



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Tatmadaw soldiers shell village, attack church and civilian property in Toungoo District

On October 12th 2011, soldiers from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #603 and Infantry Battalion (IB) #92 shelled and then attacked on foot W--- village in the Htee Tha Saw area of Than Daung Township following a clash with Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers approximately 45 minutes on foot from W--- village. According to Saw F---, a resident of W--- village who fled and hid in the forest during the attack, Tatmadaw soldiers fired approximately 50 mortar rounds into W--- and nearby civilian areas and then entered W---, where soldiers fired small arms deliberately at villagers' houses, the Roman Catholic church and religious and cultural items; killed villagers' animals; and looted or damaged villagers' property including food stores, clothing, roofing materials and money. This report is based on information provided by two villagers trained by KHRG to monitor human rights abuses,¹ including two situation reports, one incident report, an audio interview with Saw F---, and 82 photographs and three video clips taken in the W--- village area one week after the attack occurred.

On October 12th 2011, soldiers from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #603 and Infantry Battalion (IB) #92 deliberately attacked civilian homes and religious sites, and looted or damaged essential civilian property, including food supplies, in W--- village, Than Daung Township. Following a clash with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) at a location 45 minutes on foot from W---, one group of Tatmadaw soldiers shelled the village while another group approached W--- on foot. The residents of W--- fled to nearby hiding sites as soon as the shelling started; most of the attack occurred while the village was temporarily abandoned.

LIB #603 is based on active duty north of the Leit Tho to Loikaw vehicle road, in the Leit Tho, Daw Mar Der and Bp'Ho areas, while IB #92 occupies camps south of the road, in Thaw Yin Ker, Htee Tha Saw, Gk'Lay Ta, Yar



This photo was taken on October 21st 2011 inside the W--- village church, following an attack by LIB #603 and IB #92. A bullet hole is clearly visible on the front of the statue. [Photo: KHRG]

¹ KHRG trains villagers 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, villagers 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.

Ro, and Tha Kweh Bploh. Both units operate under Southern Command Headquarters in Toungoo Town, which as of October 2011 was commanded by Nyo Thaung.

W--- village is located in the Htee Tha Saw area in northeastern Than Daung (Daw Pa Koh) Township, Toungoo District. Htee Tha Saw is located in the mountainous region east of the Day Loh River and south of the Leit Tho to Loikaw vehicle road, about 15 miles (24 km) northeast of Than Daung Gyi Town. According to one of the villagers who provided information for this report, residents of the Htee Tha Saw area are predominantly Geko, Gebar or Bres Karen. Approximately 300 households with a total population of 1,500 villagers comprise nine villages in the Htee Tha Saw area: (1) Th---, (2) Bp---, (3) K---, (4) M---, (5) A---, (6) R---, (7) W---, (8) P---, and (9) L---.



These photos were taken on October 19th 2011 and show houses (left) and the church (right) in L--- village, close to W--- village in the Htee Tha Saw area of Than Daung Township. The villager who took these photos reported that L--- and W--- villagers fled their homes during the attacks in W--- village on October 12th 2011. [Photo: KHRG]

According to Saw F---, a local resident who fled during the attack on W--- village and was subsequently interviewed by another villager who submitted information to KHRG for this report, soldiers from Tatmadaw IB #92 and LIB #603 entered the Htee Tha Saw area early in the morning on October 12th 2011, at approximately 4:00 or 5:00 am. At 6:15, one group of Tatmadaw soldiers clashed with soldiers from KNLA Battalion #5 at a location approximately 45 minutes on foot east of W--- village. This group of Tatmadaw soldiers subsequently approached W--- village on foot, while another group maintained a remote position on a nearby mountain top from which they fired mortar rounds into houses, fields, plantations, orchards and forest in the W--- village area. Saw F--- estimated that around 50 mortar rounds were fired into W--- village, of which four or five landed on and damaged villagers' houses.

"The Tatmadaw entered the area at about 4:00 am or 5:00 am and they arrived near W-- village at about 6:15 am. They met with soldiers from the KNLA and they started to fight outside the village. The Tatmadaw soldiers who fought with the KNLA soldiers were from the same troops that entered the village. The other troops shelled mortars from the mountain peak. ... They shelled about 50 mortar rounds I guess... The mortars fell on houses and many were damaged... There were four or five mortar rounds which fell on villagers' houses."

- Saw F--- (male, 55), W--- village, Htee Tha Saw area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (October 2011)



According to the villager who took these photos on October 21st 2011, the six photos above show examples of damage to houses in W--- village caused by mortars and mortar fragments during the October 12th attack by Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #603 and IB #92. [Photos: KHRG]

According to Saw F---, W--- villagers fled as soon as they heard the sound of mortar fire on the morning of October 12th and hid in forested areas near W--- village. By responding swiftly in this way, Saw F--- explained that W--- villagers avoided injury, but did not have a chance to gather their food, clothes, money or any other possessions in preparation for flight.

