



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Toungoo Situation Update and Interviews: May 2010 to January 2011

This report from Toungoo District contains the following information submitted by villagers trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions: one situation update submitted in February 2011 describing events occurring in Toungoo District during the period between May 13th 2010 and January 31st 2011; four statements from villagers in Tantabin Township, collected in October 2010; and full transcripts of five interviews conducted in December 2010 in Tantabin and Thandaung townships. The ten villagers who provided information for this report chose to focus on the following issues: recent military activity, including Tatmadaw troop reinforcement and camp reconstruction in January 2011; the killing of villagers; attacks on and burning of villages; attacks on livelihoods, including the burning of cardamom plantations; repeated or prolonged displacement; forced relocation; forced labour, including taxation in lieu of forced labour; forced portering; the use of civilians to sweep landmines; theft and looting; and movement restrictions. This report also documents villagers' responses to these abuses, including: the provision of intentionally incomplete household numbers to the Tatmadaw; and the preparation of hiding sites and food caches in the forest by villagers expecting to use strategic displacement to avoid abuse by Tatmadaw forces. Villagers also express serious concerns regarding food insecurity due to abnormal weather in 2010, rising food prices, the cost and quality of children's education and the use of landmines by the Tatmadaw and non-state armed groups.

Situation Update | Toungoo District (Received by KHRG in February 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 It was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including 19 incident reports, four statements by villagers, five interviews with villagers, 346 photographs and 36 video clips.² This update contains information on Tatmadaw troop reinforcement and camp reconstruction in January 2011, and documents the following human rights abuses: movement restrictions, forced labour, arbitrary taxation in lieu of forced labour and the use of civilians to sweep landmines. It also expresses villagers' concerns regarding food insecurity due to abnormal weather in

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.

2010, rising food prices, the cost and quality of children's education and the use of landmines by the Tatmadaw and non-State armed groups.

Military activities

There is a lot of SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] activity in our Toungoo District. Villagers who live in Toungoo District and Daw Pa Ko [Thandaung] Township are complaining about this issue. Our great-grandparents have had to face offensive attacks by the SPDC Army in the past but this has not happened in our current time.³ Now they will come and be more active in the Toungoo area. Moreover, there is no benefit to civilians from the 2010 election that was held by the SPDC.⁴ Civilians reported that the election just benefits the SPDC military government.

After the election, the SPDC government sent troops and vehicle road construction workers to Toungoo District. They have a plan to construct vehicle roads, set up more camps and put more troops in Toungoo District. Civilians in Toungoo are worried because more SPDC Army troops were sent. In January [2011], they sent more troops from three MOCs⁵: MOC #4, MOC #7 and MOC #9. They also send rations, with 70 trucks. They will come and be more active in the Toungoo area. The SPDC Army closed the road, and didn't let civilians travel while they sent rations. They transported the rations by truck, but they ordered 20 villagers from M--- village to go with them. These 20 villagers had to walk in the front, as landmine sweepers.⁶ If there are landmines and one explodes, it will hit those villagers and their trucks would not be hit. On January 15th 2011, they sent rations to camps at Buh Hsa Kee, Naw Soh, Th' Ay Hta and Gko Day (48-mile). They also force villagers in relocation sites to work for them. Because of the oppression from the SPDC Army, civilians have no time to do their own work.

Civilian concerns

Civilians have to face problems, and worry because the SPDC Army sends more troops and rations. Villagers in relocation sites are complaining because the SPDC Army forces them to go and carry rations. Villages that are close to army camps have to go and do *set tha*⁷ every day for each person. Villagers always have to cut bamboo for rebuilding the [Tatmadaw] army

³ Beginning in November 2005, Tatmadaw troops systematically targeted thousands of civilians, civilian settlements and livelihoods in multi-battalion, coordinated attacks spanning Karen State's northern Nyaunglebin, Toungoo and Papun districts. For more on military operations targeting villagers in Toungoo District during this offensive, see: "Bullets and Bulldozers: The SPDC Offensive continues in Toungoo District," KHRG, February 2007. Since 2008, KHRG has reported incidents of remote shelling or limited-range patrols in areas proximate to camps, in which soldiers have deliberately targeted and shot villagers, and burn houses, food stores, field huts and/or fields, but not necessarily as part of a multi-battalion offensive. For more on military operations targeting villagers in Toungoo District since 2008, see: "Forced Labour, Movement and Trade Restrictions in Toungoo District," KHRG, March 2010; "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

⁴ The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was officially 'dissolved' on March 30th 2011; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term 'SPDC' was used by the villager who submitted this report to KHRG, and is therefore retained in this translation.

