



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Demands for labour and money by religious leaders in  
Papun District, January 2013**

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*This news bulletin is based on information submitted in March 2013 by two community members trained by KHRG describing events occurring in Papun District in January 2013, including demands for labour and money by two Buddhist monks in the area.<sup>1</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, the head monk at Myaing Gyi Ngu Monastery, U Thuzana, demanded 184 villagers from 30 villages in five village tracts to construct a bridge across the Yunzalin River. In a separate incident on January 12<sup>th</sup>, Monk Hkay Maung Win demanded that villagers from eight villages provide 1,150,000 kyat (US \$1,223) for a New Year Celebration.*

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During January 2013, there were instances of abuse that were perpetrated by religious leaders in Papun District. Villagers reported that they were ordered to provide both labour and money for two local projects.

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, construction began on the new Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge, which will cross the Yunzalin River, near Noh Hta village in Papun District. The project is led by U Thuzana<sup>2</sup> who is the head monk at Myaing Gyi Ngu Monastery.<sup>3</sup> The project leaders demanded 184 villagers from 30 villages in five different village tracts<sup>4</sup> to work every day.

Villagers Sent	Village Names
10	Pc--- village
5	D--- village

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on two interviews, one incident report and one situation update from one community member and one radio message from a different community member, both from Papun District.

<sup>2</sup> U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, March 1996. In 1995, KHRG reported that U Thuzana had collaborated with the Tatmadaw, and met with then-Southeastern Commander Major General Maung Hla to obtain weapons and supplies for 4,000 soldiers in his monastery. As a result of the agreement, U Thuzana's monastery in Myaing Gyi Ngu, in northern Hpa-an District, reportedly developed a reputation as a mystical safe haven for villagers avoiding Tatmadaw abuses. See "Karen Human Rights Group commentary," KHRG, February 1995.

<sup>3</sup> This information was included in three unpublished interviews and one incident report submitted to KHRG by a community member in Papun District.

<sup>4</sup> The village tracts are Meh Mweh, Day Wah, Kyaw Pah, Meh P'Ree and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts, which are all in Bu Tho Township, Papun District.

5	R--- village
10	H--- and P--- village
10	E--- village
10	Pr--- village
7	St--- village
3	Dr--- village
10	B--- village
4	L--- village
5	Y--- and Z--- village
10	U--- village
5	B--- village
10	C--- and S--- village
10	Ph--- village
6	Kh--- village
10	J--- village
10	Ng--- village East and West
6	Hp--- vehicle road
9	Hp--- village monastery and Ny--- village
7	Di--- village
10	Bo--- and Bc--- village
5	N--- village
7	M--- village
<b>184 villagers</b>	<b>30 villages<sup>5</sup></b>

Villagers reported that every village must provide workers, including children.<sup>6</sup> Anyone who does not attend must ensure that a replacement is sent or they cannot avoid working. Based on the KHRG community member's research, the civilians have been told by the monk that the construction of the bridge is a religious donation, ever since the project began, and are not compensated for their labour except for the provision of three meals per day. In order for the civilians to not complain about the work and that the project moves forward, security is provided by the local Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) lieutenants from Battalion #1014, which is based in Meh Pree.<sup>7</sup>

One village head from K--- village, named Saw G---, said, *"If it is the donation work, it would be okay even if we do not go. But now, it is like you can't stay [home] if you don't go, so it is not donation [work] anymore."* The community member reported that the bridge construction is expected to be finished within three years, with the villagers being ordered to do labour for the entire time. Originally, villagers were told that the project would only require six months. Although the civilians complain about being forced to labour for the bridge construction, they will likely have to continue until the project is completed.

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<sup>5</sup> This table and the one below were derived from a radio message submitted to KHRG in March 2013 by a community member from Papun District.

<sup>6</sup> During a phone conversation on June 7<sup>th</sup> 2013, the community member informed KHRG that he witnessed four or five children performing labour per day during the two days he spent in the village, but that the construction project had been ongoing for one year and would continue for at least another two years.

<sup>7</sup> In April and May of 2013, fighting broke out between BGF and DKBA units located in and around Myaing Gyi Ngu; see, "Myaing Gyi Ngu residents flee from DKBA and Govt militia fighting," Karen News, May 2nd 2013; see also "DKBA and Govt militia fighting kills one and wounds one," Karen News, April 30<sup>th</sup> 2013.

On January 12<sup>nd</sup> 2013, an anonymous T--- villager told the KHRG community member that one monk, named Hkay Maung Win,<sup>8</sup> based in Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, planned a New Year celebration in Htoo Wah place, which is known for its rubber plantation. He demanded that villagers from Htee Th'Daw Hta and Kyaw Pah village tracts send a total of 1,150,000 kyat (US \$1,223)<sup>9</sup> by January 13<sup>th</sup>. Each village was expected to provide a specified amount:<sup>10</sup>

Amount demanded (kyat)	Village
250,000 (US \$266)	Hk--- village
150,000 (US \$160)	T--- village
150,000	Hp---- village
150,000	Ch--- village
150,000	St--- village
150,000	Cr--- village
150,000	Hd---- and Sp--- village

In determining whether an incident ought to be categorised as forced labour, KHRG relies upon the definition included in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention, which defines forced or compulsory labour as *"all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily."* In the context of labour imposed by a Buddhist leader, performing the work can be understood as a religious obligation, with serious social, spiritual, and material consequences for refusal; according to one villager, *"They [villagers] felt like, even if they are busy, they have to do the labour because it is for [Buddhist] merit."* KHRG continues to receive reports from members of the communities in eastern Burma describing the ongoing requests for labour unreasonable and profoundly impactful on the daily lives of villagers. Where villagers make clear that they do not feel free to refuse requests for religious labour, KHRG considers these requests to be forced labour.

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

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<sup>8</sup> Hkay Maung Win, also known as Hkay Mee Ka, lives between Meh Pree and Kyoh K'Loh with his 30 soldiers, where he has built rubber plantations, one monastery and a school. KHRG reported that, as of January 2012, Hkay Maung Win was planning to build a new village between Meh Pree and Kyoh K'Loh villages. See "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, received April 2012," KHRG, June 2012.

<sup>9</sup> As of June 4<sup>th</sup> 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 940 Kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>10</sup> This information was included in an unpublished short update submitted to KHRG by a community member in Papun District.

- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2012 to January 2013,” (May 2013)
- “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)

