



News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2012 to January 2013

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in February 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Papun District, during the period between November 2012 and January 2013. The community member discusses abuses that happened during the period, such as how private construction workers collected stones near P--- villagers' farmland without the consent of the local community. Consequently, there is an increased threat of flooding that could affect more than 20 or 30 acres of farmland from the damage to natural water barriers caused by the stone collection. Also discussed, is how frontline soldiers from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #434, which is based at Pa Heh army camp, forced four villagers from H--- village to porter unknown cargo between Papun town and Hsaw Bgeh Der. The community member also raised problems regarding destruction of the natural environment, such as how irregular rainfall and pests are damaging paddy crops.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (November 2012 to January 2013)

The following situation update was written by a community member in Papun 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 This report was received along with other information from Papun District, including one other situation update and 64 photographs.²

Situation update from November [2012] to January 2013

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 writing situation updates, community members 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 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 2013. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the report, "Landmine explosion and death of villagers in Papun District," KHRG, May 2013.

Introduction

The situation in Bu Tho Township, from November 2012 to January 2013, which is a three month period, is that the villagers still suffer human rights abuses, such as forced labour, but it is becoming much less than before. This is because the Border Guard Force's army camps are not based close to the villages anymore. The kind of forced labour that happened was portering for the Tatmadaw. Regarding human rights abuses, the government's construction contractors come to collect stones beside the [Klaw Day] villagers' farms and canal. They came to collect it even though the villagers did not allow them; they also came to plough land with a car [bulldozer].

Human Rights abuse

Starting from November 2012 to January 2013, during the three month period, the things that abused human rights are: along the Meh Tee Loh River in P--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, the Burma government workers will repair a vehicle road and their army camps, and will build more buildings. In order to do that, they came to take stones and sand from the Meh Tee Loh River, beside villagers' farms. They did not ask for permission. The person who is in charge is Ma Tin Tin; she works for a Burma government contractor group and her husband is the chief of the contractor group. They [contractors] tried to meet with some village heads, KNU [Karen National Union] leaders and village tract leaders, but they did not give them permission. They only gave them [permission for] ten days, but they did it [stone and sand collection] more than that.

Even though they were allowed to do that [stone and sand collection], it will not benefit the villagers. Additionally, the people who collected the stones are not the farm owners and they are not villagers from the P--- area; they are people from the Way Hsa Way Moo vehicle road area, Ta Kon Taing, *Kaw La* [Muslim] and Bweh communities. One villager told them not to carry the stones with a car, but [only] with a cart or by themselves, but not to [use carts] beside the farm or the mouth of the canal. The [P---] village head also tried to talk about this [change] with them but they did not listen. Even though people who came to collect the stones are civilians, they are under the Burma governments' control and work as their contractors.

If they [contractors] continue collecting the stones, the nearby lands will be flooded in the rainy season, as there will be no stone or sand.³ If there is really flooding, there will be

³ The community member means that the river water will move faster without natural breaks from the sand and rocks, which will change the course of the river. Because farms are near the river, the community member is predicting that those farms will be flooded. The community member also anticipates that the government will not provide relief from the flood, such as food security protection.

approximately 20 or 30 acres of farms that will be gone. Even if these kinds of damages happen, the Burma government will not support them [villagers]. For collecting stone, they give [the contractors] 1,500 kyat (US \$1.68)⁴ per pile of stone.

Forced Labour

In Bu Tho Township, forced labour, which was portering for the Tatmadaw, happened on November 22nd 2012. The Papun Battalion, LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #434 soldiers, who are on the frontline and based at Pa Heh army camp, came back to meet with their comrades in H--- village. For that, they ordered four H--- villagers to carry their equipment to Papun [town] and carried it back to H---. However, the villagers do not know what they were asked to carry. The villagers also do not know the officer's name.

Military activities

The armed groups that base in Bu Tho Township, are Burma Government soldiers [Tatmadaw], the BGF [Border Guard Force], the DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army] and the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]. These armed groups are active in different ways.

For the Government case, since the KNU leaders and Burma government held the ceasefire talk, there is not a lot of forced labour happening; but they still have some, which never will be gone. After the ceasefire talk, the Burma government transported more materials, such as building materials and medicine, to each of their army camps. However; this is not a benefit for the villagers. We had heard that each of their army camps on the border have to be repaired, and constructed with cement.