⁵ A Military Operations Command (MOC) typically consists of ten battalions. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁶ The use of civilians as human minesweepers on roads in Toungoo District during rations transport by Tatmadaw troops has been documented in previous KHRG reports; see: "Forced Labour, Movement and Trade Restrictions in Toungoo District," KHRG, March 2010. The practice has often been reported to KHRG researchers in the months after the rainy season, between October and January, when Tatmadaw forces use roads to transport troops and supplies, and KNLA forces plant landmines and attack Tatmadaw soldiers along the roads.

⁷ 'Set tha' is a Burmese term for forced labour duty as a messenger stationed at army camps or bases and serving as a go-between to deliver orders from army officers to village heads, but also involving other menial tasks when no messages are in need of delivery. The villager who submitted this report is likely explaining that one or more residents of villages near army camps have to go each day for *set tha*.

camps. Villagers who don't go to porter have to pay to hire people to go in their place.⁸ The SPDC Army will punish people who refuse to go to porter. Villagers have to go to porter with fear because there are landmines on the way. Villagers are more afraid when they go to porter with SPDC soldiers, because they worry that fighting will happen on the way and they will get injured. Civilians have to face many problems because the SPDC is sending more troops and rations.

Food

Food is the most important thing for humans. We will starve and die if there is no food. As we are human beings, we have to eat to be able to survive on the earth. The most common job for civilians in Toungoo is [cultivating] plantations and hill fields, and farming. People plant cardamom, betelnut and other plants.⁹ In 2010, the weather did not go well, so many plantations were destroyed in the Toungoo area. Villagers in Toungoo do not have enough food because of the abnormal weather.¹⁰ Paddy plants were destroyed by insects, rats and wild pigs. It became a big problem for villagers who could not farm their hill fields, because they had to buy rice but their plantations were destroyed so they had no income. Food prices are becoming higher and higher.

In January, the SPDC Army closed the road from Kler Lah to Toungoo city while they transported their rations. There is no more rice to buy for villagers who live in shoot-on-sight areas, because M--- villagers can't go and buy rice in Toungoo City to sell to villagers who live in shoot-on-sight areas. They have to buy other food instead of rice. Also villagers who live in SPDC Army controlled areas have to go cut and carry bamboo and build Tatmadaw camps, so they can't do their own work. It is a big problem for people who have kids. The SPDC always calls meetings with village heads [to demand forced labour].

Education

Education is important and everyone must have it. There was no chance to get education when we look back in the past, in the decades of our great-grandparents. They didn't respect education, so they didn't have education and they couldn't read and write.

Nowadays, education is lacking for children who live in Daw Pa Ko [Thandaung] Township in Toungoo District, when we review it. This situation happened because SPDC Army oppression means it is not easy for villagers to found a school. The SPDC has a purpose to make our Karen people extinct so they don't give us the opportunity for education. Four standards is the highest [available] standard [of education] in Toungoo District. The schools are adminisered by the government but they don't receive enough materials, like books. The government doesn't support fully, so it becomes a problem for our Karen people.

⁸ Villagers have told KHRG that, although some Tatmadaw units demand payments 'in lieu of' the provision of porters, demands for porters are often issued even after payment demands are met. For more on payments made in lieu of forced labour, see "Militarization, Development and Displacement: Conditions for villagers in southern Tenasserim Division," KHRG, March 2011.

