

# Inside News

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## BURMA - BRAVE NEW WORLD

*How far  
will the  
reform  
goes?*





## CIDKP

P.O Box 22  
Maesot 63110  
Tak, Thailand

### Central

Phone: (66) 055 531330  
Fax: (66) 055531330

Email: [cidkp@yahoo.com](mailto:cidkp@yahoo.com)  
[sawsteve@yahoo.com](mailto:sawsteve@yahoo.com)

### Northern

Phone: (66) 053681854  
Fax: (66) 053 681854  
Email: [ncidp@yahoo.com](mailto:ncidp@yahoo.com)

### Southern

P.O. Box 11  
Kanchanaburi 71000  
Thailand

Phone: (66) 034517213  
Fax: (66) 034 517213  
Email: [scidkp@ksc.th.com](mailto:scidkp@ksc.th.com)

Writing and editing;  
BLEEDIN' HEART MEDIA,  
Henry Zwartz and CIDKP  
Reporters.

Design: Blacktown

## Ethnic people need humanitarian law protection

Burma's recent reforms mean nothing if the government's army is still committing human rights abuses in ethnic states. At the time of writing more than 35,000 Kachin villagers have been displaced, Burma Army soldiers target Karen villagers as a source of forced labor and extorted revenue, and there are more than 1500 political prisoners in the country's jails. Eastern Burma has as many as 500,000 displaced people, yet international humanitarian groups have been denied access to help these people who are in critical need. Burma's new reform-minded government still only allocates 1.37 percent of the country's budget for health and education while spending as much as 30 percent on its military.

So far the cautious reforms have delivered little for ethnic people. Burma's neighbors have been quick to hail the government's moderate reforms and to 'encourage' ethnic opposition groups to enter into quickly arranged 'peace-talks'. Development is the other buzzword doing the rounds as part of the 'new' Burma.

The country's past record in development projects is appalling, for villagers it has meant forced displacement as they are forced out of their homes without compensation for their land or plantations or to be taken and used as forced labor. Burma is currently a country operating without the rule of law and until there is a free and independent judicial system in place to protect the people nobody can guarantee the country is free from military oppression.

President Thein Sein recently ordered the Burma Army to stop its operations in Kachin State, but the army ignored his orders and is still bombarding villagers daily. Against this backdrop of open warfare by the Burma Army, international countries are 'urging ethnic political opposition groups to enter into 'peace talks' with the government.

But from past experience the government has shown it does not understand what peace means. Building a few roads and granting a few individual ethnic leaders opportunities to do 'business' is not a genuine peace, just more of the same.

Aung San Suu Kyi said in a recent media interview that, "that resolving the country's long-standing ethnic conflicts is probably the most important issue facing Burma". And that means that all development projects in ethnic states must involve and include ethnic people – if they don't, democracy in Burma remains a pipe dream.

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: [cidkp@yahoo.com](mailto:cidkp@yahoo.com) or write to CIDKP, PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.

# **KNU delegation table 11 keys points at peace-talks**

Photo:Khin Mang Win/AP



By: Shwe Thite Taw, Karen News

The Karen National Union's 19-member 'peace talk' delegation left the border town of Myawaddy on January 11 for official ceasefire talks in Pa-an Town, Karen State, with Burma government representatives on Thursday, January 12.

The KNU delegation is led by the Karen National Liberation Army chief of staff, General Mutue Sae Poe - the KNU delegation have prepared 11 key points for discussion with their Burmese counterparts.

The KNU 11 key points include – a demand for the Burma government to stop military operations in ethnic areas, start a nationwide ceasefire as soon as possible, to guarantee the human rights and safety of civilians, to build trust, to plan development projects that have the full participation and decision making of local villagers, to immediately stop forced labor and to stop excessive taxation and extortion of villagers.

The KNU are also demanding the Burma government release all political prisoners, provide solutions to settle land right issues, to set out principles for a genuine peace process, to open a liaison office for peace talks, to allow unrestricted unarmed travel and movement in Karen State and to draw clear lines of controlled territory. The KNU have prepared a six-page document detailing their demands that are to be discussed at the Pa-an meeting.

Padoh Saw David Taw, secretary of the KNU Peace Committee and also a member of the delegation spoke to *Karen News* and said that the mood of the delegation is positive.

"I don't think there will be any big problems arising at the meeting since we are only discussing with the government about what we have set out. To get a ceasefire agreement this is the first step and we know both sides want to have ceasefire agreement."

The KNU main delegates are General Mutue Sae Poe, Padoh Saw David Taw, Padoh Saw Ah

Toe, Brigadier General Johnny, Lieutenant Colonel Roger Khin, Major Shisho, Major Ei Tha, Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, Padoh Saw Lay Law Hsaw, Padoh Saw Aung Maung Aye, Padoh Saw Shwe Maunn and Padoh Saw Eh Wah. The delegation team will start their talk on January 12 with representatives from Burma government in Pa-an Town.

The other seven members of the delegation led by Padoh Saw Thawthi Bwe includes a medic, two officers from the KNLA and three security personnel responsible for the safety of the delegation team.

The Burma government representatives led by General Chit Than (retired) and U Ko Ko Maung from Myawaddy collected the KNU delegation team to drive them to Pa-an.

The KNU delegation is also scheduled to meet with the Pa-an based Karen Peace Committee leader Abbot Ashin Pyinyarthami from Taungalay Temple and visit the Burma Army's South Eastern Command Headquarters in Mon State.