"When I heard the sound of mortar shelling, I ran away... When the Tatmadaw fired the mortars, all the villagers ran away, so no one got injured."

- Saw F--- (male, 55), W--- village, Htee Tha Saw area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (October 2011)

Following W--- villagers' flight, the group of Tatmadaw soldiers that had fought with KNLA soldiers arrived on foot at W--- village. According to Saw F---, the soldiers killed and stole villagers' animals, damaged cooking equipment, and stole villagers' belongings, including hunting muskets, clothing, jewellery, stores of harvested cardamom and money saved by villagers. According to a KHRG researcher, the harvest period for cardamom in northern areas of Toungoo District is between the end of September and October.

"When they entered the village... They took the villagers' clothes, killed villagers' chickens and pigs, and destroyed the church. They took money, gold necklaces and moreover they broke the cooking pots and took villagers' sandals. They took anything that looked new or good... Moreover they took our money from the last cardamom seed harvest."

- Saw F--- (male, 55), W--- village, Htee Tha Saw area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (October 2011)

In addition to looting W--- villagers' houses, Tatmadaw soldiers fired small arms inside the village, damaging the walls, floors and roofs of the Roman Catholic church and five houses belonging to W--- villagers Saw P---, Saw W---, Saw G---, Saw A---, and Naw T---. The attacking soldiers also damaged religious and cultural items, as well as other civilian property inside villagers' houses and the church. The table below summarises civilian property stolen or damaged by Tatmadaw soldiers during the attack, based on information provided by Saw F--- and one of the villagers who submitted information for this report. They estimated that W--- villagers lost a total of 7,242,000 kyat (US \$9,405)² from money and harvested cardamom stolen by Tatmadaw soldiers. This amount reflects only the exact values of money and cardamom reported to KHRG by the villagers who provided information for this report; the value of all other damaged or stolen items, including zinc roofing panels, wooden floors, walls and ceilings, clothing, jewellery, and religious or cultural items are not included in this total. Some damaged items, many of which bear multiple bullet holes, are also shown in the photos included in this bulletin.

Table A.1: Villagers' cardamom, money and other property stolen or destroyed

#	Owner	Item(s) stolen or damaged	Value
1	Saw B---	Money stolen	500,000 kyat
		One box of clothing and blankets stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
2	Saw W--- (Pastor)	60 viss ³ of cardamom stolen	720,000 kyat ⁴
		Money stolen	400,000 kyat
3	Saw D--- (Church Treasurer)	Church finances stolen	1,500,000 kyat
		50 zinc roofing panels damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
4	Saw R---	40 viss of cardamom stolen	480,000 kyat
		Money stolen	300,000 kyat
		All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
5	Naw N---	20 viss of cardamom stolen	240,000 kyat
		Money stolen	100,000 kyat
6	Saw M---	Money stolen	200,000 kyat
		All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
7	Saw F---	40 viss of cardamom stolen	480,000 kyat
		Money stolen	200,000 kyat
8	Saw Ht---	25 viss of cardamom stolen	300,000 kyat

² All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of November 21st 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

³ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

⁴ According to one of the villagers who submitted information for this report, in Toungoo District one viss of cardamom is valued at approximately 12,000 kyat (US \$15.48).

		Money stolen	200,000 kyat
9	Naw Na---	All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		20 viss of rice (32 kg. / 70.4 lb.) stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
10	Saw Th---	16 viss of cardamom stolen	192,000 kyat
		Money stolen	50,000 kyat
		One musket stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
11	Saw Dt---	15 viss of cardamom stolen	180,000 kyat
		Two muskets stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
12	Naw Hs---	Money stolen	200,000 kyat
13	Naw T---	Money stolen	200,000 kyat
		50 zinc roofing panels stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		All clothing stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		House damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		Two large clay jars damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
14	Saw Y---	One musket stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
15	Saw G---	15 zinc roofing panels damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		House roof damaged by mortar	<i>Not specified</i>
16	Saw Pa---	25 viss of cardamom stolen	300,000 kyat
		House damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
17	Saw P---	House damaged by mortar	<i>Not specified</i>
18	Saw W---	House damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		One musket stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
		Two sacks of rice stolen	<i>Not specified</i>
19	Saw A---	Money stolen	500,000 kyat
20	Village Youth Group	Three goats killed	<i>Not specified</i>
		Electricity inverter damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		Car battery damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		Amplifier damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		VCR damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
21	Roman Catholic Church	Roof damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		One pig killed	<i>Not specified</i>
		Shrine damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		Two religious statues damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		Clock damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
		Religious pictures damaged	<i>Not specified</i>
Totals			7,242,000 kyat (US \$9,405) ⁵

"They not only suspected our villagers [had contact with the KNLA], they also wanted to kill our villagers. Because they didn't kill any villagers, they destroyed our place of worship and our cultural items in the village. Moreover, they broke the statue of Mary into three pieces and shot all over the pictures on the wall. ... In the past, they've come and met with KNLA soldiers and fought. Because of that, until now, they've been unhappy with the villagers."

- Saw F--- (male, 55), W--- village, Htee Tha Saw area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (October 2011)

⁵ This amount reflects only the exact values of caches of money and cardamom stolen as reported to KHRG by the three villagers who provided information for this report; the value of other damaged or stolen items, including zinc roofing panels, wooden floors, walls and ceilings, clothing, jewellery, and religious or cultural items are not included in this total.



The four photos above were taken on October 21st 2011 in W--- village, Than Daung Township, by one of the villagers who provided information for this report. In all four pictures, bullet holes are clearly visible on a monument in front of the W--- village church (top) and a shrine outside the church (bottom), after soldiers from Tatmadaw LIB #603 and IB #92 fired small arms deliberately at civilian objects, including the church, on October 12th 2011. In the photo at bottom right, the lower half of a statue of Saint Mary is shown, which Saw F--- said the Tatmadaw soldiers broke into three pieces. *[Photos: KHRG]*





According to the villager who took these photos inside the W--- village church on October 21st 2011, the holes in the zinc roofing panels (top), wooden ceiling and wall panels (middle), clock (bottom left) and stacks of bibles (bottom right) were caused by the deliberate firing of small arms inside the church by Tatmadaw troops. [Photos: KHRG]





According to the villager who took these photos, the six photos above show examples of damage to civilians' houses and possessions in W--- village caused by small arms fire inside civilians' houses during the October 12th attack by Tatmadaw troops from LIB #603 and IB #92. Damage to an amplifier, battery and electricity inverter is visible in the photos at bottom. *[Photos: KHRG]*



Drums and gongs, as depicted above, are traditionally used during ceremonies related to the paddy harvest cycle and during Karen New Year celebrations. In rural villages throughout Karen State, drums in particular often retain significant symbolism with regard to lineage and ancestral connections as they may remain in villages from generation to generation. During the October 12th attack, the gong (above right) was damaged by small arms fire, while the leather straps binding the drum together (above left) were damaged by mortar fragments. *[Photos: KHRG]*

"They came and rampaged in the village and destroyed things and after that, about 30 minutes later, they left."

- Saw F--- (male, 55), W--- village, Htee Tha Saw area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (October 2011)

Saw F--- reported that the group of Tatmadaw soldiers that entered W--- village stayed for approximately 30 minutes, but that many villagers continued to hide in the forest outside W--- village without food during the day on October 12th. Saw F--- also reported that it rained all day and night on October 12th and that some villagers, especially children and the elderly, became sick as a result of their temporary displacement, but face obstacles to accessing health care.

"Even if the sickness is serious, what can we do? If we look in one direction, the clinic is far, and the other way, the clinic is also far. So we just keep the patients in their houses. If they have a long life, they can still live, but if they have a short life, it finishes there. The second thing is that we also need a lot of money to go to the clinic. ... Now the villagers face malnutrition because they don't have enough food. They face health problems if they need to go to the public hospital because it's far away and also the Kaw Thoo Lei [KNU] clinic is far away."

- Saw F--- (male, 55), W--- village, Htee Tha Saw area, Than Daung Township, Toungoo District (October 2011)

One of the villagers trained by KHRG who provided information for this report also reported that residents of W--- village continued to monitor the local security situation after the attack and that, as of October 19th, villagers did not yet deem it safe to travel outside W--- village or to return to their agricultural workplaces, as Tatmadaw soldiers remained active in the area. Many W--- villagers depend on the cultivation of small-scale cash crop plantations, such as betelnut, betel leaves, durian fruit, and cardamom, the produce of which they sell in Than Daung Gyi Town, in villages adjacent to Than Daung Gyi Town or beside the Thauk Yay Ka to Htee Tha Saw and Thauk Yay Ka to Leit Tho vehicle roads. Some W--- villagers also cultivate paddy in hill fields. The week-long disruption to local livelihoods following the October 12th attack occurred during the busy harvest period for cardamom and paddy crops⁶ of the agricultural cycle. During that week, W--- villagers were unable to harvest fields and plantations that they had been preparing all year and at least some crops became rotten and could not be harvested and sold. According to one of the villagers trained by KHRG who provided information for this report, this will have adverse consequences on the food security of households in the W--- village area during the coming year by diminishing the income of those who depend on the sale of produce from their plantations and reducing the paddy yield of households that depend on their hill field harvest.

