



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Ler Doh Township,
May to July 2012**

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in July 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District, in the period between May and July 2012, including information on the use of villagers for forced labour by Tatmadaw soldiers, a KNU campaign to inform villagers of the ceasefire process, the testing of stones for mining operations and land confiscation. The community member describes how Muh Theh villagers were forced by Tatmadaw LIB #704 Battalion Commander Nyan Win Aung to build a bridge across the Thay Nweh Loh River for the purpose of providing motorbike access from the village to Poh Khay Hkoh army camp, as well as providing information regarding taxes placed upon motorbike taxi drivers by soldiers from IB #60. The report goes on to provide details surrounding a campaign carried out by the KNU to inform villagers about the ceasefire process, during which villagers voiced their problems to the KNU, including land issues. Moreover, the report contains information about several pending, as well as current development projects in the area, including an incident in which Tatmadaw MOC #4 and LIB #704 facilitated the testing of stones in Maw Day Forest. The report also describes the purchase of 9,000 acres of land by U Nyan Shwe Win, following the Government designation of the land in question as uncultivated. The community member reports that the land in question includes local villagers' land; betel nut; durian; mangosteen; cashew; betel leaf; cardamom; and dog fruit plantations, as well as villagers' hill field farms. Villagers were not consulted about the sale of this land. The problems that this sale of land poses to those villagers relocated during the 'four cuts' is specifically detailed; previously able to return from relocation sites to work on their plantations, this sale of 'uncultivated' land puts their livelihoods at risk. Finally, the report describes flooding caused by the Kyauk N'Ga dam, resulting in damage to villagers' paddy farms.

Situation Update | Ler Doh Township, Nyaunglebin District (May to July 2012)

The following situation update was written by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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.¹² This report was not received along with any other information.

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

Nyaunglebin District: Ler Doh Township situation

This situation update describes the situation from May to June in Ler Doh Township, such as the military's activities and the economic situation.

KNLA and Burmese military's [Tatmadaw's] activities

In Ler Doh Township, the Burmese military, which is MOC [Military Operations Command] #4, came and based [their camp] in the Ler Doh Township area. They rotated themselves in January 2012 and are based in the eastern part of Mu Theh. The Operations Command is set up in Hkler Soe place [on the hill]. They are active up to Ka Baw Too, which is on the border of Lu Thaw Township in Brigade #5 [Papun District], and Ler Doh Township in Brigade #3 [Nyaunglebin District]. In that MOC, there are ten battalions and we do not know the name of all of these ten battalions. We only know that under MOC #4, LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #704 is the group that is active in Muh Theh, to Paw Khay Hkoh, to the border of Brigade #3 to Brigade #5. We do not know the other battalions' names.

On July 3rd and 5th, the Burmese military LIB# 704 Battalion Commander Nyan Win Aung forced Muh Theh villagers to go and build a bridge that crosses the Thay Nweh Loh River. The bridge was constructed so the motorbikes can go across on it. This bridge is [located] on the way from Muh Theh village to Poh Khay Hkoh Burmese military camp. MOC #4 is based in Poh Khay Hkoh Burmese military camp. Some Burmese villagers carry and sell things beside the Poh Khay Hkoh military camps. The Operations Commander himself runs a shop. Only the Burmese soldiers buy things from the Burmese people who carry and sell the things. There are no Karen villagers who will go and buy things there.

In the past, the Burmese military from Poh Khay Hkoh ordered things from the Burmese villagers who sell things, and because there was no bridge, they had to carry their motorbikes to the other side of the river and then continue to Poh Khay Hkoh military camp. Therefore, they constructed the bridge and they asked the villagers to go and help them construct the bridge. As village is close [to the river], the villagers had to go and build the bridge. Only B--- village is in

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 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Nyaunglebin District can be found in the report, "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo Township, June to November 2012," KHRG, December 2012.

the white area [government-controlled area]. The other villages such as V--- village, U--- village, S--- and T--- villages are in a black area [armed ethnic group-controlled area].³

Currently, from Muh Theh village to Ler Doh town, the Burmese military based [there] are IB [Infantry Battalion] #60 and LIB# 351. The name of IB #60's Commander is Zarni Aung and his soldiers set up their camp on Hku Thay Soe Mountain in the western part of Muh Theh village. IB# 60 soldiers live in Muh Theh village and they set up a checkpoint and they asked for [money from] the people who run taxis [motorbike taxis] that travel between Muh Theh and Ler Doh. They [the soldiers] come and stay there [at the check point] until 9:00 pm and then go back to their camp. For LIB #351, in the past, their commander was Win Boh Shein but Win Boh Shein was promoted and we do not know the [new] commander's name of LIB #351.

