



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

April 29, 2015 / KHRG #15-27-A1-I1

Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, March 2015

This Interview with Naw A--- describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District in March 2015, including arbitrary arrest and detention, violent abuse of a villager, restrictions on the freedom of movement and arbitrary taxation.

- *On the night of March 10th 2015, an unknown armed group attacked a Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) group that calls itself the Na Ma Kya group, or 'Deaf Ear'. One of their soldiers was killed in the attack.*
 - *After the fighting, on March 11th 2015, the Na Ma Kya group temporarily closed a portion of the Asia Highway. Saw B---, unaware of the closure, was detained and violently abused by two Na Ma Kya soldiers as he was stopped at the checkpoint.*
 - *The interviewee also reports that the Tatmadaw arbitrarily taxes cars 1,000 (US \$0.96) or 2,000 kyat (US \$1.93) each when they travel on the Kyauk Ka Ba road.*
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Interview | Naw A---, (female, 32), F--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (March 2015)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Dooplaya District in March 2015 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion:

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Stay at home mother

Position: Ordinary villager

What is your name?

I am Naw A---.

How old are you?

32 years old.

¹ 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 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.

Where do you live?

I live in D--- area.

D--- area is situated in which township?

It is in Ra Ma Tee [Myawaddy Township].²

Ra Ma Tee is [the same as] Myawaddy Township?

Yes.

In which district?

Doolaya District.

How about the village tract?

I do not know the village tract.

Are you married?

Yes I am.

Could you tell me the story of how it [the incident] occurred?

I knew [about the incident] only when the person [taxi driver] who drove my daughter back informed me [of it]. He [Saw B---] was coming from E--- [village]. He was coming to [F--- village, D--- area, Kawkareik Township] to bring my daughter to me and also to come to his nephew's wedding one day ahead of the ceremony. On the way he asked each checkpoint if he could travel or not and every checkpoint [that he had passed] allowed him to travel except one group that is stationed in the H--- area called *Na Ma Kya* [Deaf Ear].³ [This group] stopped him [Saw B---] and asked him, "Where do you live?" He replied, "I am [originally] from F--- village. My wife is from E--- [village] and now I am going [F--- village] for my nephew's wedding." They [then] detained him while my daughter and a motorbike driver went to F--- and informed my mom [that Saw B--- had been detained]. A civilian [also] saw him [being detained at the checkpoint] and [he or she] notified the *Kaw Thoo Lei* [Karen National Union (KNU)].⁴ The *Kaw Thoo Lei* then went to [the checkpoint where he had been detained] and he was released.

What is the name of the person who went to get him released? Uncle Bo Hsan Pya, also known as Ko Loh Way.

What is his position?

I do not know. He might be a leader [in the KNU] but I am not familiar with the [military] positions.

Is he KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]?

² Myawaddy Township, known as Ra Ma Tee in Karen, is a Myanmar government demarcated area which overlaps with the locally defined Karen areas of Kawkareik Township, in Doolaya District.

³ *Na Ma Kya* is a Burmese phrase which directly translates as „Deaf Ear“. *Na Ma Kya* in this context refers to the name of a Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) unit based in Kawkareik Township, Doolaya District. According to local villagers, this group often acts with impunity, ignoring both the local people's input as well as the higher DKBA authorities' orders.

⁴ The term *Kaw Thoo Lei* refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU), but the exact meaning and etymology is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. *True Love and Bartholomew: Rebels on the Burmese Border*, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

[He is] from the KNU or KNLA. I do not know about the military titles.

How about the incident location?

[The incident took place on the] Asia Highway⁵ in H--- village close to the *Kyay Ler Poo* [stone farm]. If you are at *Kyay Ler Poo* in H--- [village] you can see a big bridge. It took place there.

You mean Htee Moo Hta bridge?

No, if you go half way along the Asia Highway, you will see a big bridge; it is there. They [the *Na Ma Kya*] live in the huts of H--- villagers there.

You said they [the perpetrators] are called *Na Ma Kya*?

Yes.

Do you know when [what time] it happened?

I guess it happened around eight or nine in the morning.

What about the date?

[It occurred] on March 11th 2015.

The person [Saw B---] who has been beaten also lives in H--- village?

He lives in [is from] F--- village. He lives in [is from] the same village as me.

D--- area?

Yes.

How old is he?

I do not know but [I would] guess that he is over 40 years old.

Is he married?

Yes, he is.

How many family members does he have?

He has three daughters, himself, and his wife. Altogether there are five people in his family.

Did they ask him anything before they beat him?

What they were asking was, "*Where do you live?*" And he replied, "*I am a F--- villager. My wife is from E--- [village] and now I am going to my nephew's wedding [in F--- village].*"

⁵ The Asian Highway Network is a United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific-supported project that aims to link 32 countries in Asia across 141,000 kilometres of roadway. In Burma/Myanmar the project has involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see "[The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik Town road construction threatens villagers' livelihoods](#)," KHRG, March 2015; "[Hpa-an Situation Update: Paingkyon Township, July 2014](#)," KHRG, October 2014; "[Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway](#)," KHRG, October 2009; and "[Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State](#)," KHRG, April 2007.

