



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

September 5 2012 / KHRG #2012-B73

Papun Interview: Saw E---, June 2012

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during June 2012 in Bu Tho Township, Papun District by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed Saw E---, a 36 year old married father of six, security leader from T--- IDP camp, Bu Tho Township, Papun District who described the incident regarding a shooting of a villager by Tatmadaw soldiers from IB [Infantry Battalion] #19. This incident is also described in one as of yet unpublished KHRG report and in Papun Interview: Saw K---, June 2012, published on July 20th 2012. Saw E--- describes further information on the events after surrounding the killing, from his perspective of someone who had gone to clear the villager's body from the scene. He mentions what the impact has been to villagers' opinion on the prevailing ceasefire and the dire situation regarding villagers' ability to find food to eat and sell, given the dangerous circumstances in which they live. Also mentioned is the situation for Saw N--'s wife and children, he explains how, after the death of her husband, mental health problems which she once suffered from have returned, making her and her children's lives very difficult.

Interview | Saw E---, (male, 36), T--- village, Bu Tho Township, Papun District (June 2012)

The following interview was conducted by a community member in Papun 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 Papun District, including one other interview and 11 photographs.²

¹ 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.

² 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 Papun District can be found in the report, Papun Interview: Saw N---, January 2012," (July 2012)

Marital Status: Married

Position: Security leader in T--- IDP [internally displaced persons] camp

How many children do you have?

I have six children.

How old is the eldest one?

15.

How about the youngest one?

The youngest one is ten months old.

In the past, where did you live?

I lived in the 3rd Brigade [Nyaunglebin District], Ler Doh village.

Ler Doh village?

Yes, Ler Doh village.

In which village tract is it located?

There is no village tract. It is in Pegu Division.

And now, you live in?

I live in T--- village.

In which village tract is T--- refugee camp [IDP] located?

This is located in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District [Papun District]. Some parts are in Pwah Heh village tract and some parts are in Hkaw Pu village tract.

How about you?

I am from Hkaw Pu village tract.

Have you been here for a long time?

I started living here in 2007.



The photo, taken on July 24th 2012, shows Saw E--- standing outside a dwelling in T--- camp, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. Saw E--- described events surrounding the indiscriminate killing of a villager called Saw N--- while on a truffle collecting expedition. Saw E--- is the security leader of T--- camp that was alerted of the incident and went to investigate soon after the incident had taken place. .

Can you tell us about either your experience in, or why you left, Ler Doh?

At first, starting from 1984, the military government's actions towards civilians were not right. Our area was recognized by the government as a black area,³ an area for operation command,⁴ they [Tatmadaw] asked for many porters and while we were attending school, our father was arrested and told to act as porter. After two years, he came back because he had not lost his life. At that time, we realised that we needed to do something; we had to act against the military government in order to cause its collapse. So, we started to understand that we needed to hold arms [work together] and fight against the government, so we joined the revolution and we held arms [worked together].

What I want to know about, are the difficulties that you faced while you were in Ler Doh and why you came here? Was it because of fighting or was it because they frightened you?

Yes. At that time, I was 15-16 years old. The thing that I was afraid of most was when I saw what my father had suffered; therefore, even though I lived in the village, I was afraid. When I attended school, as they called many porters, I was afraid that they would call me as a porter so I prepared myself to escape.

Therefore, you fled here to escape. In which year was it?

It was between 1986 and 1987.

When you fled, did you flee to T--- IDP camp at once or were there any other places that you fled to before coming here?

³ Tatmadaw expert Maung Aung Myoe explains that the three-phased Tatmadaw counter-insurgency plan, developed in the 1960s, designates a territory as black, brown or white according to the extent of non-state armed group (NSAG) activity. Phase one transforms a 'black area' into a 'brown area', meaning it is transformed from an area controlled by NSAGs where the Tatmadaw operates, to a Tatmadaw controlled area where NSAGs operate. The second phase is to transform the area from a 'brown area' into a 'white area,' where the area is cleared of insurgent activities. The final phase is to transform a white area into a 'hard-core area', during which more organizational works are necessary and the government forms pro-government military units for overall national defense. See Maung Aung Myo, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces since 1948*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009, p. 31-32; see also *Neither Friend Nor Foe: Myanmar's Relations with Thailand since 1988*, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Nanyang Technological University, 2002, p.71.

