



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Toungoo Situation Update: October 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2011 by a villager describing a joint attack on a village in Than Daung Township by soldiers from Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion #92 and Light Infantry Battalion #603. During the attack the Tatmadaw soldiers fired mortars into the village, prompting residents to flee into the nearby forest; soldiers then entered and fired small arms inside the village, and looted, damaged, or destroyed food, money and other property belonging to the villagers who had fled. A full account of the attack on W---, based on this and one other situation update written by a different villager, an interview with a resident of W---, and photo documentation is available in the bulletin "Tatmadaw soldiers shell village, attack church and civilian property in Toungoo District," published by KHRG on November 25th 2011. This report also notes that villagers in the area face demands for forced labour for local Tatmadaw units three or four times every year, specifically to serve as porters and guides for Tatmadaw troops and to clear vegetation from Tatmadaw camp perimeters. The villager who wrote this report further noted local concerns related to the provision of health care and education, as well as some of the strategies adopted by villagers in response to human rights concerns, including harvesting crops at night to protect livelihoods during Tatmadaw operations, and using traditional practices to treat illnesses in areas where Tatmadaw forces restrict transport of and trade in medicines.

Situation Update | Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (November 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Toungoo 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 Toungoo District, including three incident reports, two interviews, two other situation updates and 204 photographs.²

Human rights abuses still happening in Daw Pa Ko [Than Daung] Township

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 Toungoo District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

The military government changed to U Thein Sein's USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] government and the [USDP] government took power after six months, this year. This year, at the beginning of October, a new southern commander whose name is *Bo* [officer] Nyo Thaung, came and took responsibility in the area. Under his control are the army [Tatmadaw] units at *Ta Pa Ka* [Southern Command Headquarters], which are IB [Infantry Battalion] #92 and LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #603. These units fought with the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] in Daw Pa Ko [Than Daung] Township in the Htee Tha Saw area, east of W--- village. After that, the SPDC³ soldiers entered W--- village and destroyed things. They took villagers' possessions and money, and they killed villagers' animals and destroyed several things.

Village locations and occupations

W--- village is located in the Ht--- area, east of the Day Loh [River] in Daw Pa Ko [Than Daung] Township. It is far to the northeast of Than Daung Gyi Town, about 15 miles (24 km), and it is also east of the Day Loh River, where the surface of the earth is only mountains. East of the Day Loh, there are over 30 villages, but in the Htee Tha Saw area, there are only nine villages. There are nearly 300 households and the population is between about 1,500 and 1,600. The villages are: (1) Th---, (2) Bp---, (3) K---, (4) M---, (5) A---, (6) R---, (7) W---, (8) P---, and (9) L---⁴.

Most of the people who stay there [in the Htee Tha Saw area] are Geko, Gebar or Bres [Karen] and they are Karen ethnicity. Their religion is Roman Catholic.

The villagers who stay there do agriculture such as [cultivating] betelnut, betel leaves and cardamom; and some plant paddy in hill fields and a few farm [paddy fields] near the river bank. We saw that for their livelihoods, they always have to work hard and they do not have time to rest. The produce that they get, they sell beside the Tha Yin Ker – Htee Tha Saw – Leit Tho vehicle road; some go and sell it in Than Daung Gyi and some sell it in villages beside Than Daung Gyi. If there are no disturbances to their travelling, it takes two or three days. Especially, this year, it was raining a lot and the river became bigger, so for the villagers' travelling, it became a problem for them to cross the river.

Because the villagers have faced problems for many years, the weather was also bad [in 2011], and the SPDC came and destroyed the villagers' agricultural workplaces and disturbed their travels, they do not have enough food now and they have to stay in poverty.

The Htee Tha Saw area is governed by two groups, which are the Burmese government and the KNU [Karen National Union] government. So the people who stay there have to be friends with the [two groups of] governors in a sensible way. The Burmese government does not keep the area as a fighting area, but the area is near a place where the SPDC and KNLA keep fighting, so we see that there is no difference between the fighting area and the area under SPDC control. Whether the SPDC troops have to send rations to their camps or whether their columns are active on patrol, the villagers have to carry loads, guide and clear bushes from around the electricity poles. They have to go at least three or four times a year between Law Pee Tar and the Leit Tho area of Toungoo. If they do not go for forced labour, they have to pay at least 3,000

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 military, 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 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this report, and is therefore retained in this translation.

