



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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## **Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, January to March 2012**

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*This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in April 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Papun District, in the period between January and March 2012. It provides information on land confiscation by Border Guard Battalion #1013, which has appropriated villagers' communal grazing land between D--- and M--- villages for the construction of barracks for housing soldiers' families. Related to this project is the planned construction of a dam on the Noh Paw Htee River south of D--- village, which is expected to result in the subsequent flooding of 150 acres of D--- villagers' farmland, valued at US \$91,687. Villagers from K'Ter Tee, Htee Th'Bluh Hta, and Th'Buh Hta village tracts have also reported facing demands for materials used for making thatch shingles, for which villagers receive either minimal or no payment. Updated information concerning other military activity is also provided, specifically on troop augmentation, with LID #22, and IB #8 and #96 reported to have joined Border Guard Battalion #1013 by establishing bases at K'Ter Tee, as well as reports of increased transportation of rations, weapons and troops to camps in the border regions. Details are also provided on new restrictions introduced since the January 2012 ceasefire agreement on the movement of Tatmadaw units; similar restrictions have been documented in Toungoo District in a report published by KHRG in May 2012, "Toungoo Situation Update: Tantabin Township, January to March 2012". Information is also given on a recent Tatmadaw directive, which stipulates that soldiers and villagers living near to military camps must inform any KNU officials they encounter that they are welcome to meet with Tatmadaw commanders or officers.*

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### **Situation Update | Dweh Loh Township, Papun District (January to March 2012)**

*The following situation update was written by a community member 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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Papun District.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>KHRG trains community members 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, 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, 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. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the Report, "Incident Report: Papun District, June 2011," KHRG, May 2012.

## **A report on the problems faced by villagers in K'Ter Tee and Htee Th'Bluh Hta village tracts, Dweh Loh Township, Papun District**

The people that live in the area [K'Ter Tee and Htee Th'Bluh Hta village tracts] have experienced problems in the period between January 1<sup>st</sup> and March 6<sup>th</sup> 2012. These problems are still happening in K'Ter Tee and Htee Th'Bluh Hta village tracts, and they are as follows.

Border Guard Battalion #1013's , led by [Battalion Commander] *Bo* [Officer] Lah Kyaing Oo, confiscated the peoples' cattle grazing land in order to build houses for the soldiers' wives to live in. As a result of this human rights abuse happening, forced labour will also occur again as villagers will be forced to construct the barracks for the soldiers' wives. Also, more than 150 acres of Noh Paw Htee villagers' flat field farms will be flooded as a result of the dam that is going to be built on the Noh Paw Htee River by the Border Guard. These are the problems that have been impacting villagers and which they have been grieving over.

The human rights abuses reported have been caused by the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army], which has transformed into the Border Guard<sup>3</sup>. They are the soldiers from Thein Sein's government's Border Guard Battalion #1013, led by *Bo* La Kyaing Oo. The reason for causing these [human rights abuses] is because of their objective to build houses for soldiers' wives to live in. The Border Guard does not analyze the weak points and strong points of the job before implementing things; they do not even know how their work has impacted ethnic villagers, thus it keeps on happening.

To give further information on these events, a D--- villager said that the villagers' cattle grazing land lies in the area between the south of D--- village and the north of M--- village. The houses will be built for the Border Guard [soldiers'] wives in the cattle grazing land between these two villages. As a consequence, many villagers have had to send *d'nih* [a kind of leaf used in thatch shingles] and bamboo poles to the Border Guard, either without any payment or for a very low price, even though they did not want to. These villagers were from villages in K'Ter Tee and Htee Th'Bluh Hta village tracts comprising: Noh Paw Htee, Poh Ma Heh, Noh Lah, Htee Hsaw Meh (Burmese name, Zin Zweh), Htee Theh Lay and Htee Law Hsee Hta; and villages in Th'Buh Hta village tract comprising: Hpway Taw Ngoo, K' Pay Kee, Htee Hpaw Doh Kee, Baw Soh Hta, Waw Law The, Thoh Klah, Noh Ghaw and Htee Th'Bluh Hta. [In these villages] villagers cannot avoid working for them.