⁹ The soil quality and terrain in much of Toungoo District supports only limited rice or paddy farming. For this reason, most households are dependent on income generated from various plantation crops, such as betelnut, betel leaf, cardamom, durian and dog fruit. The loss of a year's crop can have devastating consequences for villagers' long-term food-security; see "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

¹⁰ Irregular weather across eastern Burma in 2010 contributed to large-scale food insecurity for many communities in the region in 2011. For detailed information on the severe food crisis currently threatening at least 8,885 villagers in Lu Thaw Township, Papun District, which lies immediately south of Toungoo, see "Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District," KHRG, May 2011.

Students who graduate four standards have to go and attend school at M--- village. It costs a lot when they go to M---, because they have to live in a dormitory and take extra classes. Some students have to leave school even though they want to study because of money problems. It is very difficult for students who graduate school to get work in the city. Some students have to go back to their own villages and do [rural] livelihoods for work, because the quality of education is poor.

Village Agency

There are two groups of villagers in Daw Pa Ko [Thandaung] Township in Toungoo District. One group lives in the SPDC Army controlled areas, in relocation sites, and another group lives outside of the controlled areas, in shoot-on-sight areas. They are separated into two groups. For villagers in the SPDC Army controlled areas, the SPDC Army always forces them to go and carry rations and do *set tha*. In the M--- area, villagers have to go and clean the army camp compound, cut bamboo and do *set tha* [messenger] every day.

The villages in the M--- area are P---, D---, H---, M---, B--- and N--- villages. The SPDC Army asked them to report the list of households but on the list they didn't report every household to the SPDC Army. For example, if there are 40 households in their village, they just report 30 households. So if the SPDC Army demands villagers to go and work, not as many people need to go because they didn't report all of the households to the SPDC Army.¹¹ M--- villagers who own cars also have agency.¹² They [*action censored*]¹³ so that the SPDC Army is not able to ask them to carry rations with their cars.

Villagers who don't live in SPDC Army controlled areas have many abilities to do something. They are not educated but they have their agency. To avoid attacks from the SPDC Army, they have contact with villagers who live in SPDC Army controlled areas; they have contact in order to be able to know information ahead of time, before the SPDC Army is going to attack their villages, or [attack] the KNLA, or send rations.¹⁴ The villagers prepare food and secret places to stay, and store food before the SPDC Army comes and attacks them. They also have communication with the KNU army [KNLA]. They cooperate with the KNU to be able to know the activities of the SPDC Army ahead of time. This is village agency.

Landmines

A landmine is a dangerous thing for humans. It is something that can kill and destroy people. A lot of landmines are still used in Burma. This is a kind of human rights abuse. Landmines are not good for humans, but they are still being used. We can say that there is no peace in our country because the government uses landmines. At the same time, landmines are also used among our Karen armies. They use landmines because the SPDC government army attacks.

¹¹ Military demands for forced labour and taxation are often proportionate to the village population or the number of households. Underreporting and lying about this number allows villages to reduce the burden of demands and minimize the amount of labour or taxation requested. See *Village agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008, pp. 97 – 99.

¹² 'Agency' is a direct translation of the Karen phrase *tha thay da ba*, which means 'able to do something'.

¹³ This information has been censored in order to allow villagers in Toungoo District to continue to employ this self-protection strategy. For more general information on the ways in which villagers protect themselves from human rights abuses and related threats, see *Village agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarised Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008.

¹⁴ Locally-developed early-warning systems include: sharing information via radio communications; monitoring troop movements and maintaining general states of alertness to signals of attack; posting lookouts; and establishing agreed-upon signals to warn communities of impending attacks. These warning systems have, in at least one instance documented by KHRG, facilitated strategic temporary displacement and prevented injury or death to villagers during a direct attack against civilian settlements. See "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011.

There would be more oppression by the SPDC Army if they [Karen armed groups] didn't use landmines. They use landmines for this reason. Some [KNLA] leaders report that they don't want to use landmines.

Conclusion

The information that we provided above is the current situation that is happening in our Toungoo District about SPDC Army activities and village agency.

