



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

---

### **Situation Update**

October 30, 2014 / KHRG #14-37-S1

---

## **Thaton Situation Update: Hpa-an Township, January to June 2014**

---

*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Hpa-an Township, Thaton District between January and June 2014, including the activity of military actors, infrastructure and industrial development activities conducted by private companies, non-governmental organisations (NGO) activities, education and healthcare.*

- *Battalion #1014 of the Border Guard Force (BGF) built a military camp in Hpah Paw village, Weh Pyah village tract on February 4<sup>th</sup> 2014.*
  - *The Soe Naing Phyo Company had intended to build a cement factory in Meh Ka Raw village, but after negotiations with local Karen National Union (KNU) authorities the project was halted due to objections from local villagers. Similarly, the Mi Zaing Taung Company had a plan to build hospitals and schools in some mountain villages, but after consulting the KNU were not granted permission to proceed with the construction.*
  - *Villagers reported a lack of coordination between the Burma/Myanmar government and KNU affiliated local authorities' efforts to provide education services in the district.*
  - *Poor coordination was also reported in the healthcare sector, as government healthcare workers came into conflict with NGO staff engaged in the distribution of medicine to local communities.*
- 

## **Situation Update | Hpa-an Township, Thaton District (January to June 2014)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 2014. It was written by a community member in Thaton 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>*

### **Introduction**

---

<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. 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.

This Hpa-an Township Situation Update covering January to June 2014 focuses on:

1. The situation regarding the government military;
2. The situation regarding independent organizations;
3. The situation regarding companies, education and healthcare.

### **The situation regarding the government military**

The military activity of government soldiers decreased in 2014. There is only [military activity] when their top leaders sometimes come to visit villages; their soldiers take care of their security along the road in the villages [when they come]. I did not see them do anything against human rights. Their battalions change once every three months as usual and their divisions change once a year.

### **The situation regarding the BGF [Border Guard Force]<sup>2</sup>**

In Hpa-an Township, BGF [Battalion] #1014 which is under the control of the Burmese government came and built a military camp in Hpah Paw village, Weh Pyah village tract on February 4<sup>th</sup> 2014. The name of the company commander who stays there is Tin Win. In Hpa-an Township, there are three of their army camps, which are Hpah Paw army camp, Law Poo army camp and Meh Poo army camp. There is also the DKBA's [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]<sup>3</sup> Bo Boh army camp, which is located at the foot of the mountain of Meh See village in Maw Keh Muh [village tract]. There is no BGF military activity. There is only one thing, which is that they wait [at checkpoints] and ask for taxes from people who do cattle trading. The army camp that is in Hpah Paw village takes care of security for a company's rubber plantation and teak tree plantation so that there will be no destruction [caused by animals]. The KNU [Karen National Union] has not given permission for the rubber and teak tree plantations. Therefore, the Shwe Than Lwin Company continues to take protection from the BGF.

### **The situation regarding companies**

In Hpa-an Township, there are two companies that have entered into the area, which are the Mi Zaing Taung Company and the Soe Naing Phyo Company. The Soe Naing Phyo Company intended to build a cement factory in Meh Ka Raw village. However, they asked the opinion of the local armed group, which is the KNU-KNLA, and the local armed group leaders did not make a decision immediately. On April 12<sup>th</sup> 2014, a monk from Kya Aye Paw Taw Mu sent an objection letter [to the KNU-KNLA] regarding the building of the cement factory. On April 28<sup>th</sup> 2014, the township leaders and some [KNU] officers went to Meh Ka Raw village and had a

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</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.

meeting with the villagers. The people who attended that meeting included [U Zaw Min], the Chief Minister of Kayin State and five of his friends [government officials working for him] and [representatives] from the Soe Naing Phyto Company. There were a total of 500 people at the meeting. One person who gave a speech in the meeting was [the Kayin State government] Minister of Transport U Khin Maung Myint. In the meeting, the villagers were asked whether they agreed to the building of the cement factory, and there were no villagers who liked the [project], so they did not agree to it. Since the villagers did not give them permission, the KNU and KNLA leaders did not allow them [to build the cement factory].

### **Mi Zaing Taung Company**

This company has a plan to build hospitals and primary schools in the mountain villages. They asked permission from local village and village tract leaders [affiliated with the KNU] and the local authorities held a meeting on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, [in which the local authorities decided] that they should not give permission. The [KNU] district leader tasked the township leaders with finding specific information about the [project], as to whether the support was coming from NGOs, the government or companies.

### **The situation regarding independent organizations entering into the area**

Since the ceasefire, I have seen that many independent NGOs have entered into the village. They are the Nippon Foundation, UNICEF, Save the Children and Switzerland Development Project.<sup>4</sup> As these independent organisations have entered into the villages, it has caused conflicts with local staff who work in healthcare.