And after that they started beating him up?

Yes.

So they did not ask any special questions?

No, but before people [KNU representatives] went [to negotiate], he [the detaining soldier] beat him while talking to him, saying, "*We have the right to kill you and beat you.*" When the people [KNU representatives] arrived [for the negotiation, the abusive soldier] again said, "*I do not have the right to kill you, but I do have the right to beat you.*" He [Saw B---] apologised and said, "*If I have made mistakes tell me and forgive me. Go tell your leader and let me meet with your leader.*" He [Saw B---] is a shop keeper and he frequently travels [on the road] and is familiar with the leader [of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)⁶ in the area]. He [the soldier] replied, "*I do not care about the leader.*" He [the soldier] did not let him meet with the leader. If he let him meet with his leader he [Saw B---] would have been able to solve the problem because they know one another and they are both Karen.

Do you know the name of the person who beat him?

His name [the victim] is Saw B---.

Is that the name of the soldier who beat him?

No, I do not know him or his name. There were two people [soldiers] who beat him. One of the soldiers who beat him said [to Saw B---], "*You do not know me? I am from H--- [area].*" He [Saw B---] replied, "*I do not know you.*" The other person [assailant] did not say anything while he was beating the villager.

The uncle [victim] lives in F--- [village]?

He is an F--- villager and married to a woman from E--- [village].

And now he is living in?

In E--- [village]. He was coming back to [F---] village [in D--- area] as he was invited to his nephew's wedding. [The person who is going to get married] is his own nephew so he came one day ahead of the wedding. The wedding date is the 12th [of March, 2015]. He [Saw B---] said, "*I was coming for the wedding and I got this job⁷ [detained and beaten at the checkpoint]. I could barely breathe [because of the injury].*" He was beaten [hit] 21 times.

Only [two] people [soldiers] beat him?

Only two people [soldiers].

Were there other soldiers [present] besides the two soldiers who beat him?

⁶ 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

⁷ The S'gaw Karen term „*ta ma*“ directly translates to the English word „job“, which is used in this context as Karen slang for a problem, which causes suffering.

Other soldiers did not [get involved in the case]. When Bo Hsan Pya [KNU representative] arrived after the beating [to prove that Saw B--- is a real F--- villager] there was one person [from the *Na Ma Kya*] who appeared. I do not know if he came from the road or from the forest. He said, "*Was that you Saw B---, were you the one who was being beaten? Where were you going?*" He [the new soldier] did not say anything special. He [the new soldier] also said, "*They can't do this to Saw B---*." He [the new soldier] is kind and hospitable. When we go to his shop to buy snacks or food he tries his best to serve us.

So that guy [the new soldier] is friends with Saw B---?

Yes.

Is he a member of the group [*Na Ma Kya*] that beat him [Saw B---]?

Yes.

Is he in any [senior military] position in this group [*Na Ma Kya*]?

He is just an ordinary soldier.

What is the name [that Saw B--- usually goes by]?

I do not know. Usually people address him as uncle Saw B---. He [Saw B---'s friend] said, "*They cannot do this to you,*" but they had already beaten Saw B---. They handcuffed him and beat him. He [Saw B---] did not even have time to talk [while they were beating him]. They beat [hit] him 21 times in just a short period. When my daughter got back she was shaking and cold. I asked her what had happened. She replied, "*I saw that guy [soldier] hitting him with a gun.*"

So your daughter saw what happened?

Yes, she saw them beat him [Saw B---] for just a moment. He [Saw B---] said [to the motorbike driver], "*Take my granddaughter*⁸ [to F--- village], *otherwise she will be scared.*" [When the motorbike driver got to the village] he said, "*I was lucky that we travelled with a child otherwise I would have also been beaten.*"

On this day they closed the [Asia Highway] but people did not know. In the lower part [of the highway] there was conflict [fighting] that night [before the incident]. My daughter got back and said they [the soldiers] were saying, "*You do not know that people came and shot at us last night and one of our soldiers died?*" How could we know? We are civilians and we have no walkie-talkie or radio so how can we receive this information? As a shop keeper coming back [for a wedding], how could he know something was happening?

They [an unknown armed group] came and shot at them [*Na Ma Kya*] last night?

Yes. They said one of their [soldiers] died and they felt vengeful.

So they [an unknown armed group] came and shot at them on the 10th [of March 2015] in the night?

Yes, it was at night time.

Who came and shot at them?

⁸ Although the interviewee's daughter is referred to as Saw B---'s grand-daughter, in actuality she is Saw B---'s great-niece.

We heard a rumor that it was Burmese [Tatmadaw soldiers]. Now they [*Na Ma Kya*] are unsatisfied.

When did they start closing the road?

The fighting happened at night time and they closed the road the next morning.

Did they inform people that they were closing the road?

