



**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 Hs---, April 2012**

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*This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during April 2012 by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed Hs---, a 63-year-old village tract head from T'Nay Hsah Township, Pa'an District who described the planting of landmines by Border Guard soldiers near villagers' plantations, houses and wells, and demands for villagers to serve as Border Guard soldiers. Such abuses are also described in the report, *Uncertain Ground: Landmines in eastern Burma*, published by KHRG on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012. It also describes how the failure of armed groups to systematically remove landmines, coupled with neglecting to inform villagers of the location of all existing landmines, serves to place restrictions on where villagers can hunt, look for food, and graze their livestock, which contributes to food insecurity in the area. The interviewee also described how villagers have sought to mitigate aspects of the concerns described above, such as tying up livestock to prevent them from grazing in mined areas and not complying with demands to send villagers to serve as Border Guard soldiers.*

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### **Interview | Saw Hs---, (male, 63), W--- village, T' Nay Hsah Township, Pa'an District (April 2012)**

*The following interview was conducted by a community member in Pa'an District. It 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 incident reports, 44 other interviews and 683 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Position:** Village Tract head

**How do people address you?**

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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 T---, September 2011," June 2012.

People called me Hs---.

**How old are you?**

I'm 63 years old.

**Where do you live?**

I live in W--- village.

**What are the problems in the village as a village tract head?**

The problem is that some of the villagers don't get enough food. I want them to get enough food. Because they don't get enough food, they have to work as a hired person by other people. Some villagers don't even have flat field.

**What is the problem for the villagers who have flat field but still have to work for others?**

The problem is that people came and planted landmines here. They planted them on the fields, and beside the well and beside the houses.

**Who planted the landmines?**

The Border Guard planted them. They planted them besides our flat fields and our houses.

**Which Border Guard is it?**

It was Dee Kyaw Naw's soldiers. Dee Kyaw Naw is the highest ranking out of those soldiers who come here.

**What is his rank?**

I'm also not sure about his rank. I think he is the Battalion commander at *Taung Thone Lone* [Three Mountains camp].

**Didn't you tell them not to plant them beside your flat fields and houses?**

We told them, but they said they also dug out their landmines but that others didn't dig them out yet. So, we are not sure whose landmines they were. They planted them and other [armed groups] also planted them.

**Were they also afraid to take out their landmines that they have planted?**

Yes. They knew that the other army didn't take them out so, they don't feel good about this. So, they just took out only some of the landmines that they planted.

**So, do you think will the landmines hit the cows and buffalos later?**

Yes, for sure, in this situation, it'll definitely hit the cows and buffalos.

**How can it hit your cows and buffalos because I saw you tie them up?**

That's why we have to tie up our cows and buffalos. Otherwise they will get hit by the landmines. We have to worry for the cows and buffalo that are untied.

**Did they warn you not to go to those places where landmines are planted?**

They warned us. They told me to tell the villagers and I warned the villagers. I told them even though you see they dig out their landmines; don't be so happy because they just dug out some of them. We heard that they planted a lot. But, as villagers we want to go to the forest for hunting or finding vegetables to eat. So, it hit them.

**What do you think of their planting of landmines? Do you think they planted them for their enemy or for the villagers?**

In my opinion, I don't think they planted them for their enemy but I think they planted them for the villagers.

**I heard that the villagers are a bit naughty?**

Yes, villagers from Noh Kay are a bit naughty. They also lie to me. When you ask them something, they won't tell you.

**Did you see anything that Border Guard does to support you?**

They also asked us about this. And we answered that, because of them we have schools, the roads are repaired now and we also have a monastery. We just said what they wanted to hear.

**Did they really build the school and the monastery or did the villagers build it?**

The villagers built it. The DKBA [Border Guard]<sup>3</sup> soldiers also helped us.

**Did they help with their strength or with money?**

They gave us money.

**Where did [Border Guard] Boh [Officer] K'Doh get the money?**

I also don't know about that. They planted the plantation and asked the villagers to go and help so I think they will get the money from their plantation.

**I heard that Boh K' Doh recruits so many soldiers and now he has become a rich man, so is it true?**

I don't think he has become rich because of this reason. Because we give the recruitment fees to the soldiers who are being recruited. We don't give it to him.

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<sup>3</sup>Note that many Karen villagers continue to refer to current Border Guard configurations as DKBA, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, despite the fact most DKBA units have now been transformed into Border Guard units. While Tatmadaw and DKBA units have for years operated together, this operational hierarchy became formalised with the DKBA's transformation into a 'Border Guard Force' under control of the Tatmadaw and containing a fixed number quota of Tatmadaw officers. This transformation dates to at least May 2009, when commanding officers stated in high-level meeting of Tatmadaw and DKBA officers that the DKBA would transform itself into a 'Border Guard Force.' Leaked minutes from the May 2009 meeting are retained by KHRG on file. Ceremonies attended by Tatmadaw commanders officially announced the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard Forces in September 2010; see, for example: "Border Guard Forces of South-East Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2010.

**Did you have to give him the fees?**

No, we just have to give the soldiers who we hire [to go as recruits].

**Does the Border Guard also recruit their soldiers?**

No, they don't. Actually, they asked us once, but we didn't give him any villagers.

**Do you think the KNU [KNLA] ever benefits you, the villagers?**

Yes, we have benefited. Sometimes, we also send the food to them secretly. Boh K'Doh also ordered us once, but we didn't give him any. So, they told us, if you want to give food to the KNU [KNLA], give it when [the Border Guard] don't see. If they see us giving the food to the KNLA, we will not be able to live here anymore.

**So, you also have to be afraid when you send the food to KNLA?**

Yes, we are afraid and we have to give them it secretly.

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

- "Pa'an Interview: Saw T---, September 2011," (June 2012)
- "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'NayHsah 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)

