



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Doplaya Interview: Saw L---, June 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during June 2011 in T--- village, Kya In Township, Doplaya District by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The villager interviewed 17-year-old T--- villager, Saw N---, who described an incident in which the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #--- fired mortar rounds towards T--- village, in response to an attack by Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) #107 on their camp near H--- village. Saw N--- and two other T--- villagers were injured by two shells, with one villager, Kyaw M---, later dying as a result of his injuries. Saw N--- highlighted other issues that arose as a consequence of the attack, particularly concerning the cost of healthcare as his relatives had to borrow money to ensure that he received hospital treatment for his injuries. Demands for food from the Tatmadaw were also cited, as well as arbitrary taxation demands levied by armed groups, and taxes on houses and land. Villagers also have to pay the schoolteachers' salaries which comprise 40 baskets of rice paddy shared between the villagers and 4,000 baht (US \$133.33) per household each year.

Interview | Saw N--- (male, 17), T--- village, Kya In Township, Doplaya District (August 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a villager in Doplaya District and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Doplaya District, including two other interviews, one situation update and 56 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Single

How many religions do you have in your village?

¹KHRG 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 conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

²In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Doplaya District can be found in the Report, "Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Doplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012.

There are Buddhists and Christians.

What do your parents do?

My parents do nothing. We all [the whole family] stay with my aunt.

Do your parents have cows, buffalos and paddy fields?

No, they don't, but we have a betelnut³ field.

How many betelnuts do you get from the betelnut field per year?

I think we get 10,000 or 20,000 betelnuts per year.

When did it [the incident described below] happen?

It happened on June 7th 2011.

Have you ever been a soldier with the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army], the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army], or the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]⁴?

No, I have never been a soldier in any armed group.

Can you explain how the incident happened?

They [DKBA #107] attacked the SPDC Army [LIB #---] camp.

Where is the SPDC Army camp? Is it in the village or outside the village?

The SPDC Army camp is outside the village.

Beside which village?

The upper part of H--- village.

How long does it take to travel between your village and H--- [village] on foot?

On foot, it takes half an hour.

Which armed group went to attack the SPDC Army camp?

The DKBA went to attack the Tatmadaw camp.

How did you get hit?

³In Burmese, "betelnut" and "betel leaf" are referred to as "konywet" and "konthih," as if they are from the same plant. The Burmese names are also commonly used by Karen language speakers. "Betel nut" is the seed from an Areca Palm tree, areca catechu; "Betel leaf" is the leaf of the Piper betel vine, belonging to the piperaceae family. See "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

⁴In 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 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who conducted this interview and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

When the DKBA attacked the SPDC Army camp I was in my village.

How did you get hit when you were in the village?

After the DKBA attacked the SPDC Army camp, they ran away. But, when the SPDC fired back the shells hit our village [T---].

Was it the SPDC Army?

Yes, it was.

Were they [the DKBA] Na Kha Mway's⁵ soldiers?

Yes, they were Na Kha Mway's soldiers.

How far from your house did the shells fall?

Not that far. It was just the distance from the entrance of the village to the end of the village.

How did you feel when you were hit?

I didn't feel anything. I could still walk.

Did you feel disappointed when you were hit?

No, I didn't feel anything.

Did anyone else in your village get hit?

No one else had been hit before I was hit.

How many times did they fire at the village?

They only fired once [at one time].

I heard that three people were injured, including you. Were they T--- villagers?

Yes, two villagers were hit later. Both of them are from T--- village, the same as me.

⁵Na Kha Mway (real name real name Saw Lah Pwe) left the KNU/KNLA in 1997 and became the commander of DKBA Battalion #907; in 2007 he was promoted to head four DKBA battalions (#901, #906, #907 and a security battalion) as the commander of the *Klo Htoo Baw* [Golden Drum] Tactical Command. In May 2009 this unit was reconfigured as DKBA Brigade #5, with Na Kha Mway commanding Battalions #901, 905, 906, 907 and 909; Brigade #5 was active in the Kya-In Seik Kyi, Kawkareik and Myawaddy areas of Dooplaya and Pa'an districts. In September 2011, it was reported that remaining DKBA forces were to be reconfigured into two tactical commands, *Klo Htoo Wah* and *Klo Htoo Lah*, and that Na Kha Mway would be the senior commander of these forces. Most recently, in early November 2011, Brigade #5 signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government in which demands for its forces to transform into Border Guard units have been dropped, and the brigade has moved to reestablish its headquarters at Wah Lay, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (Sone Seen Myaing, Myawaddy Township); see: "DKBA to accelerate military tactics," *The Irrawaddy*, September 8th 2011; and "DKBA Brigade 5 Reaches Ceasefire with Naypyidaw," *The Irrawaddy*, November 4th 2011. For more on the origins of the current conflict and the transformation of DKBA troops into Border Guard battalions, see: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, November 2010.

Do you know their names?

Yes, I know [their names]. One of them is *Mu Ghar* [Aunt] W---, and also her nephew called Kyaw M---.

Is their house close to your house?

There is just a river between my house and her house.

Did anybody die?

Yes, the youngest person [Kyaw M---] died, but he died in Umphang [in Thailand].

How did you feel? Not only were you injured but your relatives were also hit?

I felt unhappy, but I don't know how to explain it.

Have you been to school?

Yes, I went to school in the past.

How about now?

