



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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**Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi Township,
July to September 2012**

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in September 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Nyaunglebin District between July and September 2012, including the imposition of taxes by Tatmadaw soldiers on villagers mining gold, use of a landmine by KNLA soldiers and the distribution of humanitarian aid by multiple international and local organizations. Specifically, the report describes Tatmadaw IB #57 imposing taxation over 40 villagers mining gold for their livelihoods. The report also describes the attempt of the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative to send food supplies by truck to Hsaw Mee Luh base camp in August 2012, as well as the placing and marking of an anti-vehicle mine by KNLA Battalion #9 soldiers between Kat Pe base camp and Mu Theh village. Flooding in Kyauk Kyi area that started in July is also reported, which caused villagers problems with travel and work and destroyed rice paddies. World Food Programme staff visited flood victims and provided some relief during this time as well and, in August, Back Pack Health Worker Team members distributed rice on behalf of Emergency Assistance Team-Burma and also delivered soap and medicine to flood victims in Ma Au Pin village tract. During the period of flooding, villagers were worried that if gold mining operations continued along the Tha Ye stream that polluted water would contaminate their paddies and cause destruction. Villagers thus requested that gold mining stop during the floods. This request was not heeded, and all paddies in 30 acres of flat field farms died during flooding. The report also details that road builders and village officials demanded 200 kyat (US \$.21) from each traveler along the road through M--- village, including students from the M--- primary school. Additionally, it details financial offers made to villagers by the Burma government, as well as issues villagers have had with accessing deposits.

**Situation Update | Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District
(July to September 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.¹ This report was received

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 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.

along with other information from Nyaunglebin District, including three interviews and 393 photographs.²

Introduction

In our area, some human rights abuses occurred plus abnormal rain, and the flood caused problems for the villagers as well. The various [events] that have taken place in our area are: (1) the forced demanding of money; (2) a Norwegian government project; (3) paddies died because of gold mining; and (4) aid supplies have been delivered.

Demands for money

During July [2012], a Government soldier based in Kyauk N'Ga base camp demanded money from gold miners living in T--- village. There are over 40 gold miners, and [for] each gold sluice [villagers are] demanded to pay 800,000 kyat (US \$847.91)³ per month. [The] people who collected the money were IB [Infantry Battalion]⁴ #57, and one of their people in charge said, *"I have to collect the money because I have to send 20 million kyat (US \$21,197.79) to the operation commander."*



These photos were taken on July 15th 2012 in Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, and show gold miners working below Shwegyin Dam. According to the community member who took these photos, each

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 re-designed website will be released in 2013. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently published field information from Nyaunglebin District can be found in the report, "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee townships, September to November 2012," KHRG, June 2013.

³ As of June 19th 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 943 Kyat to the US \$1.

⁴ Infantry Battalions are Tatmadaw battalions of around 500 soldiers, though many within the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers.

gold sluice has to pay 800,000 kyat (US \$850.62) per month to Tatmadaw IB #57 as tax. [Photos: KHRG]

During August [2012], LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]⁵ #264 soldiers based at D--- camp demanded 20,000 kyat (US \$21.19) each time loggers transported goods from G--- to H--- village by motorboat. *Per Kaw* [police] based at D--- demanded 2,500 kyat (US \$2.64) each time from loggers transporting their logs.

Norwegian government support to Mu Theh village tract

The Norwegian government started sending aid on August 8th 2012. So far, rice sacks have arrived at Hsaw Mee Luh base camp [Kat Pe base camp] only. A delay occurred because people transporting the rice by truck had to repair the road [during the trip]. At this time, only one truck was used for the transportation. One truck can transport 50 rice sacks. The truck came along with five workers and one motorbike, so that if the truck was broken or needed some tools they would go and buy them from Kyauk Kyi town. The Myanmar Peace Support Initiative [MPSI]⁶ staff paid 8,000 kyat (US \$8.47) for each of the rice sacks when the truck was hired. During the transportation process [the truck] had to transport them to Mu Theh. The workers received payment [directly] from MPSI staff if [payment] did not come through Burma government staff and Karen National Union [KNU] members. At this time, there were many problems during the food transportation process because the vehicle road was ruined due to too much rainfall, and the workers and truck driver had to patch up the vehicle road again and again.

The other problem is an anti-vehicle mine between Kat Pe base camp and Mu Theh village. This anti-vehicle mine was planted by Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA] Battalion #9 in October 2011. After KNLA soldiers planted this anti-vehicle mine, bulldozers repaired the road before Burmese [Tatmadaw] troops sent rations [to the area], so excavated soil covered the mine. A year ago, the Burmese [Tatmadaw] sent rations, but the mine did not explode because the car road did not go straight over it. This year, it rained too much and the soil was soft, and therefore a potentially dangerous problem might occur because of this mine. KNLA Battalion #9 soldiers marked this place

⁵ Light Infantry Battalions are Tatmadaw battalions of around 500 soldiers, but most in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers.

⁶ After the 2012 ceasefire between the Union government and the KNU, an initiative called the Myanmar Peace and Support Initiative (MPSI) was formed by the Norwegian government to support the peace process throughout the Union. In May 2012, MPSI representatives visited Ler Doh Township, in Nyaunglebin District and met with community members. For more information on the MPSI and other pilot programs in Nyaunglebin, see these KHRG reports: "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Ler Doh Township, November 2012 to January 2013," KHRG, April 2013; "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo, Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee townships, January to June 2012," KHRG, October 2012; and "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi Township, July 2012," KHRG, September 2012.

where the old anti-vehicle mine was planted before MPSI came [to Mu Theh area]. KNLA soldiers do not dare to remove this mine because it was placed permanently [planted in such a way that it would definitely explode if a removal attempt was made]. If people detonate the mine, it will damage the road, [splitting it] into two parts. Then trucks will not be able to travel along on the road anymore. Currently, there is a marking where this mine is, and people extended the road to avoid going over it. If [people] detonate this mine, 30 feet of road will be damaged. Therefore, the mine was marked, and KNLA soldiers [hope to] come up with a solution in the summer. Because people could not send the rice [by truck to Mu Theh], villagers from Kheh Der village tract had to carry it from Hsaw Mee Luh to Mu Theh [then to their villages]. It is about eight miles from Hsaw Mee Luh to Muh Theh, and the additional distance from Muh Theh to their villages takes three hours. Even though the rice could not be sent to [Mu Theh by truck], villagers kept up an effort to carry it by themselves.

It took the Norwegian government quite a long [time] for the rice transportation because of the ruined road. The support from the Norwegian government can be found in [this] list of support paper [below].

The list of Norwegian government support for Kheh Der village tract⁷

No	Type	Amount
1	Rice	529 sacks
2	Salt	224 (358.4 kg. / 788.5 lbs.) viss ⁸
3	Fish paste	224 viss
4	Cooking oil	224 litres
5	Yellow bean	224 viss
6	Big pots	224
7	Small pots	224
8	Pans	224
9	Big rice paddles	224
10	Small rice paddles	224
11	Plates	224
12	Small bowls	224
13	Big bowls	224

⁷ The following measurements are taken from the community member's list. The manner in which aid was allocated to villagers is unclear, but the uniformity of measurements suggests it could have been divided along a household basis.

⁸ A *viss* is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

14	Kettles	224
15	Small spoons	224
16	Soap bars	224
17	Batteries	224
18	Mosquito nets	228
19	Mats	228
20	Blankets	672
21	Plastic cups	224
22	Small water containers	224
23	Big water containers	224
24	Cough syrup	224
25	Amoxicillin	224
26	Similac	-
27	Paracetamol	-
28	Vitamins	-
29	Metronidazole	-
30	Oral rehydration salts	-
31	Scissors	-

School equipment

32	Paper	286 packets
33	Bags	286
34	Pens	286
35	Pencil sharpeners	286
36	Pencils	286
37	Trousers	139
38	Umbrellas	286
39	Tiffin carriers	286
40	Girls shirts	147
41	Skirts	147
42	Men's longyis	448
43	Women's longyis	448
44	T-shirts	448
45	Mattocks	224
46	Broad-blade knives	224
47	Saws	224

48	Hammers	224
49	Nails	224

Flooding in our area

On July 29th 2012, flooding started [and] numerous villagers encountered many problems. They [villagers] had no boats [to travel] and villagers were put at risk of becoming jobless during the flooding, and they had to face the risk of their paddies dying as a consequence of one month of flooding. But, on August 22nd 2012, UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] [World Food Programme (WFP)]⁹ staff came and helped villagers in the area of Kyauk Kyi Township. As government staff made the report [regarding how the flooding impacted villagers], [WFP] staff provided support [material aid] to villagers, (and the support was given to village leaders who distributed it to village households).



These photos were taken by a community member on August 22nd 2013 when UN World Food Programme (WFP) staff members visited people facing difficulties in Htee Doh region, Kyauk Kyi Township. Three WFP staff members provided 1,690 sacks of rice to villagers. [Photos: KHRG]

On August 23rd 2012, the Back Pack Health Worker Team and EAT-Burma [Emergency Assistance Team-Burma] carried out the action plan of providing 300 rice sacks, soap and medicine for villagers in Ma Au Pin village tract, Kyauk Kyi Township.¹⁰

The river was full along the Tha Ye stream because the flooding occurred from July 29th to the middle of August [2012]. In Kaw Thah Say (Tha Ye Pin) villagers farmed the flat

⁹ While the community member wrote ‘UNHCR’ in the report, it is likely that this is incorrect and that the community member meant to write UN World Food Programme, as WFP staff can be seen in the photos sent with this report.

¹⁰ Although it is not clear from the written report, the community member clarified that the BPHWT workers provided rice on behalf of EAT-Burma and provided soap and medicine on their own behalf.

field farms there [in Tha Ye stream area], and gold miners did gold mining along Tha Ye stream. Villagers asked gold miners to stop digging gold for a short period while the flooding was happening, but the gold miners refused to stop and, as a result, polluted water flowed down toward paddies and spread throughout flat field farms. All paddies in 30 acres of flat field farms died. These [farms] are beside Tha Ye Pin village. Paddies [also] died in 30 acres of Leh Taw Kyi farm, which is beside Tha Ye Pin village.



These photos were taken on September 2nd 2012 and show rice paddy fields beside Tha Ye Pin village that were flooded, causing destruction of the paddies. The paddies are situated in Shwegyin Township. [Photos: KHRG]

General information

Road constructors and village leaders demanded 200 kyat (US \$.21) from each person travelling [by road] through M--- village. Students who attend the M--- primary school were demanded to pay as well, and each student had to pay up to 10,000 kyat (US \$10.59) per month. This turned out to be a problem for students' parents.

During August, the Burma government offered loans to farm workers in Pa Deh Kaw village tract, but bank representatives and village leaders did not lend the money to farm workers at all. Instead, they just lent the money to people who are not farm workers and those people who have good relationships with them. Therefore, this turned out to be a problem for villagers.

In addition, on August 22nd 2012, the Burma government [had kept bank deposits from farm workers] from 2006, and the Government [bank representatives] said that they would return the money back, but they have still not returned it back to villagers, even though the village head signed his name [as part of the agreement]. The Burma government gives loans to farmers. If a farmer pays back the loan with the amount of 100,000 kyat (US \$105.98) to the Burma government, the government will save 5,000 kyat (US \$5.29). On August 22nd 2012, village heads signed their names because people [bank representatives] told them that they would give the money to farm workers, but people have not given them any money yet. The complete information can be found in interview #3 [conducted] on September 9th 2012. I interviewed the village leader Saw N--- in M--- village, Pa Deh Kaw village tract.¹¹

Conclusion

The [events] that I reported are true incidents that happened in our area.

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

- “Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships, September to November 2012,” (June 2013)
- “Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi Township, November 2012 to January 2013,” (April 2013)
- “Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi Township, May to July 2012,” (March 2013)
- “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)

¹¹ This unpublished interview was received at the same time as the Situation Update and is on file with KHRG.

