



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Pa'an Interview: Saw T---, September 2011**

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*This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during September 2011 in Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed Saw T---, a 20-year-old villager from Eg--- village, who described an incident of forced labour in which over 50 villagers from the villages of Eg--- and P--- were ordered by the Border Guard to clear vegetation from rubber plantations in M--- village on September 18<sup>th</sup>. Saw T--- explained that each household was assigned an area of land to clear that was too large to finish within one day, meaning that villagers will be required to take further time away from their own work in order to fulfil the demand. Small children and the elderly were also stated to have participated in the work. Villagers were required to bring their own tools and most of their food supplies, and are not reported to have received any payment.*

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**Interview | Saw T---, (male, 20), Eg--- village, Lu Pleh Township, Pa'an District (September 2011)**

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*The following interview was conducted by a community member in Pa'an District, and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received along with other information from Pa'an District, including two other interviews, one situation update, and 82 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Marital Status:** Single

**Where did you have to go yesterday?**

I had to go to the rubber plantations.

**Where are the rubber plantations?**

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<sup>1</sup>KHRG trains community members 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, community members 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.

<sup>2</sup>In 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 Pa'an District can be found in the Report, "Pa'an Interview: Saw Ng---, March 2012," KHRG, May 2012.

In M--- [village].

**How many people went there?**

34 people went.

**From which village?**

From Eg--- village.<sup>3</sup>

**When did you leave?**

At 7:00 am.

**Did the 34 people include men and women?**

Yes, it included men and women. Over 20 more people came from P--- village.

**How many people were there all together?**

There were over 50 people.

**What is the distance [to the rubber plantation]?**

We arrived there at 10:00 am.

**Can you tell me what size of area they [the Border Guard soldiers] gave you to work on?**

They gave us a very large place.

**Were you able to cut the whole area in one day?**

No, a lot remained. It took another day.

**How much work did they give you per household?**

They gave us one area per household. We couldn't finish the area we were assigned in one day.

**How many assigned areas [in the plantation] were finished in one day?**

No area was finished in one day.

**Will you have to go again in the future?**

Yes.

**When do you think you will have to go again?**

It will take a few days. We can't go right now.

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<sup>3</sup>This incident is also referred to in one as-yet-unpublished situation update that KHRG currently has on file, which was received at the same time as this interview.

**How many people do you think will need to go again?**

It would be better if a lot of people go because then we can finish it quickly.

**Did you see any of the people who forced you to do the work?**

I saw only Hpah Kaw Kheh [a member of the Border Guard].

**Do you know whose rubber plantation it is?**

I don't know. It might belong to [Border Guard officers] Ton Hen, Hpah Nwee, or Bo [Officer] Kya Aye. It might belong to those people.

**Are they with the Border Guard?**

Yes, they are with the Border Guard.

**Did they ask their people [soldiers] to do it for them?**

Yes, their people waited and monitored the villagers while the villagers were forced to work for them.

**Do you know how many rubber plantations there were?**

There might be 20 or 30 rubber plantations.

**Could you take a rest when you were cutting [the vegetation]?**

Yes, we took a rest once.

**When did you take a rest?**

We took a rest at midday.

**How about food?**

We had nothing. We just had pounded chillies with fried rice.

**Did the Border Guard give you any food?**

No, they gave us nothing.

**So, did you have to bring it yourselves?**

Yes, but they brought us one pot of rice.

**What did you bring?**

Some [villagers] brought pounded chillies, some dried fish, and some dried bamboo shoots. There were many different kinds of food.

**What did you bring to cut [the vegetation]?**

Each of us brought a knife and a *kheh kay pa htaw* [a long knife used for clearing vegetation].

**How about any other tools?**

We brought knife sheaths and *koh maw* [bamboo hats].

**Did you have to clear the rubber plantations yesterday?**

Yes, we had to clear the rubber plantations.

**How many people did you go with?**

Over 30 people went [from Eg--- village].

**Over thirty people came from which village?**

Eg--- [village].

**Where did you have to go?**

We went to M---.

**What did you bring with you for clearing things [bushes]?**

We brought knives, *kheh kay pa htaw*, and bent knives.

**How many villages had to go?**

There were two villages, including P---.

**What was the other village?**

P---.

**How many people from P--- had to go?**

There were 22 people.

**Did you have to go in the morning or evening?**

We went there in the morning and we arrived at 10:00 am.

**10:00 am?**

Yes.

**When you arrived there, how did the people [Border Guard soldiers] organize the place where you were to work? How did people order you to clear things?**

We had to do one area.

**Was the place that you had to clear wide?**

It was quite a wide place.

**How wide was it?**

I have no idea. It was on the other side of the hill.

**Was it as wide as a wide flat field?**

It was as wide as people's flat fields.

**Did you finish clearing it within one day?**

It wasn't finished; there was a lot left.

**Whose rubber plantation was it?**

I don't know. Maybe, it was [Border Guard Officer] Hpah Nwee's.

**Who is that?**

They are in the Border Guard.

**Are any Burmese people [Tatmadaw soldiers] involved with them?**

Maybe, but I have no idea.

**When you were clearing things, did you see any of their soldiers take sentry duty?**

Only one soldier was there.

**Did he have a gun with him?**

Yes, he had a gun with him. I don't remember what his name was. I didn't remember what people called him.

**Did they let you take a rest while you were clearing things?**

We took a rest once.

**What time did you take a rest?**

We took a rest during midday.

**Then, did you continue to cut things?**

We kept cutting things and we came back to eat rice at 1:00 pm.

**You cut things for the whole day, so how much of the rubber plantations were you able to clear?**

I don't know about that.

**You were almost finished though?**

If ten people work to clear it [again] for a half day, they might still not finish it.

**Did you clear half of it?**

[We finished clearing] about two-thirds of it.

**You finished two-thirds?**

Yes.

**What time did you come back at?**

We came back at 3:00 pm.

**What time did you arrive home at?**

At 6:00 pm.

**At nightfall?**

At nightfall.

**Do you think people will still have to go [to clear the plantations]?**

People still have to go because there is a very wide space left [to be cleared].

**In that case, how many people will have to go?**

About ten people or more will have to go.

**Only people from your village?**

Yes, only people from my village.

**Did both females and males go there?**

All had to go, including married women and children.

**Including small children?**

Yes.

**How about old people?**

It included a lot of old people, married women and men.

Further background on the current situation in Pa'an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Ng---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Ht---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Hn---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: T'Nay Hsah Township, September 2011," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: Nabu Township, September 2011 to January 2012," (May 2012)
- "Villagers used as human shields in Pa'an District, October 2011," (March 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview Transcript: Naw D---, November 2011," (March 2012)