The military group and the powerful people [groups], which are based in Nyaunglebin District, Ler Doh Township are: Burmese military [Tatmadaw]; Union Solidarity and Development Party [USDP]; KNLA Battalion #9 and police (KNDO) [Karen National Defence Organization]⁴ Battalion #3. After the ceasefire, starting from April to May, the KNU leaders did a campaign and explained to the civilians about the ceasefire.⁵ Their trip [campaign] started from Moo Township and to Ler Doh Township and then, they went step by step until Hsaw Htee Township. The trip took them one month and a half.

When they [the KNU] campaigned, the villagers also mentioned their needs so that the KNU will solve their needs, such as problems regarding land (for example, the land that the villagers were forced to relocate to; or the land that the owner wants to use it again). The land owners want to get the land back that is [currently being] used as a relocation [site]. The villagers who were forced to relocate also reported that they want to go back and live in their old village. They want to go back and work on their own land.

³ Tatmadaw insider Maung Aung Myoe explains that Tatmadaw counter-insurgency doctrine views territory as black, brown or white according to the extent of non-state armed group (NSAG) activity. He explains that "black area" denotes "an area controlled by insurgents but where the Tatmadaw operates;"; "brown area" denotes "a Tatmadaw-controlled area where insurgents operate;"; while a "white area" is territory which has been "cleared" of NSAG activity. See: Maung Aung Myoe, *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 Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) is the former name of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNDO is a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

⁵ For more information on the January 2012 ceasefire agreement see: "Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process," KHRG, November 2012.

Economic situation

On July 1st, MOC #4's battalion, which is LIB #704 and is based in Hkler Soh came to B---, and they helped the people who are testing the stone situation [for stone mining]. This time, eight people came and there were two educated people. These eight people come from town. We are not sure which town the two educated people come from, nor what their ethnicity is. The eight people arrived in B--- on July 1st and, beginning on July 2nd, 3rd, and 5th, they tested the stones in the western part of Muh Theh area and the place name is Maw Day (forest). The kind of stone that they are testing is wolframite. When they started testing the stone on the first day, which was on the 2nd of July, they also invited a B--- villager, called Saw M---, who is about 35-years-old. The villager who went with them said that he does not understand what the two people were saying. Saw M--- said that the two people are very big, tall and white. The villagers guess that the two people might be Chinese and came from Nay Pyi Daw.

Before this activity happened, the Member of Parliament for Ler Doh Township whose name is U Nyan Shwe Win reported to the [Pyidaungsu] Hluttaw [at a meeting in Nay Pyi Daw] that stone testing was going to be carried out. The researcher [censored for security] met with the LIB #60 Battalion Commander and the Battalion Commander Zarni Aung told him about this issue.

Another thing is that U Nyan Shwe Win bought land to do business. He bought 7,000 acres of land between Ler Doh Town and Ler Weh Hkee, which is beside the Ler Doh and Hsaw Mee Loo vehicle road. Later, he bought a further 2,000 acres of land beside Ler Doh town. More than that, the places are those which the villagers from Khoh Poo village tract and Hsaw Mee Loo village tract [were relocated to]; [the villages are] Khoh Poo village, Hsaw Mee Loo village, Ta Ray Hkoh village, Htee Ya Hkee village, Ler Ka Taw village and Hee Doh village. The villagers were forced to relocate to Aung Soe Moe (in the past, it was called Ywa Shaung) during four cuts.⁶ The villagers who are from Maw Bger Hkee village tract were forced to relocate to Kyweh Chan relocation place. Villagers from these three village tracts were forced to relocate, but they were not given any land to do livelihood, so they have returned and do their livelihood in their old places until now. The lands that were bought [by U Nyan Shwe Win] currently are the villagers' plantation lands, such as betel nut plantation, durian plantation, mangosteen