The DKBA, which is based in Meh P'Ree, travels freely to Pgheh Hta and Kaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu⁵]. They also built up [erected] their buildings in Htee K'Mler Wah, which they now renamed Htoo Wah Kaw. They also have one monk named Khin Maung Win or Hkay Mee Ka. He planted a very large rubber plantation and asked villagers to help him. He said that it is religious work, so the civilians in Meh P'Ree village tract helped

⁴ As of May 8th 2013, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 893 kyat to the US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1.

⁵ Myaing Gyi Ngu is the DKBA headquarters where the religious leader U Thuzana has a temple. In June 2012, KHRG reported that the DKBA was not active in this area, and that forced labour had decreased as a result. See "Villagers return home four months after DKBA and Border Guard clash, killing one civilian, injuring two in Pa'an," KHRG, June 2012. This area has also been the site of recent conflict between the DKBA and the BGF. See "DKBA Forces Refuse to Leave Dam Site," Irrawaddy, May 7th 2013.

him. The villagers do not know from where the monk gets the money [to buy the plantation].

The KNLA is active according to the KNU's policy. Sometimes, they might have abused the civilians' rights, but we do not know about it exactly. They always try to protect and solve the problems for the civilians who suffer from human rights abuses, such as money, thatch and bamboo that are demanded by the Tatmadaw and Border Guard. If the KNLA knows these things happen, they do not allow the civilians to comply or go for labour.

Civilians' livelihoods

Most of the civilians in Bu Tho Township earn their livelihood by farming flat fields and hill fields. Some of them also work small seasonal plantations. During 2012 and 2013, they could not farm as well as the previous years. The paddy in the hill fields mostly turned yellow, because they were eaten by insects and by mice, so that the paddy was not good. For the paddy in hill fields, the paddy plants become white and yellow after being planted and it seems like they had been eaten by caterpillars and other insects, which live on the paddy plants, so the paddy plants died.

The other thing is that, because the rain is not falling regularly, it is not good for plantations or farming. It is different from the previous years. In the past, the farms that produced 300 big tins⁶ of paddy grains now produce only 150 and 200 big tins of paddy grain. For the hill fields, if people plant five big tins of paddy, they will get only 70 to 90 big tins of paddy grain. If we compare the previous years and now, the problems with livelihoods for the villagers is the food problem. If the flat fields and hill fields continue going like this, it is a sad thing for the villagers. The villagers who earn their livelihood in this way deal with this problem more and more. They cannot protect [themselves] and or find a way to solve these problems by themselves, as their grandparents did in the past.

Civilians' situation

Even after KNU and Burma government ceasefire talk, the civilians in Bu Tho Township who live close to where Tatmadaw and Border Guard are based still have to suffer human rights abuses. But, if we compare this to the past, we can say that the situation

⁶ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb. of paddy, and 16 kg. or 35.2 lb. of milled rice.

for the villagers became better. But still, there is not enough freedom for the people who stay close [to these armies].

The civilians who stay [live] in the place that is out of the area in control of the government, they dare not travel and work wherever they want to go and work yet. They are still afraid of them [armed groups]. They dare not go to the town like Papun [Town], even though they want to go, because they do not have identity cards. People who live in the side close to the mountain always worry that the ceasefire talk will be broken. If it breaks, it will be difficult for them to travel, go to work, and to go buy salt, fish paste or clothes. However, for people who live beside the vehicle road, both under the control of the Burma government and out of their controlled area, the situation has not changed. But for the people who can travel, they can travel more easily than the previous years.

Conclusion

The information that I reported is only in some areas that I know and visited already. There will be many information gaps. Because the time now is under a ceasefire, there are no hot or recent incidents that have happened yet. There is only incident that happened, as I reported. Human rights abuses and forced labour still cannot be avoided, until now. These things sometimes happen despite there being a ceasefire.

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

- “Landmine explosion and death of villagers in Papun District,” (May 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, January to February 2013,” (April 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011 to July 2012,” (April 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012,” (April 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012,” (April 2013)