⁴ The Tatmadaw set up operation commands in order to consolidate control over designated "black areas".

I joined the KNDO [Karen National Defence Organisation]⁵ in 3rd Brigade. Then, in 1991, the leader sent us to *Law Hkeh Tha* [head quarter] and I worked in the General Office Command (GOC) *Tha Wa Ka* [Military head quarter]. After I was injured, I asked permission to retire, but they didn't give me permission to do so. So, as I have strength in my heart [still alive], I took responsibility as a T--- security guard according to the *Tha Wa Ka* leader who commanded me to do so.

Have you been working as the security guard leader for a long time?

I worked [as a security guard leader] in 2007. In 2004, I started to work as the assistant security guard leader, and then, the security guard leader had other work, so I had to take his place.

The main thing that we would like to know about is, we heard that a villager was shot and killed yesterday. And we know that you also went and looked for this villager. So, can you explain to us the events and how this happened?

Because it is the time of year when truffles can be picked, the villagers from T--- refugee camp [IDP] went to try and gather them. At this time, people come to buy them, so they collect them and sell them so that they can get money to buy fish paste and sweet powder [mono sodium glutamate (MSG)]. They went to collect truffles in a place called U Kweh *lu* [hill]. Some girls and boys went to collect truffles. At that time, we heard that the Burmese soldiers [Tatmadaw] shot a civilian. On the same day, I went to find the person who was shot. On the [June] 13th, the soldier shot the man; we heard the sound of the gun fire in the morning at 7:20 am.

As we carried on listening, we heard heavy weapons being fired, which is not a good thing. This is when we realised that something bad was happening, and that the Tatmadaw were doing something bad. We then tried to find out what had happened. After this, we received a phone call from a villager who informed us that one villager was lost. So, we started to look for the villager, this was at 9:00 am on June 13th. At first we dared not go directly to where the incident had taken place, but on the 14th, we went to the place where the corpse was. At that time, we saw that the villager had been shot three times in the armpit. After that, they had shot him in one of his eyes. This was so that they would cause him more pain. This villager was not wearing an army uniform; he was wearing a white t-shirt with green sport shorts and a Karen longyi. His clothes did

⁵ The KNDO is a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

not make him look like a soldier. Also, if we look at the area where he was shot, there is no tall grass; this is an area where we can collect wood and thatch, therefore there could not have been a mistake of his identity; it was clear he was a civilian. We do not know why the Burmese soldiers chose to kill him.

Do you mean that when you went there, he didn't go with you? Did he go with the first group and you went with another group?

Yes.

What is his name?

Saw N---.

How old was he?

He was 48.

Did he have family?

Yes, he did. He had eight family members.

How many children?

He had six children, with him and his wife, altogether eight people. I would like to tell you about his wife's very pitiful situation. When I went to see her, it was very pitiful. After his wife delivered her youngest baby, she did wrong with water, so now her brain is not working so well. When they came to stay in T--- camp, it seemed like her situation had improved. Now, since her husband has died the disease has occurred again and she cries every day. Now, after a while, she called out her husband's [name], then ran outside into the rain, and then she slipped and fell. So, her disease is happening again like before and we can't cure her. It is a very pitiful situation for his wife and children.

What do you mean by doing wrong with water?

She did wrong with the water after she had her baby; they were in Lu Thaw Township. At that time, the enemy [Tatmadaw] came and she ran outside in the rain.⁶

⁶ Even though the interviewer has prompted Saw E--- to elaborate on "*doing wrong with water*," the exact problem regarding what has happened to Saw N---'s wife is unclear. Although it is impossible to know the exact medical condition Saw E--- is referring to, it is a belief in Karen culture that women should not expose their heads to water of any kind while menstruating, as it can cause symptoms such as the ones described here by Saw E---.