Interviews and statements | Toungoo District

The following statements and interviews were collected by villagers in Toungoo District who have been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. They are presented below translated exactly as received, save for minor edits for clarity and security. These testimonies were received along with other information from Toungoo District, including nineteen incident reports, one situation update, 346 photographs and 36 video clips. The nine villagers who gave the testimony below corroborate information on forced portering and movement restrictions described in the situation report provided above, and also describe: the killing of villagers; attacks on and the burning of villages; repeated or prolonged displacement; attacks on livelihoods, including the burning of cardamom plantations; forced relocation; and theft and looting.

Statement | Saw D--- (male, 38), P--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in December 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Occupation: Farming betelnut and cardamom plantations, and hill fields

Marital Status: Married

I have three children. The eldest one is 10 and the youngest one is four years old.

I started serving as a village head in 2010. I took this duty because I myself feel enthusiastic to take this duty. There are 75 households in my village and there are 600 people. We farm betelnut and cardamom plantations in our village. Villagers who don't have enough food have to carry cardamom and betelnut fruit to earn money for their families. This village was located here a hundred years ago but villagers can't stay in their village with stability [continuity] because of the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]. We could not stay in our village when they said not to stay [ordered the village to relocate]. We can come back and do our daily work when they give us permission to come back and stay. The SPDC Army often arrives to our village. They take villagers' pigs and chickens when they enter the village. They don't [pay] money. They order villagers to go and carry things for them. We have to go, and it takes two hours to walk to the place where we have to go. We can't refuse them when they order us. We have to do it when they order us.

There is a school in my village. The school goes up to grade four. The school was built by the government. There are two teachers and they are from P--- village. They are from the government and they were paid 50,000 kyat (US \$60) per month. There are 45 students. Students have to pay 2,500 kyat (US \$3) for school fees in a year.

For healthcare, we send the patients to Toungoo city when are sick, because there is no clinic or health workers in our village. *Gk'lee ta hsa* ['wind disease,' an affliction frequently described

by villagers in eastern Burma, a common symptom of which is immobilizing pain in the joints and bones] is the disease that villagers have to face.

Statement | Naw L--- (female, 36), H--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in December 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Occupation: Farming cardamom and betelnut

Marital Status: Married with four children.

We still have to face oppression from the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] in our village. We had to go and carry rations for the SPDC Army, from S--- army camp to Ht--- army camp. We went with seven people. No one who went was under 18 years old. The eldest was 36 years old. The trip took two days. We didn't receive payment. We had to go and carry rice. We had to carry one sack of rice between two people. The SPDC Army [soldiers] went with us.

Statement | Naw K--- (female, 32), Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in December 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Occupation: Farming cardamom and betelnut

We had to go and carry SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] rations from S--- to Th--- army camp. The trip took two days. We don't know what the battalion number was. We didn't receive payment when we went and carried their rations. There were seven people, including two people who were under 18 years old. [Another] one was 30 years old. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] went with us. We had to bring our own food. We don't want to carry for them anymore in the coming year 2011.

Statement | Saw Ht--- (male, 43), E--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in December 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Occupation: Farming cardamom and betelnut

Marital Status: Married

I have five children. The eldest one is 13 years old and the youngest one is 7 years old.

I have been serving as a village head for five years. My position is chairperson. I have to look after the village. I don't like working as village head but the villagers won't let me go. So I still serve as village head. I started serving as village head at the time when Light Infantry Division [LID] #66 came in 2005 and 2006. LID #66 killed two villagers. This group [unit] of the army [Tatmadaw] told us to leave our village. They said they would clear out the KNU [Karen National Union] within two months. So we villagers had to go and live in other different places. There were 34 households in my village in the past. Now villagers don't go back and live [in their

villages]. They just go back and work on their plantations. We have to face many problems. The SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] burned our plantations and destroyed our property before they left. Villagers came back and worked, and it [time] has passed year by year. We had to go carry things for the SPDC Army to A--- army camp when we lived in our village in the past. Both men and women had to go and carry. They didn't give us money.

There was a school in our village before. In 2005, we hired a teacher from Dt---. We taught the Karen language in the school. We haven't gone back and stayed in our village for four years. So there is no school anymore. Children can't study. In 2010, the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] burned villager's cardamom plantations. Villagers are complaining, and are faced with food problems now.