They did not inform people that the road had been closed. They [the soldiers who were attacked] are stationed in the H--- [village] area and I do not think they informed the lower part [checkpoints] on the Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik Township] side because my uncle [Saw B---] asked them [at the checkpoints] as he came [along the road], "*Can we go through?*" and they replied, "*Yes you can.*" There were, I guess, three checkpoints that he passed [before he reached the checkpoint where he was abused] and unluckily when he reached that checkpoint they stopped him and arrested him. In the morning there were F--- villagers who were going to Kyah Ka Wa village for another person's wedding. They were travelling with about ten motorbikes. They [the checkpoint guards] allowed only three motorbikes to pass through their checkpoint. For other motorcycles, they did not allow any of them to pass through. [On that day] some people were coming back to F--- [village] and some [motorbikes] were taking the other Kyauk Ka Ba road instead. There were no motorbikes that were travelling up [to D--- area] except my Saw B---. He did not know that the road had been closed. If he knew [that the road had closed] he would not have [tried to] come.

The previous checkpoints that he passed did not tell him anything?

They did not tell him anything. They said, "*You can go, no problem.*" I do not know if they [soldiers at checkpoints] knew [what happened the night before] or not, that they [*Na Ma Kya*] had been attacked by another [unknown] group. There were DKBA, BGF [Border Guard Force]⁹ and KNU or KNLA [checkpoints along the route].

How many checkpoints do you think there are?

I think there are about five checkpoints [manned by four different actors]; Burmese [Tatmadaw], *Na Ma Kya*, *Kaw Thoo Lei* and DKBA [all have checkpoints]. I am not familiar with the road [Asia Highway]. I have never travelled on this road since its construction.

Do you know what do they do at the checkpoint?

They tax cars if they go down [transport goods from Myawaddy Town].

They [tax] every single car?

⁹ 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.

I do not know because I have not travelled on that road [Asia Highway] but for the Kyauk Ka Ba road that I have travelled, the Burmese [Tatmadaw] ask for one or two thousand kyat [US \$0.96 or \$1.93].¹⁰ I think they will do the same [on the Asia Highway].

In the place where you live are there any other particular things that have happened?

No, nothing special.

What do you think of the military activity since the ceasefire?¹¹

I do not know about those things. My husband is a *Kaw Thoo Lei* [soldier] but I just stay on my own with my children. Your brother [her husband] is also a soldier in the same group with *Dtee*¹² Bo Hsan Pya.

Did he [Saw B---] take any action [against the *Na Ma Kya* soldiers] after they beat him?

I do not know, I have not heard anything [about the case].

No consequences?

No, I have not heard anything [after the incident].

Did they apologise [for what they did]?

No, they did not apologise. When my Saw B--- got back to F--- village after my mom went and got him, there was a person who suggested to him, “*Do not report it [the incident] to their leaders because I worry that the soldiers will not help you.*” We dare not talk about these things because we worry that people [soldiers] will stop us. The person who suggested [not to report the case] was also a [KNU] leader. He said, “*Just let it be. Forgiveness is victory.*” And he [Saw B---] calmed down. When it first happened to him he was very angry. [The person suggesting not to report the case] said, “*If you report to their leader they will make trouble for you when you travel with your children in the future. You are a civilian so try to live as a civilian. Just try to ignore them and they [the perpetrator’s leaders] will know later on. It is OK as long as you do not report about it to their leader.*”

Does he [Saw B---] want to report it [to the media] or does he not want people to know [about the case]?

I do not know. I did not ask about it.

What is the relationship between you and him [Saw B---]?

He is my mom’s youngest brother.

What do you do [occupation]?

¹⁰ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the March 23rd 2015 official market rate of 1034 kyat to the US \$1.

¹¹ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG’s analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

¹² *Pa Dtee* or *Dtee* is a familiar S’gaw Karen term of respect attributed to an older man that translates to “uncle,” but it does not necessarily signify any actual familial relationship

I do nothing. I stay home and take care of the children.

Do you have any responsibility in the village?

I used to teach but now I have quit.

School teacher?

Yes.

In KNU school?

No. It is a civilian school built by the villagers. We do not have a *Kaw Thoo Lei* school [in our village]. Now there is a [Myanmar] government school.

Do you want to mention anything else about human rights abuses that happened in your community?

I have nothing to mention.

You do not have things to mention or you do not mention them [out of fear]?

I just do not have things to mention.

So you mean there are no [human right violations] to report?

I do not know what to say.

OK, so let me stop here.

Yes.

Do you permit us to use this information?

Yes.

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

- “The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik town road construction threatens villagers’ livelihoods,” (March 2015)
- “Dooplaya Interview: Maung A---, August 2014,” (February 2015)
- “Ongoing militarisation of southeastern Burma/Myanmar, since the January 2012 ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government,” (February, 2015)
- “Dooplaya Photo Set: Land confiscation in Kawkareik and Kyainseikgyi townships, December 2013 to September 2014,” (February 2015)
- “Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik, Kyainseikgyi and Kyonedoe townships, May to October 2014,” (February 2015)

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)