Was this when her baby was young, soon after she delivered?

At that time, many diseases appeared. Later, they gave her treatment with medicine but it couldn't be cured. Then, they gave her traditional medicine. At that time, the situation also didn't become better. It became better, but her brain didn't work properly. It seemed like her circulation was not regular and she thought a lot, so her mind became different every day and every night.

Is the distance far between where the incident happened and T--- camp?

If we go from the place where the event happened to T--- camp, it takes one hour.

On foot?

Yes, it takes one hour, on foot. The Burmese soldiers had never come to the place where the villager was shot until the government and the KNU [Karen National Union] agreed on the ceasefire.⁷ The Burmese [Tatmadaw] had never come to the place where the shooting took place before the government and the KNU agreed on the ceasefire. After the ceasefire, we saw many of their tracks, and they came into the area near to where we live. On the day that we were going to find him [Saw N---], we saw their footprints. They had nearly arrived at the U Kweh *kloh* [river], then the tracks showed they went back up the hill again. We also followed the Burmese [soldiers'] way, and then we arrived to the place where the person died. Therefore, these people [soldiers] were waiting for the people to come and collect truffles.

***Gu ta la hter* [truffles]?**

Gu ta la hter.

At the place where he was killed, is it a field or is it surrounded by large trees and jungle?

This place has not been farmed and there are no big trees, on this hill there are only big and small *la hter* plants [the plant with leaves that are used for thatch].

⁷ The January 12th 2012 meeting in Pa'an Town between representatives of the Government of Myanmar and the Karen National Union (KNU) resulted in a preliminary ceasefire between the parties and an agreement to negotiate further; see initial statement issued by KNU on January 13th 2012, the day after a 19-member KNU delegation, which included military representatives from all KNLA Brigades except 5th Brigade, attended initial ceasefire talks in the Zwegapin Hotel in Pa'an Town. Karen National Union, *Statement on the Initial Agreement between KNU and Burmese Government*, January 13th 2012; for additional information on additional negotiations, see "Govt, KNU sign ceasefire," *Myanmar Times*, January 16th – 22nd 2012; "KNU, Govt Reach Historic Agreement," *The Irrawaddy*, January 12th 2012.

Is the distance between the army camp and the place where they collected truffles very far?

We can't see the camp from the place where the civilian died. If we measured it, it would be approximately 500 yards.

If we go from the place where he died to the military camp, how many hours and minutes would it take?

It would take half an hour.

Does this mean that the Burmese soldiers did not shoot from their camp?

No. I would like to explain this. For civilians, when they went to collect truffles, they went up the hill. For the Burmese soldiers, they came down from their camp situated on another hill along a path. They came down to the U Kweh *kloh* and when they had nearly arrived at the U Kweh *kloh*, they went up to the place where the people collect truffles. The civilians were not paying attention, as they had faith in the ceasefire, and therefore they did not notice the soldiers. The villagers were not expecting this kind of attitude from the Burmese military, so they went and collected truffles happily and they talked loudly. The soldiers heard them, and came down from their camp and shot at them.

So, you're saying that the Burmese heard the villagers talking. How many people were there?

There were ten people, including the one who died.

How many females?

As far as I know, there were six females.

Do you know their names?

Yes.

Can you tell us?

I don't know their names for sure.

So, you just know the name of the person who died?

Yes, only the one who died.

Were there any other villagers who were wounded when the shooting happened?

No.

When they were shooting, what did the other villagers do?

At first, the other villagers went together, but as they approached the place, Saw N--- went on a little further. The others were lower down. Saw N--- went further up, to the hill pass. At that time, the Burmese [soldier] waited and shot him. At first, they just shot once. Their guns sounded "hta". The people further down heard it, but they did not run away. After that, after two or three seconds, they shot another two times; we heard "hta" "hta". After two or three minutes, they shot again with small guns many times. They also shot with heavy weapons indiscriminately [in different directions], so then the other people fled.