Interview | Naw Y--- (female, 60), Bp--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in October 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Roman Catholic

Occupation: Farming cardamom and betelnut

Marital Status: Widowed with four children.

What did you do when you lived in your village?

I farmed a hill field.

How many households are in your village?

Fifteen households and there are 70 or 80 people.

Is your village under SPDC [Tatmadaw] control?

No.

So do you always run when the SPDC Army comes?

Yes, we always run.

Are there any armed groups staying in your village?

Yes, there are. It is *Bo Deh Poe's* army [unit].

Are they Karen National Union [KNU] soldiers?

Yes, they are KNU. I called their officer's name because I didn't call them KNU.

Has the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] been to your village?

They always come, and we always have to run.

Did you run when they came?

Yes, they came and were active and we had to run.

What will they do to you if you don't run?

They will kill you if you don't run. They kill you if they see you.

How do they accuse the villagers?

They said we are *Ng'Bpway* ['ringworms,' a derogatory term used by Tatamdaw soldiers to describe KNLA soldiers and their supporters].

Have you seen them kill people during your life?

They killed several people. They shot and killed several people.

Have they killed any of your children?

They killed my son when I came to PI---

For what reason did they kill your son?

They accused him that he is *Ng'Bpway*. My son ran when he saw the SPDC soldiers coming. Yes, the SPDC Army shot him.

How old was he when the SPDC Army killed him?

He was 25 years old. He had two kids, one is five and one is one year old.

Where does your daughter-in-law stay?

In S--- refugee camp in Thailand. They killed one of my sons. I still have three children now, two men and one woman.

Is there any organization from the government that comes and provides support to village?

There is no support.

Do you run when SPDC comes to your village?

Yes, we run. We can't prevent them.

You said you saw them kill several people?

Yes, they killed people.

How do you do your work?

We do it secretly and we can have a little food. We run and run, and have farmed hill fields for many years.

Interview | Saw M--- (male, 17), O--- village, Thandaung Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in October 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen
Religion: Christian
Occupation: Farming cardamom and coffee
Marital Status: Single

How many households are in your village?

There are 80 households. I don't know about the village population.

Are there a school and a hospital [clinic] in your village?

There's no school and no hospital [clinic]. Before there was a school and a hospital but, in 2006, the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] came and burned down the village, and no one stays in the village now. Villagers are hiding in the bushes [in the forest].

How many times did the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] come and burn down your village?

They came and burned it down three times, but I just know about and saw it happen one time in 2006.

Did you run when people burned down your village?

Yes, we ran.

How many armed groups are in your village?

It has the SPDC [Tatmadaw], the Karen [KNLA] and the Karenni [Karenni Army]¹⁵ in the east.

Did the Karenni Army arrive to your village?

They didn't, but our village is located on the border [with Karenni State]. It is close. They sometimes arrive to the village.

What did they do to villagers when they came?

They did nothing.

What about the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]?

The place where we live is not a Tatmadaw-controlled area. So they shoot and kill villagers when they see them, because it is not under their control. They said '*You live in a Karen [KNLA] controlled area, so you are Karen soldiers [supporters].*'

Have you ever seen them kill people?

I have never seen it. I just heard about it. I didn't see it with my own eyes.

Do people come and give support to your village?

Sometimes, they have [come]. They came and gave medicine and mosquito nets.

Where do those organisations come from?

¹⁵ The Karenni Army (KA) is the military branch of the Karenni National Progressive Party.

From the KNU.

What about from the SPDC [Tatmadaw]?

There is no support from the SPDC.

What about support for school?

Karen people come and help. The SPDC helps with nothing.

Do you have a Burmese village head in your village?

No, we all run when the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] comes. No one stays in the village. We come back when we hear the Burmese army has gone back away. We have to worry about them planting landmines when we come back. We have to worry about that.

Do they plant landmines when they come to your village?

Yes, they plant them.

What is your parents' occupation?

They farm a hill field and work in a garden [plantation].

What do they grow?

Coffee, cardamom, areca nut [betelnut] and dog fruit.

Where do you go and sell it?

