



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Photo Set**

September 14, 2016 / KHRG #16-4-PS1

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**Hpapun Photo Set: Villagers displaced following rumours of  
KNLA's recruitment in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District,  
October 2015**

*This Photo Set shows the consequence of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)'s recruitment incident that occurred in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District in between August and October 2015. Many of the villagers in Kyaw Pah village tract fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town to evade the KNLA's recruitment. Due to the lack of information, it led them to flee their village and leave their properties, work places and livestock. Schools were closed so children could not access their education. The Photo Set also describes how the KNLA's Company #4 Company Commander held a consultation meeting with villagers explaining the detailed information on the recruitment and promising to stop the recruitment activity to prevent villagers from fleeing their village. However, many villagers still chose to resettle to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town.*

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**Photo Set | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (August to October 2015)**

*The following photos were taken by a community member in Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. They are presented below, censored where necessary for security purposes.<sup>1</sup> The 14 photos below were received along with other information from Hpapun District, including 16 other photos and a general update on the situation in Hpapun District.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar 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.

<sup>2</sup> This Photo Set was compiled by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, 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. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

## 1. Constant flow of villagers evading the KNLA's recruitment



The photos above were taken by a KHRG community member on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2015 at B--- village's boat's port in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show how B--- villagers went to the Yuzalin River bank carrying their luggage and children while they were going to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town by motorboat to evade the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]'s recruitment.<sup>3</sup> On October 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, the KNLA's Company #4 Company Commander Hsa Yoo went to the village and held a meeting with villagers regarding the recruitment. In the meeting he explained to villagers about the detailed information and the purpose of the KNLA recruitment. Then, he told villagers who remained in the village not to go to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town anymore and also to inform others who had fled to return. He told villagers, "*We [KNLA] are not recruiting soldiers anymore. So, do not flee like this anymore. Live as you did before. Ask and inform villagers who already fled to return and we will not do anything to them. They can live as they did before.*" Even though Commander Hsa Yoo told villagers like this it seems that villagers did not inform other villagers or ask others to return to their homes. Moreover, more villagers were still fleeing: these photos were taken two days later after Commander Hsa Yoo held a meeting with villagers. The photos depict villagers continuing to resettle to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Some of them, even though they have small children, were also fleeing. According to the KHRG community member, there might also have been some rumours from other groups that persuaded or scared the villagers in some way to flee, causing this ongoing problem. [Photos: KHRG]

## 2. Students were facing difficulty to access to education due to the rumour of KNLA's recruitment

<sup>3</sup> See "[Villagers displaced following rumours of KNLA forced recruitment, more flee following a clash with Tatmadaw in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, September to October 2015](#)," KHRG, June 2016.



The first photo was taken by a KHRG community member on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 at G--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. It is the photo of students who were studying at the primary school in G--- village. There were two female schoolteachers and 36 students in the 2015 academic year. When villagers fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town they were bringing their children with them. Therefore, nine students followed their parents to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. The second photo was taken on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2015 at A--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. It is a photo of the primary school in A--- village. Starting in August 2015, because villagers heard a rumour that KNLA would come and recruit soldiers in the village, villagers were scared and they fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town; the female schoolteachers were also afraid and they fled there too. There were six teachers: four female teachers from the Burma/Myanmar government and two teachers who were hired locally. This school has not re-opened yet [at the time of receiving this report] and there were fewer students remaining in the village as of October 2015, so they could not study and go to school. [Photos: KHRG]

### 3. Villagers' houses, properties and livestock were left behind







The first row of two photos were taken by a KHRG community member on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. These photos show G--- villagers' houses. Villagers left their houses and fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. The reason why they left their houses and fled is because they heard a rumour that the KNLA's soldiers would come and recruit soldiers in their village so they were afraid. Some of them do not want their sons to serve as soldiers, therefore they fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Some of them they did not know the situation and they thought and worried that the reason that KNLA was recruiting more soldiers was because the fighting would resume again. So, they were afraid and they fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Other reasons were: they worried that the Tatmadaw soldiers would operate in their area again; that Border Guard Force (BGF) soldiers would come to their village; and that some of them scared one another with the rumours therefore they fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. There were 13 households that cover 66 family members in G--- village who fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town.

The last four photos were taken on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2015 at A--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District. The photos show A--- villagers' houses. There are around one hundred households in A--- village. A--- villagers heard a rumour that the KNLA would come and recruit soldiers in their village, therefore they immediately fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. They left all their houses, livestock, farms, hill farms and properties. There were around ten households left out of a hundred households. The village head and village leaders all fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Then, villagers also fled and followed their village leaders to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town because there is no village head and they were scared to stay in the village without village leaders. The last bottom photo shows A---'s villagers who remained in the village. They said, *"If people can live, we can live too. We won't go and stay in Kaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu] Town. We still have our leaders [Karen National Union] and our [ethnic Karen] people. If we die we would like to die in our own village. We do not want to go to other places."* According to the KHRG community member, some of them are courageous, but some still are afraid because they do not have their village head in the village. [Photos: KHRG]

#### 4. Consultation meeting held by KNLA's Company #4 Company Commander regarding the recruitment



These two photos were taken by a KHRG community member on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2015 at C--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. These photos show the KNLA's Company #4 Company Commander Hsa Yoo holding a meeting with villagers from H---, D--- and E--- villages in C---'s school. There

were 47 villagers who attended the meeting. The purpose of why Company #4's Company Commander Hsa Yoo held this meeting was regarding the KNLA recruitment: some villagers are worried, some villagers do not want to be a soldier and some villagers even fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. Commander Hsa Yoo himself came and informed villagers about the detailed information about the recruitment. Company #4's Company Commander Hsa Yoo told villagers, *"The reason why we have to recruit more soldiers is because, in the past there was a [KNLA] verbal law that one person in every family has to serve as the soldier but no one wants to be a soldier. There are some families that never gave one of their family members in the past like for two to three terms of service. Because of this reason, we were ordered to carry out this law strictly. We just made it a little strict but many villagers are afraid of this action and fled to Kaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu] Town [to avoid the recruitment]."* Commander Hsa Yoo also told villagers that, *"No one wants to be a soldier. First of all, ask me 'Did you want to be a soldier?' Then, go and ask my mother, 'Aunty, did you allow your son to be a soldier and were you happy?' If you do not believe me then, go and ask my mother. If you do not want to support the revolution anymore then we do not need to recruit soldiers anymore."* In the meeting, he told villagers who remained in the village not to go to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town anymore and to inform other villagers who already fled to return and live as they used to live in the past. He also informed villagers that he won't forcefully recruit soldiers anymore and he won't do any harm to villagers who had already fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town. *"Now, ask people who went to Kaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu] Town to return and inform them that we do not recruit soldiers anymore. So [they should] come back to their village and look after their work places. If they want to come back, please come back as soon as possible and do not go and stay for a long time. If you stay away for a year, there will be a difficulty for you when you return. So, villagers who remain in the village please inform your siblings and relatives to come back. They do not need to be afraid of anything. Come back and live as they used to live in the past. We do not make trouble for you."* [Photos: KHRG]

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

- "Two separate landmine incidents happened in Hpapun and Nyaunglebin districts, March and April 2016," (August 2016)
- "Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women's testimonies from southeast Myanmar," (August 2016)
- "The death of Saw Hpah Mee, November 13<sup>th</sup> 2015," (July 2016)
- "Villagers displaced following rumours of KNLA forced recruitment, more flee following a clash with Tatmadaw in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, September to October 2015," (June 2016)
- "The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar" (February 2016)

# Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)