⁴ The villager who wrote this report also provided a list including GPS coordinates of the nine villages in the Htee Tha Saw area, however, these have been redacted from the report for security.

kyat (US \$3.90)⁵ for each day that they do not go. The villagers have to get a written permission document for travel as the SPDC requires.

SPDC locations

In the Than Daung [Township] area, the camps that SPDC units occupy are Thaw Yin Ker, Htee Tha Saw, Gk'Lay Ta, Yar Ro, Tha Kweh Bploh. Now IB #92 stays and is active there. Above the vehicle road, in the Leit Tho, Daw Mar Der and Bp'Ho areas, LIB #603 stays and is active there under the Southern Command.

Commander Kyaw Min Thu of MOC [Military Operations Command] #2 came and stayed in Leit Tho and manages operations from there. For the area west of Day Loh in the Than Daung Township area, IB #124 takes security, and in eastern Than Daung, around the Day Loh River, the MOC #9 battalion which stays and is active there is LIB #378.

Destruction and loss of villagers' property

On October 12th 2011, a column of soldiers from SPDC IB #92 and LIB #603 was active and fired mortars and small arms in W--- village. They also shelled farms, fields, plantations, orchards and forest. After that they entered W--- village and destroyed villagers' possessions and houses. Villagers whose houses were destroyed were: Saw P---, Saw W---, Saw G--- [see No. 14 in the table below], Saw A---, and Naw T--- [see No. 13 in the table below]. The walls, floors and roofs of their houses were destroyed.

Table A.1: Villagers' cardamom, money and other property stolen or destroyed⁶

#	Owner	Item(s) stolen or damaged	Value
1	Saw B---	Money stolen	500,000 kyat
		One box of clothing and blankets stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
2	Saw W--- (Pastor)	60 viss ⁷ of cardamom stolen	720,000 kyat ⁸
		Money stolen	400,000 kyat
3	Saw D--- (Church Treasurer)	Church finances stolen	1,500,000 kyat
		50 Zinc roofing panels damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
4	Saw R---	40 viss of cardamom stolen	480,000 kyat
		Money stolen	300,000 kyat
		All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
5	Naw N---	20 viss of cardamom stolen	240,000 kyat
		Money stolen	100,000 kyat
6	Saw M---	Money stolen	200,000 kyat
		All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
7	Saw F---	40 viss of cardamom stolen	480,000 kyat
		Money stolen	200,000 kyat
8	Saw Ht---	25 viss of cardamom stolen	300,000 kyat
		Money stolen	200,000 kyat

⁵ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of November 21st 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

⁶ Note that this table is a list of items stolen or destroyed as reported by one villager trained by KHRG who visited W--- village a week after the attack on October 12th and, as such, should not be read as a complete inventory of all items stolen or destroyed. For a table that compiles all the information submitted to KHRG by three different villagers regarding items stolen or destroyed during this incident, see "Tatmadaw soldiers shell village, attack church and civilian property in Toungoo District", KHRG, November 2011.

⁷ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

⁸ According to one of the villagers who submitted information for this report, in Toungoo District one viss of cardamom is valued at approximately 12,000 kyat (US \$15.48).

9	Naw Na---	All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		20 viss of salt (32 kg. / 70.4 lb.) stolen ⁹	<i>Not specified</i>
10	Saw Th---	16 viss of cardamom stolen	192,000 kyat
		Money stolen	50,000 kyat
11	Saw Dt---	15 viss of cardamom stolen	180,000 kyat
12	Naw Hs---	Money stolen	200,000 kyat
13	Naw T---	Money stolen	200,000 kyat
		50 Zinc roofing panels stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		House damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
15	Saw G---	15 Zinc roofing panels damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		House roof damaged by mortar	<i>Not specified</i>
16	Saw Pa---	25 viss of cardamom stolen	300,000 kyat
17	Saw A---	Money stolen	500,000 kyat
28	Village Youth Group	Three goats killed	<i>Not specified</i>
		One pig killed	<i>Not specified</i>
19	Roman Catholic church	Electricity inverter	<i>Not specified</i>
		Battery	<i>Not specified</i>
		Amplifier	<i>Not specified</i>
		VCR	<i>Not specified</i>
Totals			7,242,000 kyat (US \$9,405) ¹⁰

When the SPDC fired heavy weapons and small arms in the village, immediately, the villagers went out of the village without any food or clothes. The SPDC saw this and so did whatever they liked with the things that they [the W--- villagers] had left behind.

