labour: interviews with DKBA deserters and escaped porters," KHRG, November 2009.

Did you attend school?

No, I didn't have a chance to attend school because my parents died when I was a child.

Why did you escape?

We had to do everything for them [the DKBA]. We also had to clear landmines for them, so I tried to escape.

What is your opinion of the DKBA?

They don't benefit the villagers.

How many porters were the same age as you?

There were two or three people the same age as me. The others were more than 20 and 30 years old.

How many people escaped with you?

There were two people who escaped with me. We started escaping at Me---. We swam across the river to the Thai side. We didn't bring anything with us when we fled. After we arrived to the Thai side we were brought to A--- and then we slept there for two nights. Before we came to A--- we slept on the Thai side near Me--- for two days.

What is your future plan?

I will stay in Thailand and find work to get money, but now I don't have any work. I dare not go back to Burma because I'm afraid to be arrested again.

Appendix 6