The conflict happened with the government staff and KNU staff regarding the healthcare sector because they [NGOs] sent their staff into the villages without letting the local healthcare staff know. They then left after they had treated the patients over one or two days. Therefore, when the local healthcare staff went to treat the patients in the villages where the NGO staff had treated people, they asked some of the patients what kind of medicines the NGO staff had treated them with. Since the patients did not know what kind of medicines they had been treated with, it caused a problem [with the local healthcare staff]. Saw A---, the new township healthcare department administrator said that regarding the NGO healthcare staff entering into the township, there is a policy that the local healthcare department needs to be informed before [any NGO] enters the township. This is because there are already some Back Pack Health Worker Teams in some villages [and government healthcare workers there] who they should coordinate with, so that there would not be any overlap [in the provision of healthcare by NGOs and Back Pack Health Worker Teams]. He also said that when [the NGO] staff went to look after the patients and inject the patients [with medicine], one of the government healthcare staff went and took the syringe and said to the patient: “*Do not inject that medicine! Come and get medicine from me.*” It happened like that and if there are misunderstandings [between NGO and government healthcare staff], problems could happen.

### **The situation regarding education**

Regarding a problem which happened in the education sector, since the government sent too many of their teachers to mountain villages, some of the local teachers who the Karen Education Department [KED] had already selected became jobless. What is more, it has made the burden on the villagers heavier as they have to provide the food for the government

---

<sup>4</sup> The researcher did not clarify which organization this refers to.

teachers. Another thing is that based on KED needs, they [KED] could not elect the villagers to attend advanced teacher training or the other trainings easily like before. Since the government opened opportunities to apply for jobs, and [since] they will be provided a suitable salary, most villagers went to apply for jobs with them [the government]. As the work on this [the KNU] side is voluntary, we can see and say that the villagers are not interested in working [for the KNU].

This year, the government said that there must be a nursery school in every village in Hpa-an Township. [Villages can be divided into] three types [on the basis of whether or not they have had] nursery schools [before], which are; villages where there has never been a nursery school, villages where there was a nursery school once but the nursery school was destroyed, and villages where there is a nursery school which has never been destroyed. The government [provides] 300,000 kyat (US \$303.03)<sup>5</sup> [of financial] support to villages where there is a nursery school which was never destroyed, 600,000 kyat (US \$606.06) to villages where there was a nursery school which was destroyed, and 900,000 (US \$909.09) kyat to villages where there has never been a nursery school. This money includes [support] for everything like the school building materials, the food for the students, and toys for students to play with. The nursery schools will not be supported in the coming years. The teachers need to be hired from the village and they [the government] are going to provide salaries for the teachers. Regarding [other] schools, there is free education for primary school and middle school in the villages where their [government] teachers have been sent. However, the villagers have to take responsibility for the teachers' food and [the costs they incur] in travelling back and forth [to attend trainings etc]. As the teachers teach for one month and then always have to attend teacher training for ten days or one month, the students' parents complain [about] the [teachers'] travel costs. Since the students do not have very much time to study even though they go to school [due to the frequent absences of the teachers while they attend training], the villagers want the schools to be self-help schools.

### **The situation regarding healthcare**

The healthcare situation in Hpa-an Township is fairly good. There haven't been any serious diseases this year; there has only been malaria, diarrhoea, measles and some illnesses that happened to women such as dizziness and blood pressure problems. There are some government clinics in this township but there is nothing [no medicine]. Therefore, some villagers went to attend health training with the KNU, and there are also some villagers who went to attend obstetric training [provided by] the government. Since the training, they have gone back to their villages and bought medicines and they are taking care of patients as well as they can. They ask [the villagers] for the cost of the medicine. When the villagers have serious diseases, they send them to the hospital that is in the town. Going to the hospital in the town costs a lot of money. The villagers who do not have money have to borrow money from others. Some of the villagers could not pay back the money; so they had to go and work in other countries.

### **Conclusion**

The above information is written [on the basis of] what I have seen and heard, and know [through] visiting the township. It is not that I thought [up] the information and wrote it. As for some information, the villager suffered personally and told me and I wrote up the information. Then I wrote it as a situation update.

---

<sup>5</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the October 7th 2014 official market rate of 990 kyat to the US \$1.

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

- “Land confiscation due to a road repair and expansion project in Bilin Township, Thaton District, January 2014,” (September 2014)
- “Thaton Incident Report: Attempted rape in Thaton Township, September 2013,” (August 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013,” (September 2014)
- “Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire,” (September 2014)
- “Thaton Interview: U A---, May 2012,” (September 2014)

# Doo Tha Htoo ( Karen )



**KHRG** Karen Human Rights Group  
 Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma