



News Bulletin

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Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015

This News Bulletin describes three separate incidents of fighting that occurred on September 30th 2015, between Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers in Day Wah and Kyaw Pah village tracts, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. This includes arbitrary arrest and detention, violent abuse of a villager, restrictions on the freedom of movement, and displacement of villagers.

- *The deputy commander of KNLA Company #4 reported that his soldiers engaged in a fight with Tatmadaw soldiers due to the Tatmadaw soldiers failing to abide by the ceasefire agreement and crossing over their delimited area.*
 - *Following one of the skirmishes, Tatmadaw soldiers violently abused a 61-year-old male villager, accusing him of providing them with false information regarding the whereabouts of KNLA soldiers. They then arrested him and ordered him to follow them for one day before finally releasing him.*
 - *Due to the fighting, approximately ten households in Meh K'Naw village, Kyaw Pah village tract temporarily fled to the area surrounding Myaing Gyi Nyu Town in Hpa-an District. At the time KHRG received this information, these villagers had not yet returned to their village.*
 - *Following the fighting, Tatmadaw and Border Guard Force (BGF) soldiers set up a checkpoint on the vehicle road between Hpapun and Ka Ma Maung towns and stopped all cars in search of Karen National Union (KNU) members.¹*
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On October 5th 2015, a KHRG member spoke to the local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Company² #4 deputy commander in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, who reported that three skirmishes occurred between KNLA soldiers from Company #4 and Tatmadaw soldiers on September 30th 2015, in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

The first skirmish took place at Kwee Neh village, Day Wah village tract between a group of KNLA soldiers from Company #4 and Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was received by KHRG in October 2015. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, 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. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

² A company is a military unit of approximately 100 soldiers.

³ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties.

#205, who were being led by Deputy Commander Kyaw Thu from Light Infantry Division (LID)⁴ #22. According to the deputy commander of KNLA Company #4, the fighting lasted for five to ten minutes, and one Tatmadaw soldier was seriously injured during the skirmish.

The second skirmish occurred at Meh K'Naw Th'Waw Hpya section, in Meh K'Naw village, Kyaw Pah village tract, between a different group from KNLA Company #4 and an unknown Tatmadaw battalion. According to the deputy commander of KNLA Company #4, immediately after the second skirmish, the Tatmadaw soldiers walked along the road to A--- Section, in Meh K'Naw village, in search of the KNLA soldiers who attacked them. On their way, they saw an A--- Section villager named U B---, 61 years old, who was looking after his cattle. The Tatmadaw soldiers asked him whether he had seen any KNLA soldiers. As U B--- had not noticed any KNLA soldiers, he replied that he had not seen any. The Tatmadaw soldiers continued patrolling for a while, before they were ambushed again by KNLA soldiers on a road beside a paddy field, near A--- Section, Meh K'Naw village, Kyaw Pah village tract. The Tatmadaw soldiers then returned to U B--- and hit him once on the ear with the tip of a gun's barrel and once in the chest. U B---'s ear was bleeding and his chest was bruised. They abused U B--- because they were angry as a result of the KNLA ambush, and accused him of previously lying about the KNLA soldiers' whereabouts. The Tatmadaw soldiers then arrested him and ordered him to follow them until Yar Poe Hta place. It took U B--- one day to travel there, and then the Tatmadaw soldiers finally let him go free.

Based on the account of the KNLA Company #4 deputy commander, these skirmishes occurred because the Tatmadaw soldiers went over the delimited area without contacting the local KNLA soldiers to inform them of their patrol route. As per the preliminary ceasefire agreement,⁵ the Tatmadaw are only allowed to operate and travel up to 50 yards from either side of the road that connects their army camps through KNLA territory, and only within a 150 yard radius around their army camp.

Because of these skirmishes, more than ten households from Meh K'Naw village fled to the area surrounding Myaing Gyi Ngu Town, Hpa-an District. As of October 5th 2015, these villagers have not yet returned to their village.

In addition, on October 3rd 2015, local villagers reported to KHRG that the Tatmadaw and Border Guard Force (BGF)⁶ began actively operating a checkpoint on the road between Hpapun and Ka Ma Maung towns at Oh Taung village, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District.

⁴ Light Infantry Division (Tatmadaw); commanded by a brigadier general, each with ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, "search and destroy" operations against ethnic insurgents and narcotics-based armies. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, (three battalions each and one reserve), one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units.

⁵ 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. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors have begun in Yangon, see "[Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations](#)," *Karen National Union Headquarters*, March 18th 2015. Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see "[KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders' Summit](#)," *Karen News*, April 22nd 2015.

⁶ 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 Burma/Myanmar 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.

Although the checkpoint was in place prior to the recent skirmishes, the soldiers manning it had not been stopping passing vehicles in a systematic way, until recently. The Tatmadaw and BGF soldiers searched passing cars and questioned passengers, asking whether there were any Karen National Union (KNU) members in the cars.

KHRG is in the process of following up on this incident and is attempting to meet with the villagers who fled to the area around Myaing Gyi Ngu Town as a result of the fighting.

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, April 2014 to February 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Human rights violations by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh of BGF Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District, between 2012 and 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, January 2015,” (August 2015)
- “Explicit threats and the indiscriminate firing of mortars and small arms by BGF soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, June 2015,” (August 2015)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)