If barracks are built for the Border Guard soldiers' wives, the ancient cattle grazing land will be destroyed and lost. The land with a spring beside D--- village is where the barracks will be built. This place has water in ponds, so hard soil is needed in the place

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<sup>3</sup>While Tatmadaw and DKBA units have for years operated together, this operational hierarchy became formalised with the DKBA's transformation into a 'Border Guard Force' under control of the Tatmadaw and containing a fixed number quota of Tatmadaw officers. This transformation dates to at least May 2009, when commanding officers stated in high-level meeting of DKBA officers that the DKBA would transform itself into a 'Border Guard Force.' Leaked minutes from the May 2009 meeting are retained by KHRG on file. Ceremonies attended by Tatmadaw commanders officially announced the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard Forces in September 2010; see, for example: "Border Guard Forces of South-East Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2010.

where the barracks will be built. One dam needs to be constructed on the Noh Paw Htee River in order to change the direction of the water so that it flows down into the Baw Soh River (Burmese name, K'Nyin Doh River). This river is located to the west of D--- village and it flows from north to south, so the Border Guard has planned to construct a small dam to the south of D--- village. This information was provided directly by a D--- villager.

To build the dam, Major Aung Myo Myint has been contracted [by #1013 *Bo La Kyaing Oo*]. He and Border Guard Battalion #1013 Battalion Commander *Bo La Kyaing Oo* held negotiations and decided that they will build the dam forcibly. No discussion was held with the villagers, the public. When the dam is built, it will block the water in the Noh Paw Htee River and the water level will rise by nine feet, as reported by D--- villagers. If the water level rises like this, 150 acres of D--- villagers' flat fields will be underwater, and they will be destroyed and lost. If we calculate it, the value of 150 acres of flat fields would be at least 75 million kyat (US \$91,687)<sup>4</sup>.

The place in this report, where the Border Guard are trying to build the dam, is located to the west of Ka Ma Maung and the Papun vehicle road, and four furlongs (0.5 miles / 0.8 km) away to the northwest of M--- [village]. It takes 20 minutes on foot from M---village to that area. Thein Sein's government's LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #8 troops used to be based in Bilin Town but they have come to K'Ter Tee to join with Border Guard Battalion #1013, led by Battalion Commander *Bo La Kyaing Oo*. They are active in the area in which the dam will be built. KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] Battalion #102 troops are sometimes active there. LID [Light Infantry Division] #22, IB [Infantry Battalion] #8, and IB #96 are under the control of the Thein Sein government. They are based in K'Ter Tee camp where they have their headquarters, and they are active from the southwest of Thaw K'Law Kee village to Kyak Thaw Hsay [where Yoh Klah Camp is located] and to the north of M'Taw village, along the right side of the vehicle road. Also, they travel back and forth from the east of Nat village to Hsoo Mweh Hta Camp, which is located on the bank of the Salween River.

In this current ceasefire period, Thein Sein's government troops [Tatmadaw] can only travel 200 yards from the fences around their camps. They are allowed to cut firewood and carry water 200 yards from the vehicle road, and they are allowed to leave their camps and travel back and forth up to 200 yards away from the villages where villagers live. [If they travel] any further away, misunderstandings can arise between the armed groups, and attacks can happen. This information was received from KNLA soldiers who are active on the front line.

Again, a directive was passed to Thein Sein's government's troops at the frontline camps and villagers from nearby villages. If anyone sees any responsible persons from the KNU [Karen National Union], they must let them know that they are welcome to meet and talk with the camp commanders or officers from Thein Sein's government's army camps. The directive announced that the public must cooperate and help to maintain the current ceasefire status so as not to break it again. Every person who lives close to the camps was informed about it as well.

The KNU has also welcomed [the Tatmadaw], but they have sent more weapons, troops and rations, as much as they could, to the border camps. Due to Thein Sein's soldiers' activities, every ethnic armed group is watching what Thein Sein's Tatmadaw does carefully.

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<sup>4</sup>As of May 24<sup>th</sup> 2012, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on a rate of 818 kyat to US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012 to initiate a managed float of the kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1.

We think that it has nothing to do with KHRG members whether or not we obtain peace or maintain a ceasefire. The things related to KHRG members are: how well villagers are, how free they are, and how happy they are, because KHRG members watch the public and help the public. Even if we have peace, we cannot say that there are no human rights abuses during peacetime. We will still have one kind of human rights abuse or another after getting true peace. We would like to report that human rights abuses keep on happening, so KHRG members have to continue to stand by the sides of villagers. All KHRG members have the responsibility to use their skills to help with every social problem.

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

- "Papun Interview Transcript: Naw P---, November 2011," (April 2012)
- "Papun Interview Transcript: Saw L---, June 2011," (March 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Maung R---, August 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw H---, March 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, May to June 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw T---, August 2011," (January 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, Received in November 2011," (December 2011)