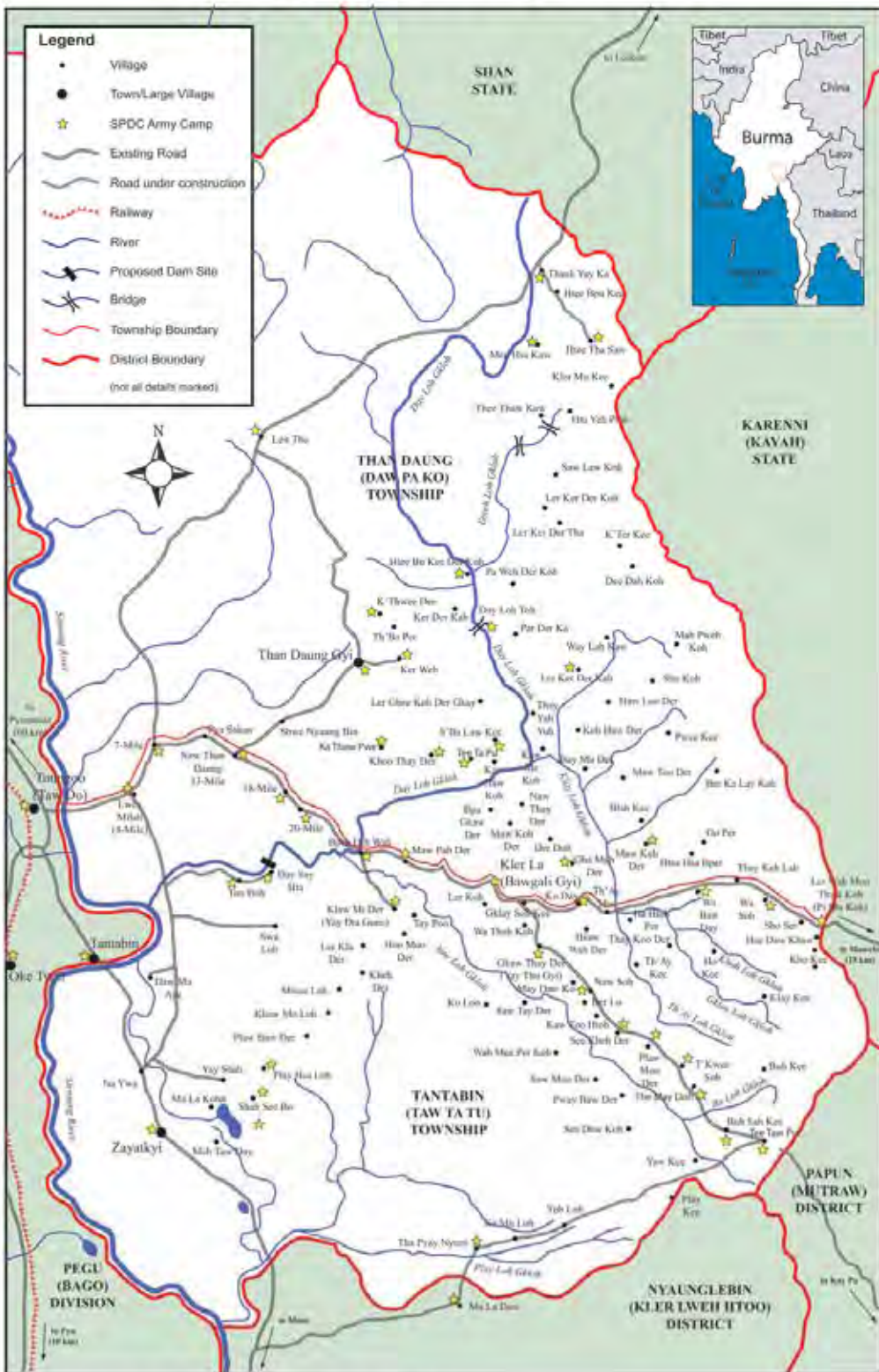
Further background on the current situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Toungoo Situation Update: May to July 2011," (October 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: April to July 2011," (October 2011)
- "Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011," (July 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: April 2011," (June 2011)
- "Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011," (June 2011)
- "Toungoo Interviews: November 2010 to April 2011," (June 2011)
- "Joint Tatmadaw patrol burns field huts and seed stores, displaces six villages in Toungoo District," (May 2011)
- "Toungoo Incident Reports: March and April 2011," (May 2011)

⁶ According to a KHRG researcher, this attack occurred after the harvest period for durian fruits, which is typically between late August and September, and prior to the betelnut harvest period, which occurs during November.

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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