



News Bulletin

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Villagers flee to avoid fighting and portering: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District

Civilians in Dooplaya District continue to be impacted by conflict between the Tatmadaw and armed Karen groups, who have increased fighting in the area since November 7th 2010. The situation around Palu village remains highly unstable; in order to avoid conflict and conflict-related abuse, civilians are moving frequently between their homes and fields, more secure locations outside the village and along the Moei River, and both official and unofficial locations in Thailand's Phop Phra District. Residents of the community have told KHRG that they believe male villagers face a serious threat of being forcibly recruited as porters to support re-supply operations of Tatmadaw units deployed in the area, and that men in Palu are actively avoiding encountering Tatmadaw troops.

Civilians in Dooplaya District continue to be impacted by increased conflict since November 7th 2010, involving Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw, and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), as well as other armed Karen groups. Since larger battles occurred in Myawaddy and Three Pagodas Pass towns on November 8th and 9th, the conflict has been characterised by frequent skirmishes, shelling and guerrilla style attacks throughout areas opposite Tak and Kanchanaburi provinces, Thailand.

Civilians living in areas affected by fighting, including villages in which fighting is expected but has yet to occur, have described a range of physical security and livelihoods threats including: death, injury, or destruction of property as a result of skirmishes between armed groups and functionally indiscriminate use of weapons by soldiers in civilian areas;¹ looting of property by soldiers or other villagers;²



This picture, taken on December 3rd 2010, shows residents of Palu village fleeing to the Burma side of the Moei River to avoid expected fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA forces active near Palu. [Photo: KHRG]

¹ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Villager injured, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

² See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG,

arrest, detention or execution by soldiers that suspect civilians of supporting an adverse party to the conflict;³ sexual violence;⁴ arrest and forced portering;⁵ movement restrictions impeding livelihoods activities and villagers' ability to escape fighting;⁶ and the fear that prolonged fighting and associated abuses will disrupt the harvesting of corn and bean crops into which many villagers in the area have invested significant labour and financial resources.⁷

Most of these threats are markedly different from the human rights and security concerns associated with the low-intensity conflict that communities in eastern Dooplaya have confronted over the past decade. Villagers have told KHRG that they do not feel safe amid the unstable and increasingly dangerous military context created by the upheaval of military relationships and the re-emergence of open conflict;⁸ many have opted to flee with their families temporarily to more secure locations from which they can monitor the security situation and check on their homes, property and crops.⁹ Villagers attempting to access such temporary refuge in Thailand, however, have faced a number of obstacles that have caused incoming refugees to hide in dispersed, discreet locations or else cross back and forth between temporary sites established just across the border in Burma whenever fighting occurs.¹⁰ Several sources, including within the DKBA, have told KHRG that they expect the fighting to continue, which suggests that the protection threats to villagers in eastern Dooplaya will remain urgent.¹¹

Continued fighting and displacement in Palu village

November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

³ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "School closures and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

⁴ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010.

⁵ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

⁶ See: "School closures and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Villager injured, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010.

⁷ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "School closures and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

⁸ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

⁹ "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

¹⁰ See: "Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

¹¹ See: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, November 2010; "Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for civilians seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand," KHRG, November 2010.

Earlier this week KHRG reported that residents of Palu village, Kawkareik Township, began fleeing their homes on November 25th to avoid shelling and clashes between Tatmadaw and DKBA forces.¹² Further fighting in Palu has been reported every day since then, including yesterday, when one villager estimated that more than 20 shells landed in and around the village.

Saw Wi---, a resident of Palu that spoke with KHRG, said that Tatmadaw forces are currently based in several strategic locations in the area, including at a camp on the western edge of Palu at the base of a small mountain and at a site on top of the same mountain known as Dtah Kaw Kyo, a 30-minute climb from Palu village. Dtah Kaw Kyo has a clear line of sight into Palu village and adjacent villages in Thailand, extending as far as the town of Mae Sot on a clear day.

According to Saw Wi---, on the morning of December 3rd at approximately 10 am DKBA soldiers arrived at the edge of a forested area on the outskirts of Palu and began surveying the area to see if Tatmadaw soldiers were present; Saw Wi--- reported that this prompted many villagers to flee the village because they feared that the Tatmadaw unit occupying Dtah Kaw Kyo would easily spot the DKBA soldiers and begin firing mortars into the village. Saw Wi--- also said he heard that another villager had been warned by the DKBA soldiers that they were planning to attack Tatmadaw troops stationed in Palu, and that they should consider fleeing.



These photos, taken on December 2nd 2010, show villagers from Palu in an RTA-administered temporary refugee site in Meh Gku Kay village in Thailand's Phop Phra District. Many residents of Palu have fled multiple times since Tatmadaw forces took positions in the village on November 25th. One Palu resident told KHRG that some villagers preferred not to stay in such official sites if they had other options, because their movements would be tightly controlled, their access to information about the situation in Palu would be limited, and they would have no choice about when to return to Burma. [Photos: KHRG]

Most residents of Palu initially fled only to the Burma side of the Moei River, a short distance from Palu; Saw Wi--- said he believed villagers were unwilling to cross into Thailand at this stage because they worried that Royal Thai Army (RTA) soldiers would ask them to stay in locations tightly administered by the RTA. At approximately 11:30 am some of the villagers decided to cross into Thailand, when shelling began in Palu village. Another villager, who had not fled prior to the shelling but arrived in Thailand at approximately 2 pm, told a KHRG researcher that he estimated more than 20 shells had been fired, and that several shells had landed inside Palu, including on the football pitch, while other shells had landed outside the village and near the Tatmadaw camp on the western edge of Palu.