⁶ In Burma, the scorched earth policy of 'pya ley pya', literally 'cut the four cuts', was a counterinsurgency strategy employed by the Tatmadaw as early as the 1950's, and officially adopted in the mid-1960's, aiming to destroy links between insurgents and sources of funding, supplies, intelligence, and recruits from local villages. See Martin Smith. *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999 pp. 258-262. Though official references to the four cuts strategy have ceased, throughout 2011 KHRG continued to document evidence indicating that tactics targeting civilians continue to be systematically employed. See "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, April 2011; "Joint Tatmadaw patrol burns field huts and seed stores, displace six villages in Toungoo District," KHRG, June 2011; "Tatmadaw soldiers shell village, attack church and civilian property in Toungoo District," KHRG, November 2011.

plantation, cashew plantation, betel leaf plantation, cardamom and dog fruit plantations. They also include villagers' hill fields. The Burma government, having labelled these lands as uncultivated land, sold them to the wealthy people but they did not ask for the villagers' agreement. As the trading [selling and buying of land] is not consulted and not discussed with the villagers, the villagers do not know whether their land is included or not. KHRG researchers from Hkler Lwee Htoo [Nyaunglebin] reported that when the KNU [Karen National Union leaders] went and campaigned about the ceasefire, they also explained to the civilians about the issue of the buying and selling of land.

Civilians' situation and their opinion

If we compare the situation of the past with now, because the Burmese military and the KNU entered the ceasefire, the villagers are able to live in the better situation, as they can travel a little bit more freely. For example, at present, checking at the checkpoint has stopped and villagers do not need a recommendation letter for travelling in the area or for going and working in their working place and sleep there [working place].

For the livelihood of the villagers from Ler Doh Township, their main livelihoods are: villagers from the mountain area do hill field farming and the other works that they get some income from are planting durian plantations, betel nut plantations, cardamom plantations, betel leaf plantations, mangosteen plantations and dog fruit plantations. These works are based on the plantation [harvesting] time. However, because the villagers did not get rights for sure to take care of their plantations carefully and they also did not get rights to plant more new plants, they only have the leaves and fruits of the old plants, which are not so good. Because the fruits and the leaves are not good, they do not get good prices. Therefore, the villagers have to face food shortages.

The other thing is that, currently in Ler Doh Township, because the Burmese military are based in their [the villagers'] farms and set up their military camps beside their working place, the villagers from S---, T---, U--- and V--- want to make their farming places and their plantations better, but they dare not go back and do it. The villagers want to go back and work in their place and they want the Burmese army camps, which are based in and besides their farms and in their plantation, to move back to their own places.

And the villagers from P---, Q--- and R--- also reported that the paddy from their farming places beside Hkaw Loh River and in Hkoh Kwee Lah Region was very good [in the past], but because of Kyauk N'Ga Dam, all of their farms are [now] flooded. The villagers from these three villages also reported that because of the ceasefire and peace process, they want [the Government] to reduce the construction of dams so that they will be able to work on their farms.

Researcher's points of view

According to the information above, now, the villagers are enthusiastic to go back and live in their own village and work on their own land. However, because the wealthy people came in and bought a lot of land, there is also concern about the loss of the villagers' land. In the past, the villagers were forced to relocate to the relocation places, but the villagers pleaded to get the chance [to work on their plantations in the harvest time, during which they would travel from their relocation sites], or they came back secretly so that they could work on their own land. For now, the powerful people work and the wealthy people are buying the land, so the villagers' working places have been lost; they do not have land to work on and there are only difficulties for their livelihood.

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

- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo Township, June to November 2012," (December 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo, Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee Townships, January to June 2012," (October 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi Township, July 2012," (September 2012)
- "Sustained Tatmadaw resupply operations in Thaton, Nyaunglebin and Papun during ceasefire," (May 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw P---, October 2011," (May 2012)

