



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

June 6, 2012 / KHRG #2012-B56

Pa'an Interview: Saw P---, September 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during September 2011 in Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed 31-year-old Saw P---, a hill field farmer from T--- village, who described the problems faced by T--- villagers as a result of Border Guard troops' activities in Dta Greh Township, specifically concerning their demands for food and the theft of villagers' livestock. He provided details of an incident that occurred in August 2011, in which a villager's pig, worth approximately US \$110, was shot and eaten without permission and furthermore no compensation was provided. Saw P--- also explained that the presence of KNLA troops in the area has led to a decrease in such incidents of theft, by serving to deter Border Guard soldiers from approaching T--- village when they are aware that KNLA troops are operating nearby.

Interview | Saw P---, (male, 31), T--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District (September 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a community member in Pa'an District and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Pa'an District, including two other interviews, one situation update, and 82 photographs.²

¹ 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 conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² 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 Pa'an District can be found in the report, "Pa'an Situation Update: Dta Greh and Lu Pleh Townships, September 2011," KHRG, June 2012.

Ethnicity: Karen
Marital Status: Married
Occupation: Hill field farmer

How are things going in the village?

When people [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) soldiers] came to Ler Hpaw Her [in 2009], we faced many problems.³

What problems are those? Could you explain them a little bit?

Once the Border Guard⁴ soldiers came [to T--- village] and they ate a pig [in August 2011]. They didn't ask permission to take the pig from the village head. They just shot the pig and ate it. They shot and ate Naw E---'s pig. After they had shot it, they asked people to request money for [the cost of the pig] from M--- [village]. We didn't dare go. The village head said that he didn't dare to go. There was nothing that we could do then and the villagers had to pay for it.



This photo, taken in September 2011, shows 31-year-old Saw P---, who provided information about military activity in T--- village, and reported how T--- villagers are facing difficulties arising from Border Guard soldiers' demands for food. [Photo: KHRG]

How many viss⁵ was the pig?

I didn't see the pig.

You just heard about it from people?

People told me. Later, when I came back, the school committee [members] told me that they [the Border Guard soldiers] had shot and eaten the pig, and then asked people to request money from M--- village. They didn't dare to go.

From what people told you, how many viss was the pig?

It was 2,000 viss (3,200 kg. / 7040 lb.) or more.

If you sold 2,000 viss, how much money would you get?

³ Ler Hpaw Her is located on the banks of the Thoo Mweh River, and is the former location of a mobile KNLA camp. DKBA and Tatmadaw troops reportedly took control of this camp at Ler Hpaw Her in 2009, following fighting between the Tatmadaw, DKBA and KNLA. Prior to reaching Ler Hpaw Her, DKBA and Tatmadaw soldiers are reported to have travelled through T--- and Eg--- villages, where they ordered several villagers to porter supplies for them. The DKBA no longer occupy this camp however, no information was given on whether or not it is occupied by other armed groups or military units at present.

⁴ 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 22nd 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawady Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25th 2010.

⁵ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

If we sold 2,000 *viss*, we would get about 90,000 kyat (US \$110.02)⁶ or even more. I haven't seen it with my own eyes.

Currently, Burmese money doesn't have a good value, right now?

Burmese money doesn't have a good value.

Who shot and ate the pig?

I don't know which officer shot and ate the pig.

Didn't you see them?

I didn't see them. The person who shot the pig was an officer. It wasn't his people [soldiers].

Didn't they demand to eat it?

They didn't demand to because they hadn't met the village head. After he shot it, his soldiers said that it wasn't good that the officer had done a thing like that. [They said], "*We daren't go [on patrol] to Eg---; people will shoot us if we go by Eg---. We will get in trouble because he didn't ask the village head for it [the pig] even though the village head was there [in T--- village].*"

You mentioned that he [the officer] asked people to request money from M--- village. From whom?

It should be from [Border Guard Officer] Ton Hen.

Is Ton Hen a high-ranking officer?

I don't know how high his position is. He is the officer who stays behind and controls the soldiers who are at the front line. If one person [soldier] makes a mistake, he has to take responsibility for it.

Currently, the Border Guard stays there [in M--- village]. What do they do?

They don't do anything. Let's say that the *Kaw Thoo Lei*⁷ stay close [to T--- village]. They [the Border Guard] are afraid and the situation gets better. They were very bad when the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] soldiers didn't stay close.

How do they [the Border Guard soldiers] live and eat?

I don't know what to say. They sometimes eat goats. They eat pigs very often. They eat chickens very often. I have no idea whether they order the village head to find those things for them or if they find them by themselves.

Don't they buy them?

⁶ As of June 6th 2012, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this interview are based on a rate of 818 kyat to US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1.

⁷ Both the researcher conducting the interview and the interviewee used the term '*Kaw Thoo Lei*', which refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU). The exact meaning and origin of the term '*Kaw Thoo Lei*' is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. *True Love and Bartolomew: Rebels on the Burmese border*, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

I have no idea about that. As for the time when they shot and ate the person's pig, it was strange to me because they ordered me to find chickens and gave me 6,000 kyat (US \$7.33). I couldn't find chickens for them. I asked them to give me money in order to buy a bottle of alcohol. I thought I would buy a bottle of alcohol but I gave the money back to them before buying it. Then, I told them that I wasn't free and that I had to go to my hill field. I went to the field. When I came back, I heard from people [other villagers] that they had shot and eaten a pig. The school committee said that when they shot and ate the person's pig, the *Kaw Thoo Lei* were just approaching the village.

People [KNLA soldiers] were close to them. But didn't they [Border Guard soldiers] know that when they shot and ate the person's pig?

They didn't even know that the *Kaw Thoo Lei* soldiers were close to them.

Do they stay nearby and steal things to eat now?

In the past, we used to follow them and we couldn't believe what they would do. If the owners weren't there, they would just take things.

Are they the same as the Burmese [Tatmadaw]?

We have never seen the Burmese [Tatmadaw] come to our village.

What do you think are the differences between the Border Guard's and Burmese [Tatmadaw's] activities?

I have never heard about that.

How did they [Border Guard soldiers] get food to eat? Did they get things [by demanding it] like the Burmese [Tatmadaw]?

If we think carefully, the Border Guard and the Burmese [Tatmadaw] do things like that and they [the Border Guard soldiers] are worse than the Burmese. When the Burmese [Tatmadaw] came in the rainy season, they ordered a bottle of alcohol from people [villagers] and paid them money. When the Border Guard drank the alcohol and became drunk, they were bad. They then fined villagers and prohibited them from selling alcohol. People don't dare to sell alcohol anymore.

How many children do you have?

I have two children.

Further background on the current situation in Pa'an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Pa'an Situation Update: Dta Greh and Lu Pleh Townships, September 2011," (June 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Hs---, April 2012," (June 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw T---, September 2011," (June 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Ng---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Ht---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw Hn---, March 2012," (May 2012)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: T'Nay Hsah Township, September 2011," (May 2012)

