



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

October 29, 2014 / KHRG #14-30-S1

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## **Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe Township, April 2014**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District in 2013 and 2014, including villagers' livelihoods, development projects, migration, landmines and Tatmadaw militarization.*

- *A Japanese non-governmental organization (NGO) entered Hlaingbwe Township and built a number of schools and hospitals, but villagers expressed concerns that their children did not have the opportunity to learn their own Karen language in the schools.*
  - *A number of villagers who live on the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border have returned to their villages to work on their fields, but they are concerned about old landmines which were planted by the Tatmadaw.*
  - *Villagers expressed that they are not confident in the ceasefire process, mainly due to the fact that the Tatmadaw has continued to engage in activities which local villagers perceive as preparations for further conflict throughout Hlaingbwe Township.*
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### **Situation Update | Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District (2014)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in May 2014. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Hpa-an District, including 164 photographs and nine video clips.<sup>2</sup>*

In Hlaingbwe Township, there are four village tracts, which are Kleh Day village tract, Kwee Law Ploh village tract, Kloo Htaw village tract and Ka Kya village tract. They are in both mountainous and plains areas. Most of the villagers are working on paddy fields and hill fields for their livelihoods. The village tracts which are on the plains areas contain mostly farmers, and also those working on rubber plantations. They use their income for building their houses, and buying tractors and machines to plough their fields. Their income usually comes from raising cattle, goats and pigs, as well as receiving money from their children who are working in Thailand.

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in eastern 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. 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.

<sup>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern 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.

During 2013-2014, a Japanese NGO<sup>3</sup> entered Hlaingbwe Township and built about 40 schools; they are going to build more schools in some villages where the villagers need them. In 2013, the NGO first arrived in Hlaingbwe Township, and they helped [the villagers] mostly in the education and health care sectors. The villagers were happy with that. However, they also were concerned with one thing, and that was that the names of the schools and the hospitals [that the NGO had built] were written in Burmese. The Tatmadaw stated that they [the schools and hospitals] belong to them. Therefore, some of the villagers said *"We have schools in our villages but our children do not have a chance to learn their own Karen language."*

In Hlaingbwe Township, the villagers from the village tracts such as Kleh Day village tract, Kwee Law Ploh village tract, and Kloo Htaw village tract had to flee to Thailand in the past as the Tatmadaw and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)<sup>4</sup> came to attack the Karen National Union (KNU). Some of the villagers who are from Kleh Ka village, Htee Baw Day village, Meh Kreh village, Nga Kyah Kway village and Htee Too Kaw village came back [from Thailand] to work on the hill fields in their villages, but not all of them have come back. Some are still living on the Thai-Burma border. Some of the villagers returned to work on their hill fields. Nevertheless, they [those who live on the Thai-Burma border] are still concerned about the old landmines that are planted in the former military areas where they had stayed in the past [in the border area]. In December 2013, one of Dee Kha's [a local villager] father's male buffalos stepped on an old landmine in Meh Kreh Hkee village, Kwee Law Hploh village tract.

The villagers from Meh Kreh, Htee Baw Day, and Hkler Ka said that they did not dare to return and build their houses in their villages yet. [The villagers stated that] the ceasefire is not real and the Tatmadaw soldiers are preparing themselves [for further fighting] throughout the township. The villagers are worried and afraid of everything [the Tatmadaw].

In Hlaingbwe Township, there were village tract leaders in the past, in 2011-2012, who became administrators in the [Burma/Myanmar] government in 2013-2014. The Tatmadaw gives them a salary of 190,000 kyat (US \$190)<sup>5</sup> per month. All of them have become members of the Tatmadaw. It is so sad for them. It makes us ponder the fact that our people [referring to the KNU] cannot give the same salary as the other ethnic group [Tatmadaw]. They all [the administrators] are now on the side of the Tatmadaw.

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<sup>3</sup> Villagers our researcher spoke to in the area could not identify the name of the NGO, but stated that it was Japanese.

<sup>4</sup> The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "[Inside the DKBA](#)," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

<sup>5</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the October 28<sup>th</sup> 2014 official market rate of 1000 kyat to the US \$1.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpa-an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Hpa-an Situation Update: Paingkyon Township, July 2014,” (October 2014)
- “Hpa-an Situation Update: Hti Lon Township, March 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Human rights violations by BGF Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, February 2013 to July 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Hpa-an Incident Report: Stone mining damages villagers’ fields in Paingkyon Township, March 2013,” (August 2014)
- “Hpa-an Short Update: Hti Lon Township, March 2014,” (August 2014)

# Hpa-an District



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