



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

September 10, 2014 / KHRG #14-6-NB1

**Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District,
November 2013 - January 2014**

This News Bulletin describes forced labour and violent abuse perpetrated by Saw Tha Beh, a 2nd Lieutenant of BGF Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District, where local villagers reported being forced to transport wooden planks in support of a logging operation in the forest close to M--- village. Those who were unable to provide labour had their own wood confiscated and faced beatings. In order to avoid forced labour, most of the village's inhabitants fled to other villages.

During late 2013 and early 2014, a number of human rights abuses were reported to the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) by local villagers in Hpapun District. The subjection of villagers to forced labour and violent abuse by Saw Tha Beh, a 2nd Lieutenant of Border Guard Force (BGF)¹ Battalion #1014, which is based in Weh Gyi army camp and led by battalion commander Bo² Maung Chit,³ was raised more than once.

Second Lieutenant Saw Tha Beh is reported to be conducting logging operations in the forest near M--- village. On January 15th 2014, he ordered villagers in M--- to transport wooden planks from the forest to the vehicle road using their trucks or bullock carts without providing any wages. Those who didn't have cars or bullock carts had to physically carry the planks to the road.

Some villagers were unable to provide the labour demanded because they were busy conducting their own livelihood activities. Second Lieutenant Saw Tha Beh responded by confiscating wood from villagers who refused to work for him, and subjected them to violent abuse, punching and hitting them. Naw S---, 50, was among the villagers subjected to forced labour. She told KHRG that whenever 2nd Lieutenant Saw Tha Beh calls a meeting to demand labour, he always carries two cane sticks, and if the villagers say that they are not able to provide labour, he would hit them with the cane sticks.⁴

¹ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

² Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

³ Commander Maung Chit, also referred to as Maw Hsee, is the commander for Tatmadaw Border Guard Force (BGF) battalion #1014 in Hpapun District. Maung Chit is not to be confused with Maung Chit Thu (typically referred to as Chit Thu), who is a senior level BGF commander overseeing battalions #1017, #1018, #1019 and #1020 in Ko Ko, Hpapun District.

⁴ This information was included in the previously published KHRG report "[Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

In addition, Saw Tha Beh asked to buy wooden planks from the villagers at far below the market price. The villagers didn't want to sell the planks for that price, but they worried that Saw Tha Beh would harm them if they did not, so they were forced to. Sometimes, Saw Tha Beh didn't even pay for the planks and just confiscated them. Fifty one year-old U M---, said that "[even though] *Saw Tha Beh had confiscated my wood, he still hit me twice with his cane stick and twice with a piece of split bamboo. He also punched me twice.*"⁵ He went on to explain that Saw Tha Beh had also ordered villagers to serve as messengers and perform sentry duty.

To avoid being ordered to do forced labour or suffering violent abuse, most of the villagers fled to other places such as D--- village and P--- village. Some people who fled have now dared to come back to the village, but most of them haven't returned yet. The villagers also reported that 2nd lieutenant Saw Tha Beh and his soldiers travel around the district and engage in logging whenever and wherever they want.⁶

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

- "Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013," (August 2014)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014," (August 2014)
- "Hpapun Interview: U A---, July 2013," (August 2014)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to November 2013," (August 2014)
- "Hpapun Interview: Naw S---, September 2013," (August 2014)

⁵ This information was included in an unpublished incident report received by KHRG in July 2014 from a KHRG community member from Hpapun District

⁶ This information was included in the previously published KHRG report "Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014," KHRG, August 2014.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)