



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, April 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in April 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Papun District, during the period between January and April 2011. The villager describes the embezzlement of funds earmarked for road repair by government officials; increased taxation on vehicles, road use and the transport of goods; and demands for payment in lieu of forced labour levied by Border Guard Battalion #1013.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (April 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Papun 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 along with other information from Papun District, including three incident reports, nine interviews and 63 photographs.²

Incidents that happened between January 2011 - April 2011:

The incidents that I am going to report happened in Meh Gklaw and Meh Mweh village tracts, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. The incidents started happening in February 2011 and continue to cause problems now. The problem has been that villagers have to pay portering fees [in lieu of sending villagers as porters], and ox-cart and motorbike taxes. A Papun Town labour group also lied about the reconstruction of a vehicle road. The people who caused the problem were [Tatmadaw] Border Guard soldiers from Battalion #1013, a Papun Town labour group and the Papun Town Municipal Department.

These people don't have a great reason for doing this. They lied to and manipulated villagers to be able to get money for free from them. If I have to describe the problem in detail: a unit of the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] who agreed to become Border Guard Battalion #1013, led by Battalion Commander Maung Chit and based in Myaing Gyi Ngu, came to Meh Nyaw monastery to hold a meeting on January 15th 2011. Every village from Meh Mweh Hta [Meh Mweh village tract] and Tee T'Daw Hta village tract had to come and attend the meeting.

¹ KHRG trains villagers 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, villagers 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.

² When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Papun District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Papun District, and more specifically, in Bu Tho Township, can be found in the recent Field Report, "Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control," KHRG, August 2010.

In the meeting, Battalion Commander Maung Chit from Battalion #1013 decided that Meh Mweh Hta village has to pay money [in lieu of providing] two porters and the total amount of money is 200,000 kyat (US \$271).³ The village would have to pay this every month. There are about 50 households in Meh Mweh Hta, so this has become a big problem for the villagers.

Another problem involves the labour group [public department responsible for road maintenance] in Papun Town. They went around and lied to people about road reconstruction. On February 2nd 2011, they announced that they would start rebuilding the vehicle road from Papun [Town] to Ma Htaw village. They said they were going to construct a road and repair a bridge. In reality, they did not even repair the entire road. They just covered the holes in the road. Maybe, it is true that [high-ranking] leaders in the labour group above asked for the whole road to be rebuilt, but the builder in charge just made small repairs. We know that the contractor for road construction cut off the money in the middle [embezzled funds earmarked for road construction].

On February 6th 2011, the Papun Town Municipal Department said [announced] another thing. They said: '*The road has been repaired, so carts and motorbikes are not allowed to drive on the road for free. If they want to drive, they have to hold a card [travel permission document].*' As this is what they said, cart owners and motorbike owners now have to go and buy a card [travel permission document] from the Papun Town Municipal Department. For a motorbike card [permit], they have to pay 3,000 kyat (US \$4.07) and for carts, 5,000 kyat (US \$6.78). This issue causes a big problem for villagers who live between Papun Town and Ma Htaw village. Daw Htike Yin Win is the Director of the Papun Town Municipal Department. We know this because we got information from a cart owner from H--- village; he told us and that is how we know this information.

I thought this kind of problem and situation would change and disappear when the new government came [into power]. We have waited to see but we see that nothing has changed, and problems have not disappeared. The problems will not decrease or disappear if the situation stays the same as before the election.

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

- "Papun Incident Reports: November 2010 to January 2011," (August 2011)
- *Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District* (May 2011)
- "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," (April 2011)
- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, (August 2010)
- "Southern Papun District: Abuse and expansion of military control," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Village-level decision-making and strategic displacement," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control," (August 2010)
- "Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River," (August 2010)

³ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this interview are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of August 31st 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 737 kyat. These figures are used for all calculations above.

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