As of 4 pm on December 3rd, most residents of Palu had not returned to their homes. When asked where the villagers would stay during that evening, Saw Wi--- told KHRG:

¹² "Villager injured, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010.

I believe tonight none of the villagers will dare to go back [to Palu]. Some villagers who know people on the Thai side will go stay [in Thailand] with their friends. Villagers who don't have friends there will stay on the Thai side in field huts. Some people will stay on the Burma side, but won't dare to go back to the village.

When asked further whether he thought villagers staying in Thailand would try to stay in sites administered by the Thai authorities, Saw Wi--- said he believed that villagers would avoid these sites because of tight restrictions on refugees entering and exiting the sites, the difficulty of getting information about the situation in their village from inside the sites, and the likelihood of being forcibly returned while staying in the sites. Nonetheless, by 4:30 pm staff from relief organisations in Thailand counted 1,029 villagers at an RTA administered site opposite Palu.

Further south in the Kyo G'Lee area of Kawkareik Township, meanwhile, a KHRG researcher has reported that villagers have been leaving their homes amid fears of renewed fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA forces.¹³ Since November 27th, small groups of villagers from Mae Gk'La Kee, T'Naw Hta, Maw Gk'Noe Kee, Kyo G'lee, Kwee Ta'Ho, G'Neh Thay Hta and Bpaw Baw Hta villages have reportedly fled, with some seeking protection in Gk'Law Hta and Noh Bp'Taw Wah villages in Thailand's Umphang District as of December 2nd 2010.



These photos, taken on November 30th 2010, shows villagers from the Kyo G'Lee area of Kawkareik Township, fleeing through the jungle to seek protection in Gk'law Hta and Noh Bp'Taw Wah villages in Thailand. The situation for communities in eastern Dooplaya District is highly unstable, and many villagers have told KHRG that temporary displacement of families to more secure locations, including to Thailand, until the security situation becomes clearer is an important protection strategy in the current context. [Photos: KHRG]

Forced portering

Residents of Palu have also told KHRG that the arrest of male villagers as porters by Tatmadaw forces remains a significant threat to civilians. According to a Saw Ju---, a villager from Palu who spoke with KHRG, on December 1st two ethnic Burman male residents of Palu were arrested while harvesting beans on a plantation on the outskirts of the village and ordered to carry an injured Tatmadaw soldier as well as rice rations. Ka---, who is in his mid-twenties, and Da---, who is in his early thirties, were detained by Tatmadaw soldiers currently based at a camp at Ta Le Ee Pwa, which is approximately 45 minutes on foot southeast of Palu.

According to Saw Ju---, who met with Ka--- and Da--- after the incident, the two men were ordered to carry a Tatmadaw soldier, who was wounded in his leg, in a bamboo stretcher from

¹³ KHRG reported earlier this week that two civilians in the Kyo G'Lee area had been arrested and that Tatmadaw forces were enforcing movement restrictions in the area; see: "More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010.

the camp at Ta Le Ee Pwa to the Tatmadaw camp on the western edge of Palu village. When the men reached the Tatmadaw camp in Palu, they were immediately ordered to carry sacks of rice back to Ta La Ee Pwa. According to Saw Ju---, Da--- attempted to bribe the soldiers to avoid portering the rice, but his offer was ignored. Hungry from not having eaten after carrying the wounded soldier, Ka--- abandoned his load a short distance from the Tatmadaw outpost and escaped temporarily to Thailand. Da--- finished carrying his load to Ta Le Ee Pwa; on December 2nd he was ordered to porter rice again, this time from Ta Le Ee Pwa to the Tatmadaw camp at Dta Kaw Kyo, on a small mountain to the west of Palu village. Da--- abandoned his load on the way to Dta Kaw Kyo and escaped; Saw Ju--- said that when he spoke with Da--- later that afternoon, he said he would avoid meeting Tatmadaw troops in the future because he did not want to be arrested and forced to porter again.

Villagers from Palu that have spoken with KHRG have confirmed that male residents are highly concerned that they will be arrested as porters, since it is believed that the Tatmadaw has not yet completed the delivery of rations to all of its forces active in the area. Saw Ju--- said he had seen eight truckloads of rations arrive in Palu but that not all of the rations had yet left the village. Another Palu resident, Saw Bo---, told KHRG that, while passing a Tatmadaw checkpoint near the riverside at Palu at 10:45 am on December 2nd, he overheard a Tatmadaw officer's telephone conversation in which the officer explained:

Now the fighting has stopped but it isn't easy for us to go to Waw Lay. We need more troops. Now some rice has arrived in Palu. Some of the rice still needs to be sent and we need troops who will take security [for the rice delivery].

