



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

February 24, 2015/ KHRG #14-65-A5-I1

Dooplaya Interview: Maung A---, August 2014

This Interview with Maung A--- describes events occurring in Kawkaeik Township, Dooplaya District in October 2010, including the confiscation of his land by the Tatmadaw for the construction of buildings for the Karen Peace Force (KPF). Villagers were not compensated for the land and Maung A--- remains landless and unemployed. He refrained from submitting a formal land claim due to intimidation from the Tatmadaw.

Interview | Maung A---, (male, 42), B--- village, Kawkaeik Township, Dooplaya District (August 2014)

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 August 2014 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 Dooplaya District, including four other interviews, one situation update, 75 photographs and 14 video clips.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

Position: Villager

What is your name?

My name is Maung A---.

How old are you?

I am 42 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.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern 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.

What is your nationality?

Karen.

What is your religion?

Buddhism.

Where do you live?

B--- village.

Which township?

Kawkareik Township.

Which district?

Doooplaya District.

Are you still single or married?

I am not single. I have a family.

What do you do?

I am a farmer.

Do you have any responsibility [hold public office in the village]?

No.

Is everything going well with your farming?

No.

Why?

Because the Tatmadaw confiscated my land.

Where is your land located?

It is located in C--- [area].

C--- is in which township?

Kawkareik Township.

Did you purchase it yourself or inherit it?

I inherited it.

How many acres is your land?

Five acres.

How many acres of your land were confiscated?

Over two acres.

What did you plant on your land?

I did not plant anything [this year because my land was confiscated, but] in the past I planted rice.

Do you have a land title?

In the past I had a land title. When the Tatmadaw attacked our village I lost my land title. We do not have any village leader [who is willing] to make land titles for us [now]. I am not finished re-doing my land title yet.

Do you remember the date when they [Tatmadaw] confiscated your land?

No, I do not remember.

Where did they confiscate your land?

They confiscated it in C--- [area].

C--- is based in which village tract?

Kyin Doe village tract.

Which township?

Kawkareik Township.

In which district?

Doplaya District.

You said the people confiscated your land, so who [exactly] confiscated your land?

[The] Burmese.

Local Burmese or Burma military?

Burma military [Tatmadaw].

Did they have any intention to start a development project [on the land] after they confiscated it?

The development project [they initiated] was the building of houses for KPF [Karen Peace Force]³ families. *Law gha hsa* [It seems like stars].⁴ Five [people's] lands are [now] full of houses.

³ Karen Peace Force was formed in February 1997 after splitting from the KNU/KNLA and surrendering to and signing a ceasefire with the Burmese military government. The KPF controls some administrative areas

They [Tatmadaw] built [houses] for KPF families, so do they [Tatmadaw] come and stay there [in the houses]?

Yes, sometimes they come and stay there because even though they are not the same group they are joined hand in hand [cooperate with each other].

Do you know the name of the people who started the project?

Yes, I know.

Who?

Tatmadaw.

Did they construct it by themselves or ask people to construct it?

They asked [a] company⁵ to build the houses.

Where are they [construction workers] from?

They are from the city and towns.

Do you know their names?

Yes.

Who are they?

The [construction workers] are Thra Thaw Ngway, Myo Aung and Maung Thaw.

Do you know the people who [will] finish the project? Have they finished the project?

No, they have not finished the project yet. They are constructing more buildings.

[So they are] not finished yet?

Yes, [they are] not finished yet. In the summer they repair them [the buildings] or make them better to live [in].

Do you remember the date when they started building the houses?

No, I do not remember the date.

Have you ever gone and seen them building the houses?

in Three Pagodas Pass and operates a number of road and river checkpoints in the area of Three Pagodas Pass. Following repeated rejections of Burmese government proposals to reform KPF into the Tatmadaw Border Guard, substantial elements have since reformed in the Tatmadaw Border Guard in 2010 while others remain independent.

⁴ *Law gha hsa* is a Karen phrase that translates directly as ‘it seems like stars’, and is used as a metaphor to describe settings or scenarios in which there are many of a certain thing. In this particular instance, it is referring to the large number of houses that have been built on the villagers’ land.

⁵ At the time of publication, KHRG was unable to determine the name or origin of the company mentioned.

No, I never went because the Burmese [Tatmadaw] are [living] on the land. If we go there they might shoot us because they have guns.

You said the people [Tatmadaw] confiscated your land. Did you hear from the villagers [about the confiscation] or did you see it yourself?

I heard from the people [villagers].

Who told you?

My friends who work on the farm next to my farm, they saw [the Tatmadaw confiscating my land] and told me.

After they told you, did you go and check [on] your land?

No, I did not go and check because there are many Tatmadaw [soldiers there]. I am not willing to go because they have guns. I am a villager so I am not willing to go. We are always afraid because of them [Tatmadaw].

Did you go to check your land after a very long time [had passed]?

Yes, I went and checked my land after a very long time [had passed].

Do you remember the date of your land being confiscated?

No.

What about the year?

Yes, I remember the year.

Which year?

2010.

Which month?

In October.

You said that you do not remember the date?

Yes.

After the people [villagers] informed you [of the confiscation] did you go and check [on your land] or did you [only] go and check after a long time [had passed]?

After a long time I went to look at the land.

What was the situation when you checked on it [your land]?

In the upper part [higher elevation] of the land they built many buildings. In the lower part [of the land] there is not enough water to plant rice and we [the villagers] are [therefore] unable to [work on] our farm. If we go [to the farm] they might shoot us, we are not sure

because [the Tatmadaw] were shooting cows and buffalos when they [the livestock] went there [to graze]. They [Tatmadaw] also shot chickens and pigs. In the upper part of the land the quality of the soil is very good for growing rice but they built houses for the KPF [there]. We cannot work on the land. We [the villagers] just live in fear.

[Since] the KPF is also a group of Karen people, you could go and tell [them], 'The Tatmadaw confiscated our land, please help us. We have no land to earn a living [on].' Are you willing to tell them [KPF]?

No, we are not willing to tell them because even though they are not the same group, they cooperate with each other.

Have you submitted this case to them [KPF]?

No, I never submitted this case.

You never submitted it?

Yes, never.

Do you have any other land?

No, I do not have any other land.

You have only that land?

Yes.

For example, if you do not tell them [KPF] and they do not give back your land what will you do for a living?

I cannot do anything.

Now, what do you do?

I do not do anything. I just look after buffalos.

Did any groups [government actors, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) or corporations] come to give information to the villagers before they [Tatmadaw] confiscated the land?

No, we did not see any group come and give information.

After they [Tatmadaw] confiscated your land, [did] they [Tatmadaw] tell you to come prepare a contract and sign it?

No, they never asked me to sign [anything].

Did they give you compensation?

No, they never gave me compensation.

They never gave you [compensation]?

Yes.

They never discussed [the confiscation] with you?

Never.

Did you submit your case to any organisation?

There is no organisation to submit the land case to.

Have you ever discussed the land case amongst the [other] land owners in order to [protect] against the [housing] project?

We never discussed [protecting our land]. We talk about the lands that were confiscated by the Tatmadaw and [about how] we cannot do anything.

Have you ever discussed or submitted this case to the village tract administrators?

No, we are not willing to discuss [this case] with the village tract administrators because they [Tatmadaw] have guns. If they [Tatmadaw] found out [about] our discussion maybe they would defeat [imprison] us. In the meeting, they [Tatmadaw] said that if we submitted this case or discussed it with anyone they [Tatmadaw] would put us in jail. We are afraid of what they said.

Which group held the meeting?

KPF.

Do you remember the date?

No.

Who held the meeting?

Myit Win held the meeting.

What is his position?

He is an officer in the KPF.

Do you protect your land in any way?

There is no way to protect the land. We [villagers] cannot discuss how to protect our land because the Tatmadaw and KPF oppress us. Later on this case was forgotten. We are not able to find a way [to protect our land]. If we find a way they will hit [us], kill [us], and put us in jail. We are not able to do anything so this case was forgotten. They have guns and oppress us. We are simple villagers and we always fear them [Tatmadaw]. [After some time had passed] this case was forgotten.

You said that your land had been confiscated. Did they [KPF] call this meeting to give you compensation [for your confiscated land]?

No, they never gave [compensation] and I was never notified [about the land confiscation].

The people [Tatmadaw] confiscated your land and built buildings [on it]. You did not find a way [to protect your land] and did not submit [a complaint] to any organisation. Will you give your land to them [Tatmadaw] and will you support this project?

We do not support this project.

If you do not support [the project], why did you not find a way to submit a land claim?

We have not found a way [to submit our case]. If we did [submit it] they would put us in jail. I only have a small [piece of] land but they built houses on that land therefore I cannot work on it.

They confiscated your land and built houses [on it], so have you even [protested] against the project?

I think we will submit this case to the KNU [Karen National Union]. I had discussed this with my family but if they [Tatmadaw] knew that we had submitted [a claim] to the KNU they would hit us or do something bad to us. We are worried about that and eventually this case was forgotten.

Have you ever heard of villagers getting back their lands because of media reports?

No, I have never heard [of this].

You have not?

Yes.

Have the people [KNU] who work with the [land registration department] visited your area [to check the land]?

No.

Do you have to pay taxes on your land?

Yes, in the past I have had to pay taxes.

What about now?

I have not had to pay [taxes] for the last four years.

Why is it that you have not needed to pay?

I have not needed to pay because they built houses [on my land] and [therefore] do not collect taxes [anymore].

You said that you have never heard of villagers getting back their lands because of media reports?

Yes.

Now what do you want?

If I get back my land I will be very happy. We heard the people [KHRG community members] were coming and my friends told me that I could report the land case to them. I was very happy when I heard that they would help us report it.

Your friend told you that we [KHRG] would come to help you get back your land?

No, my friend said they [KHRG community members] would help us to report the land case. If they help us to report [the land case] maybe we will get back our lands.

You said that your friend told you that we would help you to get back your land. How did they explain [our role] to you?

He [his friend] said we could come to meet with some of the leaders [KHRG community members] and ask them to help us with the land case. If the leaders help us we will be very happy.

For land cases, if the people [villagers] come to submit [the case] to us we then have to send it to the leaders [KHRG head office]. The leaders [then] arrange everything according to those cases.

If the leaders can arrange this [report the land case] for us we will be very happy.

Do you want to say anything that I have not asked about?

Nothing, I hope the leaders [KHRG] will try their best. If we get back our land we will be so happy.

Do you want to submit anything else?

If I get back my land I can work on [it].

If you don't have anything more to add, thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

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

- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik, Kyainseikgyi and Kyonedoe townships, May to October 2014," (February 2015)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Ma A---, May 2013," (January 2015)
- "Dooplaya Field Report: January to December 2013," (December 2014)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, September 2014," (November 2014)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, July 2013," (October 2014)



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