



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

August 28, 2013 / KHRG #2013-B52

Mining development damages farms and irrigation infrastructure in Papun District

This news bulletin about gold mining and road development in Papun District was written by KHRG based on villager testimonies and a community member's research.¹ It describes how businessmen were granted permission from KNU leaders to begin gold mining and the resulting problems from gold mining that villagers from Dwe Lo Township, Papun District have encountered. Villagers reported that their rice nurseries died after irrigation gates were destroyed by road construction related to the gold mining and how water was contaminated and animals died as a result of the mining itself. Villagers reported the loss of their jobs as a result.

On May 7th 2013, KHRG received information in which villagers from Ma Lay Ler, Waw Muh and Meh Hkyoh village tracts from Dwe Lo Township, Papun District complained about gold mining and associated road construction that destroyed their farm irrigation gates and nursery fields, and has consequently affected their livelihood and damaged the environment.

In November 2012, village leaders representing various regions cooperated with businessmen representing gold-mining interests. These leaders included women's organization leader Naw Dah Muh from Kwee T'Ma village, Meh Hkyoh village tract; K'Toh Hpoh, Kay Ray and Naw Khyoh from Hpoh Kheh Hta village; Hpaw Nay Thah Moh from Waw Muh village; Hkyay Lay, who is a district staff member from Karen National Union (KNU); and village representatives from the Ma Lay Ler village tracts who cooperated with business men representing gold mining interests.

The businessmen were granted permission from KNU leaders to begin gold mining in the area and started constructing a road shortly thereafter in Dwe Lo Township, Papun District. Areas targeted for development included villagers' farmland. The construction resulted in the

¹ This information contained in this news bulletin was included in three unpublished incident reports received by KHRG on May 7th 2013 by a community member in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions.

destruction of farm irrigation gates, and rice nursery fields the villagers rely on for their livelihood died from lack of water. Installing irrigation gates and developing reliable nursery fields is a considerable task for villagers requiring significant time and money. This process can take several years. One villager said, *"Now, because the nursery field was destroyed, I do not have a nursery field [anymore]. In order to get this paddy nursery field, I dug out the trees. I had to try very hard for three or four years for [it to become] a paddy nursery field. Now, it is just being destroyed and I am very upset. In the coming year, in order to sow paddy, I have to find a new place for paddy nursery field and it will be very difficult for me."*

The villagers' farm irrigation gates were initially destroyed when gold mining was undertaken in the area by Democratic Karen Buddhist Army Lieutenant Maung Chit Thu² in 2009, but mining ceased in 2010 when he left the area. Until recently, villagers had gotten enough water for their farms and could farm without any major difficulties; the resumption of gold mining and related development has greatly stressed villager livelihoods. Moreover, one of the villagers reported that because of gold mining, people have lost their jobs following farmland destruction, and animals from the area have died as a result of drinking water contaminated by gold mining. According to reports received by KHRG, villagers see little benefit in gold mining efforts and hope that local authorities intervene on their behalf.

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

- "Incident Report: BGF #1014 Corporal Maw Nay Say violent abuse and extortion of villager in Papun District, November 2012," (July 2013)
- "Violent abuse and forced labour in Bu Tho Township, November and December," (July 2013)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, March 2012 to March 2013," (July 2013)
- "BGF and KNLA grenades injure villagers and their children in Papun District," (July 2013)

² Maung Chit Thu was the operations commander of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) Battalion #999, prior to the DKBA transformation into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, which began in September 2010. Although he accepted this transformation, his current position in the Border Guard remains unclear, and he has been variously described as a high-level advisor and an operations commander. Other abuses committed by Maung Chit Thu have been cited in previous KHRG reports, including ordering the forcible relocation of villagers from eight villages in Lu Pleh Township in July 2011 whilst acting as a Border Guard commander, see, "Pa'an Situation Update: June to August 2011," KHRG October 2011. For more information on the DKBA / Border Guard transformation, see, for example: "Border Guard Forces of South-East Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State," New Light of Myanmar, August 22nd 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawaddy Township, Kayin State," New Light of Myanmar, August 25th 2010.

- “Incident Report: Villager tortured by Tatmadaw commanders in Papun District, December 2012,” (July 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to March 2013,” (June 2012)