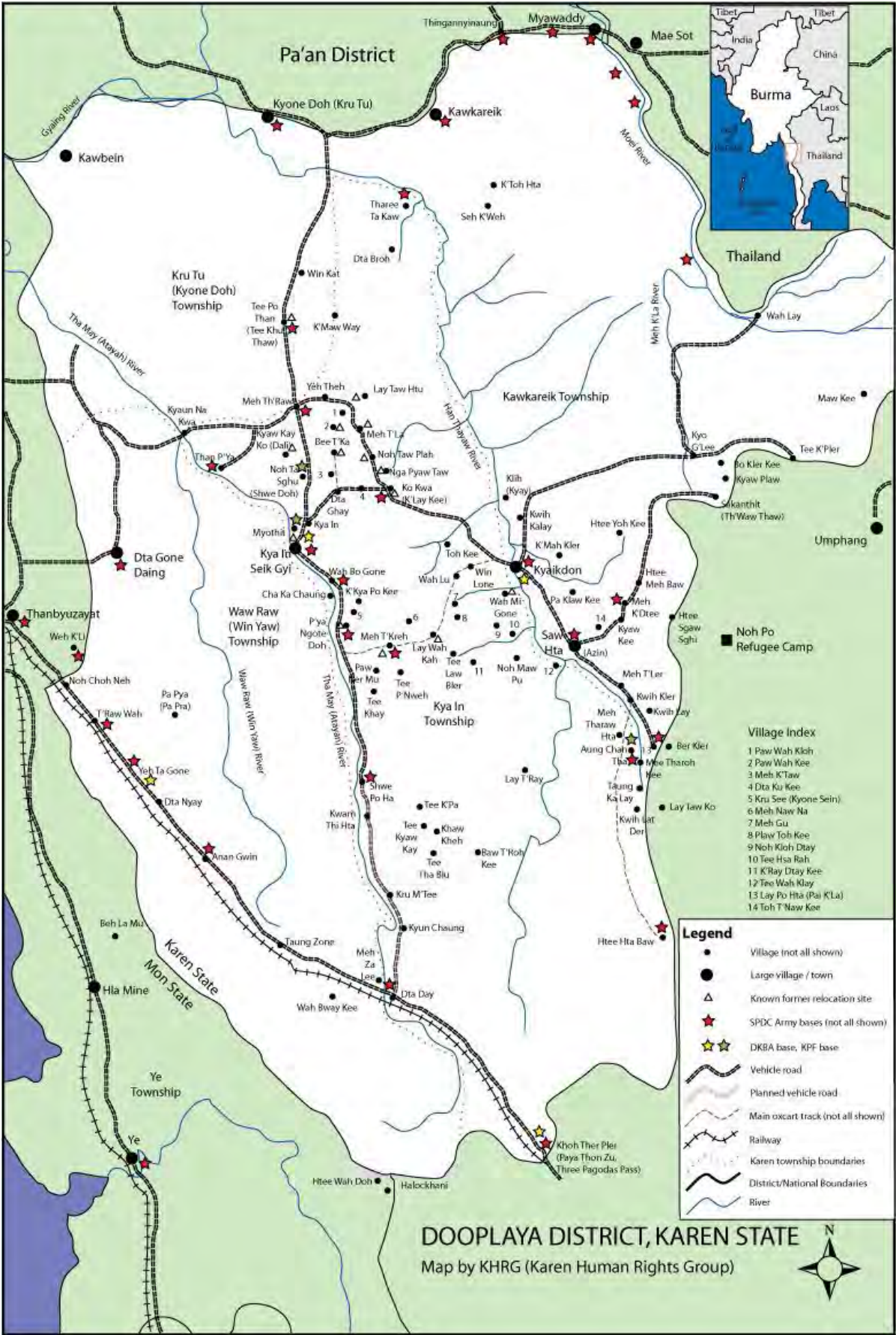
KHRG reported last week that DKBA sources said they were in fact actively obstructing Tatmadaw efforts to re-supply units deployed further south in Waw Lay;¹⁴ as long as such operations remain ongoing, villagers in Palu are likely to continue to fear that male civilians will be arrested as porters to support delivery of Tatmadaw rations.

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

- *Threats to human rights, obstacles to protection: Conditions for villagers seeking refuge in Phop Phra District, Thailand, KHRG, November 2010*
- *More arrests and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Villager injured, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Arrest, looting and flight: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *School closures and movement restrictions: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts (November 2010)*
- *Civilians at risk from continued SPDC-DKBA conflict in Dooplaya District (November 2010)*
- *DKBA burns village and forces residents to relocate in Pa'an District (June 2010)*
- *SPDC shelling destroys villagers' rubber plantations in Dooplaya District (May 2010)*

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrg.org>.

¹⁴ "Villager injured, community flees: Conflict continues to impact civilians in Dooplaya District," KHRG, November 2010.



Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles