



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in August 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Papun District in January 2011 and human rights consequences for local communities. It contains updated information concerning Tatmadaw military activities and details the following human rights abuses: coordinated attacks on villages by Tatmadaw and Border Guard troops and the firing of mortars and small arms in civilian areas, resulting in displacement of the civilian population and the closure of two schools; the use of landmines by the Tatmadaw and non-state armed groups; and forced portering for the Tatmadaw and Tatmadaw Border Guards. The report also mentions government plans for a logging venture and the construction of a dam. Moreover, it documents villagers' responses to human rights concerns, including strategic displacement to avoid attacks and forced labour entailing physical security risks to civilians; advance preparation for strategic displacement in the event of Tatmadaw attacks; and seeking the protection of non-state armed groups against Tatmadaw attacks and other human rights threats.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (August 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Papun District, including 12 interviews and 98 photographs.²

Situation in Bwa Der village tract, Bu Tho Township

In January 2011, SPDC [Tatmadaw]³ and [Tatmadaw] Border Guard forces joined together and became active in Day Wah, Kyaw Bpah, Htee Th' Daw Hta and Mar Bpree. They then went to

¹ KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, villagers are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Papun District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Papun District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control," KHRG, August 2010.

³ In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the researcher and informants, and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this report.

Bu Tho Koh to make attacks in the areas of O---, E---, A---, B---, Th---, Gh---, N---, S---, L---, K---, and H--- [villages]. In those village areas, some villagers had to flee in order to escape, and lost their livelihoods.

The units that made the attacks were SPDC Army LID [Light Infantry Division] #11 and Border Guard Battalion #1013. The commander of LID #11, [Infantry] Battalion #120 was Way Kyaw. Border Guard soldiers were led by Maung Chit and Pa Yuh Khay and their [respective] ranks are Company Commander and Deputy Company Commander. These Border Guard soldiers obey and follow orders from the SPDC Army because they get [their] salaries from them [Tatmadaw]. I have no idea how much salary they get.

Based on the attacks on villages, villagers suffered as they had to flee, and two schools were lost and destroyed. One school which was lost was B--- School because the school teachers, students and villagers fled when SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers came, and they did not have that school anymore. I do not know how many students, villagers and households were there. The estimated number of students was over 20, with two school teachers. The school teachers did not dare meet with the soldiers that attacked them. They were afraid that they would have to carry [porter] things and guide the way to KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] soldiers close by, when a battle could then happen after which SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers would punish them.

The second school which was lost was P--- School located in N--- village in the K--- area. In January 2011, SPDC Army LID #11 and Border Guard Battalion #1013 came to Y--- and Gt--- [village areas], west of the Gkoh Loh River, in the eastern Bu Tho Township area, and they shot small and heavy weapons [in the area]. This school's teachers and students could not continue school lessons anymore because the two school teachers had come from a refugee camp. It was not school holidays, but the students were in separate places and if they wanted to study they would have had to do this [study] in the jungle, so they had to give up attending school.

SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers are currently active all the time. Now, L---, S---, N---, and Ny--- villagers are preparing [themselves] to be ready to flee. SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers are [presently] active in one more place, called Haw Mar. It is close to N--- and Ny--- villages. Some villagers from this area have fled already.

As for KNLA soldiers, they currently take security [measures] for us to be able to [sustain our] livelihoods in the areas that SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers are active. They [KNLA soldiers] planted landmines in order to disrupt SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers' movements. It [planting landmines] caused problems for the SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers because they could not advance quickly. KNLA soldiers are active to [ensure] security for the villagers' livelihoods in the area. If villagers did not have any rice to eat, the KNLA soldiers could not keep living [in the area the villagers live].⁴

Their [the Burma government's] first plan is to conduct logging business [in Bwa Der village tract]. The second plan is: they have always had a plan to build a dam at Gkay Doh [and will continue] until it is finished.

SPDC Army and Border Guard soldiers active [in the area] also use many landmines and plant them but do not inform the villagers [of the locations of the mines]. In addition, they order villagers to porter things. They demand money if the villagers do not come to porter things.

⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the complex factors informing local perspectives on the role of non-state armed groups, and landmines, in protecting civilian communities in upland areas of northern Karen State from attacks by Tatmadaw forces, see: *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, KHRG, August 2010, pp.82-115.

The villagers face many problems [due to] these attacks. The problems concern food crises, health and education. These make it very hard to keep on living into the future.

As for the weather, it was abnormal [in early 2011] and people worked their hill fields, but they could not burn them because the rains came. A lot hill fields could not be replanted.

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

- *Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011* (September 2011)
- *Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, April 2011* (September 2011)
- *Papun Incident Reports: November 2010 to January 2011* (August 2011)
- *Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District* (May 2011)
- *Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District* (April 2011)
- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State* (August 2010)
- *Southern Papun District: Abuse and expansion of military control* (August 2010)
- *Central Papun District: Village-level decision-making and strategic displacement* (August 2010)
- *Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control* (August 2010)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