At that time it was raining all day and night so the villagers who fled into the forest, especially the children and elderly people, got sick and are [sick] even now. Because the SPDC entered and destroyed [the village] and were active in the area, villagers did not dare to go to their fields, cardamom orchards and betelnut orchards, and they could not work or prepare paddy for a week. Their paddy and fruit got rotten, so that has affected their income and caused problems for their families to be able to eat.

When the SPDC entered and destroyed things, they also destroyed things in the Roman Catholic church including a statue of Mary. They fired at it with a gun so it broke into two or three parts. They broke pictures and materials in the church so it made the Christians very sad.

At that time [in October], the SPDC column was active in the area, so villagers who stayed there did not dare to travel and could not work in suitable weather, so they had to go in fear and were worried. Villagers who stayed in the area did not dare to travel and could not harvest paddy or pick cardamom. It was also the time that the villagers had to harvest their plantations that they had been working on for the year. It was not easy to work at this time, so in the future there will be a food problem for some villagers.

Health care and education

⁹ While the villager who wrote this report said that Naw Na--- lost 20 viss of salt, a local resident of W--- village who fled temporarily to the forest during the October 12th attack said that Naw Na--- lost 20 viss of rice, during an interview conducted with him by another villager trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses. See “Toungoo Interview: Saw F---, October 2011,” KHRG, November 2011. Note also that that interview was conducted in Sgkaw Karen with a third-party interpreter translating questions for the interviewee into Gkebar Karen, which is the dialect spoken by W--- villagers. The villager trained by KHRG who conducted research in the W--- village area and wrote this report does not speak Gkebar Karen.

¹⁰ This amount reflects only the exact values of caches of money and cardamom stolen as reported to KHRG by the villager who wrote this report; the value of other damaged or stolen items, including zinc roofing panels, wooden floors, walls and ceilings, clothing, jewellery, and religious or cultural items are not included in this total.

There is no special hospital or clinic in the W--- village area. The villagers use traditional medicine and a few use medicines from western countries when they bring them secretly. The government does not allow the villagers to bring medicine. If they see that villagers bring medicine, they would severely punish them, so the villagers also do not bring [medicine with them]. If someone is seriously sick, they send them to town.

For education, we saw that all villages have school up to grade four in primary school. Some schools were established by the Burmese government and some were established by the villagers. Most children who finish school in the villages do not continue to study, and help their families instead. There is no one who has finished high school who helps the villagers in that area. All the male and female teachers who teach in the area are from other places.

Table 2: SPDC army camp locations:

No.	SPDC army camps	GPS coordinates
1	Htee Tha Saw	N 19° 14' 35" E 96° 47' 55"
2	K'Ma Dee Bpoh Lee	N 19° 17' 10" E 96° 47' 00"
3	Thaw Yin Ker	N 19° 18' 50" E 96° 43' 55"
4	Dah Roe	N 19° 19' 35" E 96° 47' 15"
5	Yar Doh	N 19° 20' 05" E 96° 48' 50"
6	Gk'Lay Tar	N 19° 22' 10" E 96° 48' 30"

