



## Situation Update

December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 / KHRG Log # 19-76-S1

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### **Nyaunglebin Situation Update: *Arbitrary taxation by KNLA soldiers and local watchmen, and gold mining activities resulting in livelihood difficulties in Mone Township, January to August 2019***

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District between January and August 2019. Gold mining activities have been conducted in Thaw T’Koo village tract since 2017, including by KNLA<sup>1</sup> Battalion #8 and Company Commanders. These activities have damaged villagers’ farms and crops, resulting in livelihood difficulties. Local people are also worried about the potential environmental impact of a sand extraction project along the Ko Plah Lo Kloh river. In several village tracts, villagers were subjected to arbitrary taxation by KNLA soldiers and local watchmen for not respecting logging limitations set by the KNU.<sup>2</sup>*

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#### **Gold mining activities damaging farmlands in Mone Township**

Gold mining activity has been occurring in Haw Hkoh Wah Hkee (along the K’Law Myaw river), which is between S---, L---, and K--- villages, Thaw T’Koo village tract, Mone Township, since 2017. It is still on-going in 2019. Some of the Township leaders, along with local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Battalion and Company commanders, are engaged in this gold mining process, which has impacted the local villagers’ farms and has also damaged rivers.

The gold mining activity expanded to S--- village, Thaw T’Koo village tract, damaging lands in Tha Loo Plaw and Kyee Kya Leh Plaw fields. A villager from S--- said that the gold mining process was being conducted across 346 acres located in Tha Loo Plaw and Kyee Kya Leh Plaw fields, as well as in farms. S---’s villagers also explained that this gold mining process does not benefit villagers. Instead, it has negatively impacted the villagers’ livelihoods and the environment. Excess soil from the gold mining process was carried by the river into the farms in S--- village, destroying paddies.

The villagers shared information about these damages and expressed their difficulties in a village tract meeting and a Township meeting [KHRG was not able to find out the exact date]. Local authorities came to take photos of the gold mining place but the gold mining process is

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<sup>1</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union. The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

<sup>2</sup> The present document is based on information received in September 2019. It was provided by a community member in Nyaunglebin District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG staff.

still on-going. Despite villagers expressing their worries about the potential damages of this gold mining process and reporting the case, the situation has not changed.



*These photos were taken in March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 in S--- village, K'Law Myaw area, Thaw T'Koo village tract, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. They show the excess soil from the gold mining process being carried by the river into the farms in S--- village.*

In 2017, the gold mining damaged local farms and crops in S--- village, including Tha Loo Plaw and Kyee Kya Leh [Plaw] fields. In addition, it also affected aquatic life, and killed cattle that consumed water containing chemicals from the gold mining. Local people also reported about this case to the Township authorities, who did not take any action concerning this report. Because the Township authorities failed to tackle the case, people have continued to engage in the gold mining project until now.

In 2019, the [KNLA] Battalion #8 and Company Commanders started mining gold in Plaw Too and Thaw T'Koo village tracts, Mone Township. They invited miners from other places to participate in this gold mining. The gold mining has again negatively impacted, rather than benefitted, local villagers. This gold mining activity is also located in Haw Hkoh Wah Hkee (K'Law Myaw). On August 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, Mone Township leaders formed a gold mining committee in the township and granted permission to local villagers to conduct gold mining in Haw Khoh Wah Hkee.

A villager who applied for a gold mining permission stated: *“People who applied to engage in gold mining were given two acres of land. However, they were asked to pay taxes according to the amendment [rule] set by the [Township leaders]. There were around 70 to 80 people who applied for permission to engage in the gold mining.”* Local people heard that the Myanmar government also sold the gold mining area to many individual business workers and foreign companies. Those individual businesses, companies and local people who applied for the gold mining agreed that they would avoid any actions that could cause damage, and would take responsibility for any damage caused by the gold mining.

However, the people who applied for the gold mining permission are not residents in the village and they have no land near the mining locations. Therefore, large numbers of people who do live near and have lands in the gold mining area do not agree with the project. The village leaders who went to Township meeting [see above] did not come back to consult with all villagers, sowing the seeds for tension between villagers who engage in the gold mining, and the large number of villagers who do not agree with the gold mining project. The latter believe that it will have negative impacts on the local environment, forests, and plantations. Villagers who engage in the gold mining project do not fully understand the gold mining process, which is why they have invited gold processing companies who have experience in gold mining.

Local people stated that the gold mining investors and their activities dramatically increased in 2019. They are more aware of the potential harmful impacts on them and their future generations. Although local people reported this case to the Township authorities, they could not do more than that to fight against the project.

### **Concerns over a sand extraction project in Mone Township**

On August 10<sup>th</sup> 2019, villagers from K--- village, Thaw T’Koo village tract, Mone Township, received a letter sent by the Kyaukkyi Township administration office. In the letter, U<sup>3</sup> Kyaw Min Lwin, an individual who lives in Mone town, section #4, requested permission to extract sand from the Ko Plah Lo Kloh River that flows through K--- village. On August 11<sup>th</sup> 2019, 12 village leaders from K--- and H--- villages held a consultation meeting about the letter and they decided to reject the request. Then, they wrote an objection letter to the Kyaukkyi Township administration office.



*This photo was taken on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in K--- village, Thaw T’Koo village tract, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. It shows the Ko Plah Lo Kloh River, along which U Kyaw Min Lwin requested to extract sand.*

On August 21<sup>st</sup> 2019, Aung Zaw Zaw – a representative of the Myanmar Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation in Kyaukkyi – and U Kyaw Min Lwin asked Saw<sup>4</sup> M---, the K--- village administrator, to gather K--- and H--- village heads to negotiate with the villagers and convince them to give their permission to implement the project. However, the villagers did not grant permission. They raised their concerns against the project because it could damage the river and nearby plantations, erode the river bank, and kill the fish. They are still worried that U Kyaw Min Lwin might try to implement the project after the rainy season despite their objections. At the time of drafting, there had been no updates regarding this case.

### **Logging issues and arbitrary taxation in Mone Township**

In March 2019, Karen National Union (KNU) leaders in Mone Township granted permission to the villagers living in Kwee Dee Hkoh, Htee Leh Baw Hta, Leh Klah, and other village tracts to conduct logging as they were facing difficulties to build houses. This opportunity was granted because of the destruction of local paddies by flooding and mice in 2018 and 2019.

The KNU Township leaders allocated specific areas to conduct logging. Local villagers engaged in logging activities to build houses or to sell the logs to secure their livelihoods. However, some of them did not respect the limitations set by the KNU. Therefore, the KNU Township authorities, as well as KNLA Battalion and Company commanders and leaders assigned people to monitor the activities in the forest.

The KNLA soldiers and local village watchmen who were assigned for this monitoring complained a lot because they had to patrol the forest. When patrolling, they did not have

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<sup>3</sup> U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

<sup>4</sup> Saw is a S’gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person’s name.



enough food or enough money to buy cigarettes. To be able to cover these costs, they started collecting taxes from the villagers who were conducting logging – between 20,000 kyats (USD 13.31 as of December 4<sup>th</sup> 2019) and 30,000 kyats (USD 19.96 as of December 4<sup>th</sup> 2019) per bullock cart full of logs.



These photos were taken on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, in L--- village, Mone Township, Nyaunglebin District. They show logs gathered by local villagers.

Further background reading on the negative impact of economic and natural resource extraction activities in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Nyaunglebin Interview: Gold mining activities threaten the livelihoods of villagers in Mone Township, September 2019”](#), (November 2019)
- [“Hpa-an Situation Update: Land confiscation by the KNU/KNLA-PC in T’Nay Hsah Township and resettled refugees facing difficulties in Lu Pleh Township, February 7th to May 18th 2019”](#), (November 2019)
- [“Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Logging and gold mining activities threatening community livelihoods, land confiscation by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Mone and Shwegyin townships, November 2018 to January 2019”](#), (August 2019)

### About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at [www.khr.org](http://www.khr.org).