We go and sell in M--- and in T---.

How much does one viss (1.6 kg / 3.5 lb) of areca nut sell for in your village?

One viss of areca nut is 2,000 kyat (US \$2.42), but there are different kinds. Some are 2,000 kyat for one viss, and some are 3,000 kyat (US \$3.62).

What about coffee?

We also sell [coffee] in viss. One viss is 1,000 kyat (US \$1.21), and 1,500 kyat (US \$1.81) is the most expensive. For cardamom, one viss is 2,000 kyat (US \$2.42). If you take out the seeds [from the cardamom pods], it is 15,000 kyat to 20,000 kyat (US \$18 - 24) for one viss. If you don't take out the seeds, it is 1,200 to 2,000 kyat (US \$1.45 - 2.42). But for this year, I don't know, because I haven't done [sold] it. We go and sell in M--- but if the way to M--- is not open, we go to T---, and if the way to T--- is not open, we go to M---. If no way is open, we have to stay in the village and go around.

How long have you stayed here [in PI---]?

I came this year, in 2010.

Interview | Naw R--- (female, 60), Gk--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in October 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Roman Catholic

Occupation: Farmer

Marital Status: Married with 8 children [one of whom is deceased]

How many households are in your village?

There are over 30 households and the village population is about 200 people, including children and adults.

How many armed groups are there in your village?

There are KNLA soldiers. The SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] lives in M---. If you walk for one or two hours, you will arrive to them.

Does your village stay under SPDC [Tatmadaw] control?

No, we don't. The *Kaw Thoo Lei* [KNU/KNLA] won't allow it if we stay [under Tatmadaw control].

So you run when the SPDC comes?

We have contact with the KNLA and run when we get the news [that Tatmadaw soldiers will come to the village].

You have to run, so what about your work?

We run and we have to sleep in the jungle. You have to do like this. You have to work and run.

Can you get food?

We can, but not quite enough. Sometimes, I cook rice with bamboo shoots. I chop bamboo shoots and dry them and eat them like this with my *poe lee* [sons, daughters and grandchildren]. Sometimes, I cook *dtah gka bpor* [traditional Karen rice porridge] with pumpkin leaves. We don't have fish paste and never see oil.

Do you have to be afraid when you farm your hill field?

You have to farm with fear, and go around and spy [monitor the area]. You have to leave your field behind when the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] comes. You get a little food so you don't have enough food. You could have enough food for the whole year if the Burmese army didn't disturb you. Even if [we were] poor, it would be better. But now, when the Burmese army does like this, it is serious. They burn down your house. Even if you already go and live in the in the forest, they still go and burn down your house.

How many of your houses did the Burmese army burn down?

They burned down the whole village. They burned it down twice. They burned down our big village one time and when we went and stayed in the forest, we built a small church to worship and they burned that down again. We didn't build it up again and we stayed one [family] here and another there [at different locations]. Some came back to Ht---, M--- and the refugee camps. We all went in different directions. Some went back to K--- and Lw---.

Is there any organization that comes and provides support to the villagers?

Yes, they are from a *Kaw Thoo Lei* [KNU] group. Not from the SPDC. If they come and see you, they will kill you.

Do you have a school in your village?

Yes, it is a *Kaw Thoo Lei* school.

What about a clinic?

There's no clinic but there's a *Kaw Thoo Lei* clinic, and we go there.

So you never show yourself to the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]?

No, I don't dare to see them [show myself to them]. My hands and legs shake when I hear gun shots. I can't walk and I have to crawl on my knees. I was shaking and weak. I was afraid even though I didn't see them and just heard the gun shots.

Have you ever seen them shoot people to death?

I saw one [person] die and I went and buried him. I saw it just once, a long time ago. He was my uncle.

Why did they kill your uncle?

My uncle went to guard the road, and he went back to tell us to run when they came. He said '*Run, don't wait, I'll go and look at the situation and come back to tell you.*' If not, we would have met with the Burmese army. He went and the Burmese shot him to death.

How old was he?

He was 22 years old when he was shot. He was single at that time.

Are there any houses still in your village?