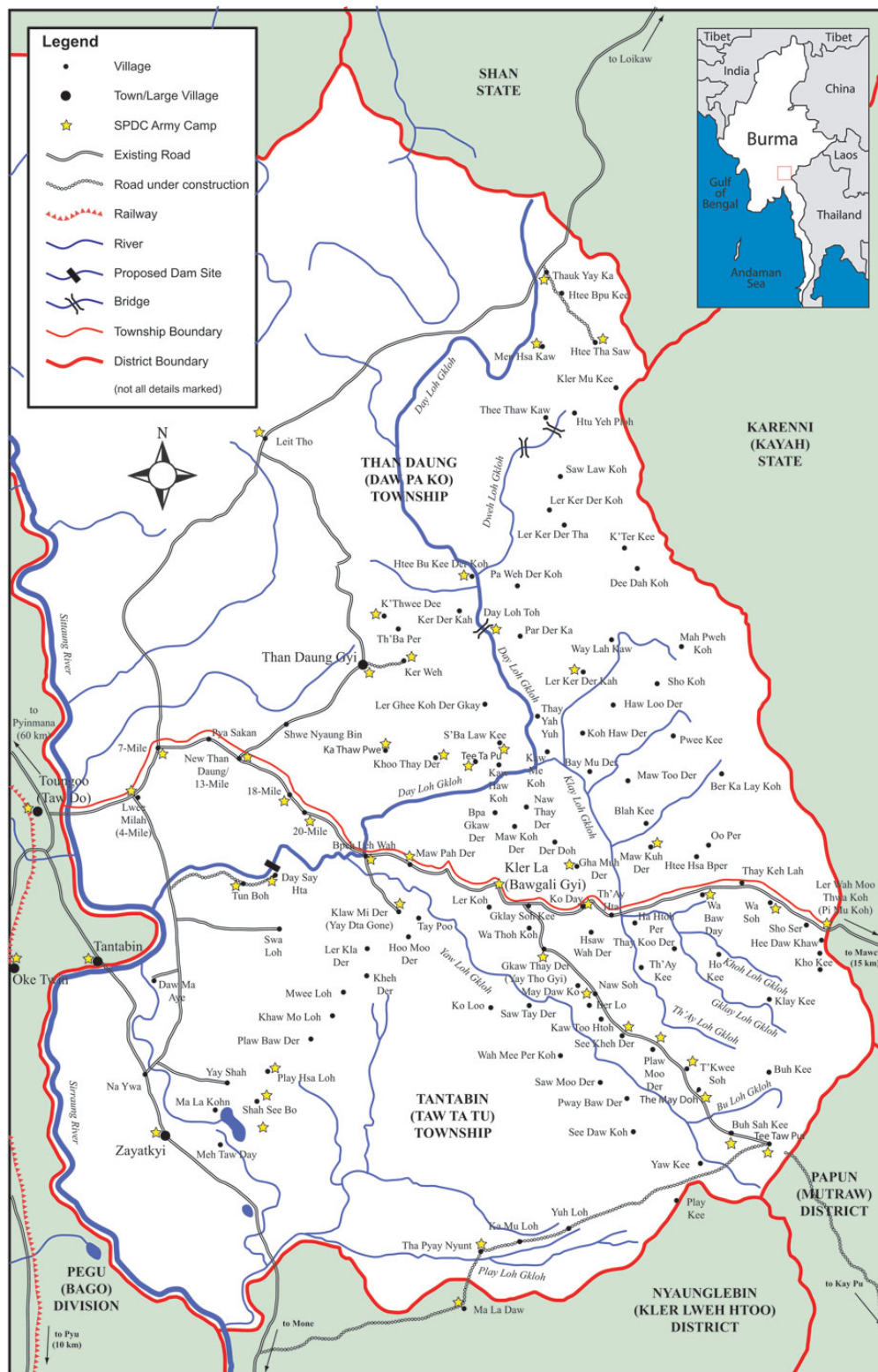
Conclusion

In this area, the SPDC destroyed villagers' occupations and their church so the villagers who stay in that area have to suffer in their bodies and also in their hearts. Previously, the weather was not good and it was dry, so some plantation crops died, while others remained but could not bear fruit, so the villagers could only get a small income from their fruit. If we count in percentages, the income that would remain for the villagers is only 30 or 40 percent of what it should be. In order to get enough food the villagers tried to do hill fields, but it rained early so they could not burn the fields very well and some places that they planted paddy were destroyed by rats and wild pigs, so the villagers could get only half the rice [they expected]. According to the information above, the SPDC was also active in the field areas so the villagers could not harvest their paddy, although some villagers went and harvested at night time. For the villagers to get access to services and food and be able to stay safely, they need help to solve the problems that they face.

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

- "Toungoo Interview: Saw F---, October 2011," (November 2011)
- "Tatmadaw soldiers shell village, attack church and civilian property in Toungoo District," (November 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: May to July 2011," (October 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: April to July 2011," (October 2011)
- "Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011," (July 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: April 2011," (June 2011)
- "Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011," (June 2011)

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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