No, not anymore.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

I have one older sister and one younger sister. There are three siblings, including me.

What hospital did you go to?

I went to the hospital at Noh Po camp [refugee camp in Thailand].

Who gave you the money to go to Noh Po camp?

My aunt and uncle.

Does your aunt have any problems with money as a consequence of sending you to hospital?

Yes, because we had to borrow money from other people.

How many shells did they [the Tatmadaw] fire?

They fired two shells into the village and one above [another T--- villager] Naw P---'s mother's house in the betelnut field.

Were your aunt and nephew injured by the same mortar shell?

No, they were injured by another mortar shell, not the same one that I was injured by.

How do the people in your village make a living?

I think half of the villagers are hill field farmers and the other half are flat field farmers.

Did any other organisations help you with the hospital costs?

No, only my parents and my relatives helped me with the hospital costs.

Have you ever been to Noh Po camp before you went to the hospital?

No, I have never been to Noh Po camp before.

Did you have enough food when you were in Noh Po camp?

Yes, I had enough food.

Did anybody come and say bad things to you or threaten you [when you were in hospital]?

No, no one did that.

Did you have good security when you were in hospital?

No, I didn't have good security when I first came to Noh Po camp hospital.

Do you still not have good security [in the village]?

Yes, the security situation still isn't that good.

What kind of security don't you have?

I don't know that either. I don't know how to explain this because I have never faced it before.

Did the nurses in the camp give you enough medicine, take good care of you, and give you a [secure] place to live in the hospital?

Yes, they took very good care of me.

Did they [the nurses] also give you enough food?

Yes, they gave me enough food.

Did they also give you a nice bed and a mosquito net?

Yes, they gave me a mosquito net and a bed in the hospital.

Do you know any armed groups that are against the SPDC Army? Do you know any KNLA soldiers? Do you know the SPDC Army?

I don't know. I know only *pwa ta kler* [other people from outside his village].

Which *pwa ta kler*? I don't know who you mean.

I don't know that [where they are from] either. I only know DKBA soldiers.

Have you ever seen KNLA soldiers?

Yes, I have seen the people that some call [KNLA] soldiers.

Do you know any Border Guard soldiers?

What are Border Guard soldiers?

Have you ever seen the Karen Peace Force?

I know the Karen Peace Force soldiers.

Do you know the *P'yaw Thu* [Burmese soldiers]?

Yes, I know them. I have seen the *P'yaw Thu*.

Does the SPDC Army come to T--- Village?

No, they don't come now, but in the past they did.

Did they loot things and make demands when they came to your village?

No, they didn't loot, they asked [for things] and we gave them to them.

What kind of food did they ask for?

They just asked for salt, oil and chilli.

Who gave the SPDC Army the things they demanded, the villagers or the village head?

The village head gave it to them.

Do the villagers have to pay any tax?

Yes, we have to pay tax.

What kind of tax do the villagers have to pay?

We have to pay taxes for the farms, fields and plantations.

How do they [the armed groups] arrange the taxes? Do they tax according to each acre or each allotment?

They have separated the tax paid to them, the armed groups, and the other taxes [paid to them] for houses and land.

How about the SPDC Army?

I don't know about them.

Do you have any [*names of organisations censored for security*] offices in your village?

Yes, we have both [*names of organisations censored for security*] offices.

Do you have *ka la tha mi*, *ka la thar* [young people]?

Yes, we have *ka la tha mi*, *ka la thar*.

You said that villagers follow two religions in your village; one is Christianity and the other is Buddhism. Do they [the villagers] work together?

Yes, they do work together. When the Christian people have a celebration the Buddhist people go to help them, and when the Buddhist people have a celebration the Christian people also go to help them.

Do you have a school in your village?

Yes, we have a school in my village. It has four grades.

Are the teachers from your village or another village?

One teacher is from my village and the other one is from outside.

Do you know how many students there are?

I don't know.

Do *[names of organisations censored for security]* provide the school books?

The support comes more from the KNU [Karen National Union].

Who pays the teachers' salaries?

The villagers pay the teachers' salaries.

How much do you pay each teacher per year?

We pay one teacher 40 baskets (836 kg. / 1843.2 lb.) of paddy. We pay two teachers 80 baskets (1672 kg. / 3686.4 lb.) of paddy.

Do the villagers also have to pay them money?

Yes, the last time they collected 4,000 baht (US \$133.33) per household.

Do all the villagers have to pay?

Yes they all have to pay, even if their children don't go to school.

Do any organisations come and visit your village?

Yes, but I have only seen the KNU.

You have only seen the KNU? Have you seen any other organizations?

Yes, I sometimes see some other organisations.

Do you know their names?

No, I don't know their names.

Do you want to say anything else?

No, I don't know what to say.

How do you feel about you and your relatives getting injured?

I don't know how I feel.

Do you have good security in your village? You said that it only takes 30 minutes [to travel between] your village and the SPDC Army camp?

I don't know how to explain this.

Is that okay if I report the information that you have given me?

Yes, you can.

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

- "Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Dooplaya District, December 2011," (March 2012)
- "Incident Report: Dooplaya District, August 2011," (March 2012)
- "Incident Report: Arbitrary detention and violent abuse in Dooplaya District, December 2011," (March 2012)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: August to October 2011," (March 2012)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw Ca---, September 2011," (February 2012)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: August 2011 to September 2011," (December 2011)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: August 2011," (October 2011)