A few houses still.

What do they do?

They farm hill fields. But they are alone. There are no children.

You didn't show yourself to the SPDC [Tatmadaw] and ran at the time before when they came?

Yes, we ran. We didn't dare to show ourselves to them at that time and until now. We can't speak their language.

Interview | Saw Sh--- (male, 65), Gy--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in October 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen
Religion: Roman Catholic
Occupation: Farmer
Marital Status: Married

What did you do when you lived in your village?

I farmed a hill field.

How many households are in your village?

There are about 30 households. There are about 60 to 70 villagers, including children and adults.

Did you have school in your village?

Yes, there is a school.

What about a clinic?

No clinic.

How many armed groups are in your village?

The Burmese army [Tatmadaw] visited our village.

What about the *Kaw Thoo Lei* army [KNLA]?

Yes, they sometimes arrive.

Do you meet with the SPDC Army?

Before, we met them.

Did they ask you to do anything?

Yes, they [Tatmadaw soldiers] asked us to go and do [work on] the road. We didn't want to clean up the road, so we fled here.

After you met them, did you have to do what they demanded?

Yes, we had to.

What about carrying things for them?

Yes, we have to go and carry things. We went and carried things for them, and we had to go for a half-day long walk.

Did they pay you a wage?

No, they didn't give [payment].

Do they demand other things, like money?

They ordered us to go and send them chickens and pigs, and we did.

Did they pay you the price?

Yes, they gave the price.

Do you have to give rice?

They don't ask for rice.

Have they ever burned down your village?

Yes, they already burned it down.

Why?

They accused us that we supported the outside army [KNLA].

How many times have they burned down your village?

They burned it down several times. Now, the village has become old [overgrown] because people don't go back and stay there. No one stays there. People have to stay in the forest.

How many years has it been since you came here?

Two years, or almost two years.

Have you ever seen the SPDC Army kill and shoot people during your life?

I have heard [about it] but I haven't seen it.

Interview | Naw Ky--- (female, 40), L--- village, Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (Interviewed in October 2010)

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Roman Catholic

Occupation: Farmer

Marital Status: Married

How many households are in your village?

There are only 12 households and there are about 60 to 70 villagers.

Does your village stay under SPDC [Tatmadaw] control?

No, our village is not under [Tatmadaw] control. We always run when they come.

What will happen if you don't run?

They will kill you if they see you. They will torture you and kill you.

Why do they do that?

They treat us all as their enemy.

How many armed groups are there? Just the Tatmadaw?

There is the KNU army [the KNLA].

So you don't need to go and carry thing for them?

We run when we hear their news.

During your life, have you ever seen them [Tatmadaw soldiers] kill people?

I didn't see it with my eyes, but I heard they shot [people] to death outside [in other areas].

Did you know why they did that?

They accused that group of people as their enemy.

Do they keep all villagers as their enemy?

Yes, they keep all villagers as their enemy.

Is there any organisation from the government providing support to villagers?

Just one group from the KNU provides support.

What did they support?

They supported us with a little money, but not much.

Do you have a school in your village?

No school. We have to run and stay in the forest.

[Is there] Any clinic?

No clinic.

So you can't stop the Tatmadaw soldiers when they come?

We can't stop them. We just hear their news [hear news that they are active nearby], and we run away from the village.

So how do you work?

We just have to listen [monitor the situation]. If they are far from us, we go back and do our work. We don't dare to go back if they are close to us.

Did they do that until now?

My village has been destroyed over and over again since the time when I was a child, until now.

Do people still live there?