Does this mean that the Burmese [soldiers] only saw Saw N---?

Yes.

They didn't see the other people who were with Saw N---?

They didn't see them; if they had seen them, they would have shot and tried to kill them all. Also, they [the villagers] were on a hill, so they [the soldiers] could not see.

Was it because Saw N--- climbed up the hill and for the rest, they were beside [the hill].

Because the angle of the hill was blocking where the bullets could reach, they were not hit.

Do you know the battalion number of the Burmese military who shot at the villagers?

Yes.

Which military number is it?

It is IB [Infantry Battalion] #19.

How about the leader?

I don't know the leaders' name.

The battalion commander or the company commander?

I don't know.

Do you know the camp where they stay?

I don't know.

Related to the case that has happened, can you tell us what your opinion is? Like, this person is a villager and as you said, he didn't wear a soldiers' uniform. On his body, there were no military materials. If we looked at him, we would have known clearly that he is a villager. So, what is your opinion on the soldiers who shot the villager?

In my opinion, I want to say this briefly. In the present time, we listen to what our leaders from the KNU say, and we follow the rules. We as civilians go and work, and find food where we are allowed to go. In this incident, they waited and they shot and killed a villager. In my opinion, it is not good and not acceptable. For us, we have listened to our leaders' orders. In their [Tatmadaw] case, if they don't respect the ceasefire then it causes great difficulties for us civilians and we can't trust the ceasefire, which is bad for the future of our country [Burma]. Therefore, finally, because of Battalion #19, all minority ethnic groups' hope and faith on the ceasefire have been lessened somewhat.

As we know, the villagers have come and stay in the camp temporarily. The food that they get is only rice and salt. In order to get other kinds of food and to be able to buy other kinds of food, they have to go and find it outside. As they have to go and find food outside, this is what happened. Are there any other difficulties that the villagers face while they are finding food? Is there anything else that they have to be afraid of?

For this one [the situation], and for us here at T--- refugee camp [IDP], it is as you said. We could not live in our country, because the Burmese [military] came and attacked us, so we couldn't live there anymore. Therefore, we came and lived in the T--- area. We don't come and live here because we are happy. We come and stay here temporarily because we can't go back. Now, if we look back, we were living between the enemies and we lived in an area that was under the control of the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]. We didn't have places to work and there was no land to plant [crops]. For the food, as you said, salt and rice, two types. For other food, we as Karen people have a lot of food. So, some of the people try to do plantations. When the opportunity comes, in the season when we can collect thatch [March to May], then we collect thatch to weave and sell. When we get the opportunity, we will take it. Therefore, the situation is the same here, we live under house arrest. We have to stay inside. We can't go to the east and we also can't go to the west. When we cross the other side of the river, [Salween] there are rules and regulations so it is difficult for us to work. If we find food,

as our area is between the enemies, we cannot let our guard down and move freely. If we do cross over to Thailand, then there are many rules and regulations. Therefore, if we look at the situation for our refugees, [internally displaced persons] it is a big weakness for our livelihoods.

The next thing is, when they go and find food from outside, have they ever encountered any landmines? Or do they need to be afraid of landmines?

In this area, in the case of landmines, our leaders [KNU] have told and notified us about all areas that we shouldn't go. Therefore, related to this, in our area, the civilians do not violate the regulations and there has been no difficulty. Now, the difficulty is we are not able to travel around freely, as now the Burmese [military] have come and shot at us, this has become a difficulty for the civilians.

These are all my questions. Is there anything else that you want to express, or any questions that I have not asked, which you would like to talk about?

No.

Thank you.

Thank you.

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

- "Papun Interview: Saw N---, January 2012," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw K---, June 2012," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw D---, January 2012," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw Kr---, October 2010," (July 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw T---, December 2011," (July 2012)
- "Photo Set: Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam," (June 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, received April 2012," (June 2012)