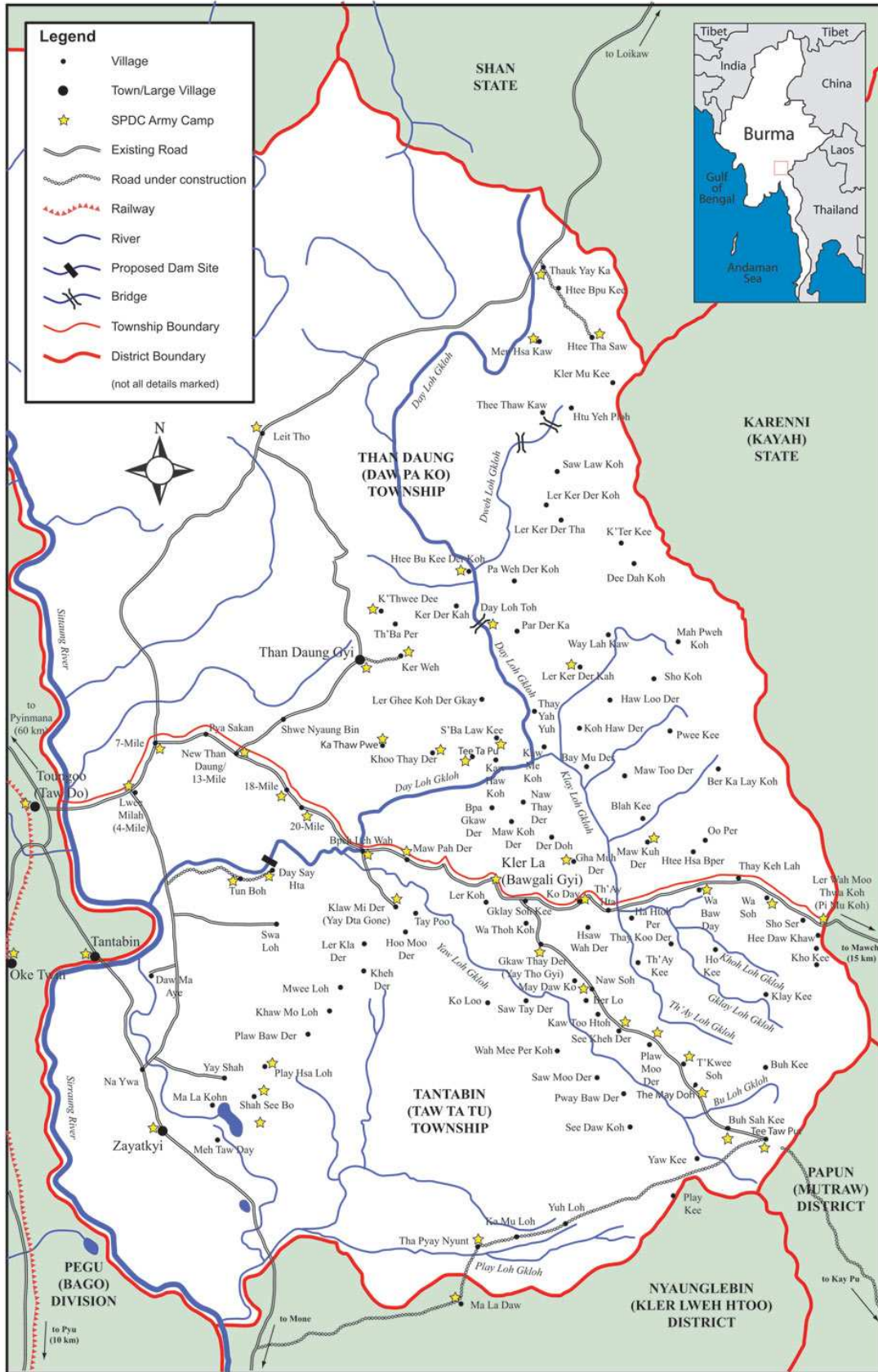
People stay under the trees and bamboo. They stay around, close to the village, but not in the village.

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

- *Villagers injured by landmines, assisted by neighbours in southern Toungoo* (October 2010)
- *Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District* (May 2010)
- *Forced labour, Movement and Trade Restrictions in Toungoo District* (March 2010)
- *Patrols, movement restrictions and forced labour in Toungoo District* (September 2009)
- *Rural development and displacement: SPDC abuses in Toungoo District* (January 2009)
- *Attacks, killings and the food crisis in Toungoo District* (August 2008)
- *Attacks, forced labour and restrictions in Toungoo District* (July 2008)
- *SPDC spies and the campaign to control Toungoo District* (March 2008)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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