The Burma government peace emergence group led by Minister U Aung Min had met with Chin National Front on January 3 at Hakka Town and they signed ceasefire agreement on January 4. Burma's media are predicting that the 'peacetalks' with the Karen on January 12 and with the New Mon State Party on January 20 will reach the first objective - ceasefire agreements.

The KNU has been struggling for equal right and self-determination since January 31, 1949 and has been fighting against the Burma military regime's for more than 60 years.

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# Karen People Say

*Recent political changes in Burma by the government suggest it is slowly moving away from the military dictatorship that controlled the country for more than 60-years. However, while the Burma Army continues to forcibly displace and abuse villagers in ethnic areas, skepticism and concern about the government's motives remain. Ethnic and political opposition groups have spoken out against the government's 'peace talks' as a ploy to destroy ethnic unity and a tactic to convince the international community to lift sanctions and invest in Burma.*



*In spite of the skepticism 'peace talks' with the ethnic armed groups have been timetabled. The Karen National Union - the government's staunchest opponents - has been fighting against the military regime that dominated Burma for more than 60 years. Now the KNU will officially meet with the Burma government for 'peace talks' on 12<sup>th</sup> January, in the Pa-an Town, the capital of Karen State. Reporter, **SAW BLACKTOWN**, interviewed Karen people living in five refugee camps along the Thai Burma border for their views on the forthcoming 'peace talks' between the KNU and the Burma government – he found among the people many different points of views, but most said they wanted a genuine and long lasting peace.*

“As long as it is not to surrender and it is not against the benefit of Karen people, the peace talks are a good start. Hopefully, it will lessen our sufferings and loss of life - that would lead to better lives for our people. I agree with our leaders and I am supportive of it.” — **Saw Mo Shay, 24, health worker from Mae La Camp**

“If we don't go in at the time the door is opening, we will be blamed that we don't want peace. Our leaders have been struggling for over 60 years now and I think they will be well prepared in entering through this peace door. I believe our Karen leaders will talk for all the Karen people about what we want. However, we have to acknowledge that there will be some differences [between the government and KNU] and finding the common ground to those differences, will take more rounds of talks. There were peace talks before, but it didn't turn out well. This time, we don't know what will happen, but there is an opportunity, we have to take it.” — **Saw Wah Htee, a camp leader from Umphiem Camp**

“I don't really know anything about the peace talks, but if they [KNU] make peace with the Burma government for the benefit of the people, then it is good. I've never known peace, but I think it will be good enough for me to have enough food for my family and to live happily.” — **Naw Moo Moo, 36, housewife, from Mae La Camp**

“I think it is still just a game, I don't expect any concrete result in the end. Even though there is an agreement come out of this peace talk, it won't be a lasting or properly signed agreement. Then, you break the agreement or I break the agreement and the fighting will start again. I believe that the Burma government is not sincere; they only do it for a show to international community. Thein Sein is being praised now but he is just an actor, the puppet's strings are still pulled by Burma army generals.” — **Saw Wah, 36, worker with a community-based-organization, Mae Ra Ma Luang Refugee Camp**

# Give Peace a Chance

“In my understanding a ceasefire agreement is the first and essential step of any peace negotiation process. A ceasefire agreement should be in place before any further political discussions take place. This is a good time and good opportunity for Karen leaders to enter into peace talks and bring positive changes for Karen people, otherwise we will have to struggle for another 60-years.” —**Pu Kwekabaw, 65, retired community leader from Mae La Camp**

“I think peace talks now are good. To be positive, there is new government in Burma and they may also try to do good for the country, I think there will be some changes. The peace talk must be headed by a high level delegation with equal mandates and decision-making [powers]. It won't work if one side appoints delegates with lower level of decision-making that always has to report back to higher officials. I think the Burma government may also feel some responsibility to bring changes since there have been many high level diplomatic engagement with the United States, ASEAN and regional leaders.” —**Ta Per Hser, 29, youth leader from Nu Po Camp**

“Meeting face-to-face and talking peace is a good sign as a first step between the two warring parties, better than opposing and fighting each other. Looking back into the past, decades of civil war brought no benefits for either side - only lots of losses. Karen people and the people of Burma are caught between this political instability and we are all tired now. It's time to bring peace to the country. If these peace talks are successful, many people from Burma will be happy and have the chance to live a happy life.” —**Saw Taw Taw, 45, schoolteacher from Umphiem Camp**

“If they it is genuine peace talks, it is good. If we continue fighting, many [more] lives will be lost, including the innocent. But we don't know for sure what the attitude of the Burma government is. Is the Burma government sincere with these peace talks? Can we believe in them? I think we have to be careful.” —**Naw Htee Siree, 30, former teacher trainer from Mae La Camp**

“Making peace is good - stop fighting and bringing peace to the country is a good thing. We hope it will be successful and we have been praying for it. In the Bible, it says blessed are the peacemakers. We also want to be able to go back to our own country. Living in other people's country is burden for the host - we understand that. If the peace talk is successful, we are happy. God doesn't like people killing each other but He wants love and harmony.” —**Tee Moe, 53, religious leader from Mae La Camp**

“The peace talks are good and I hope they [KNU and government] will come to an agreement that will lead to bringing lasting peace to the country. Then, we who live in refugee camps will be able to return home. This is what we have been hoping for - to go back to our homeland.” —**Naw Chawpoepi, 25, CBO worker from Nu Po Camp**

# **KNU wants a transparent peace process**

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"The KNU leadership will take further steps to continue concrete discussions ...before both sides can agree on the final ceasefire agreement."

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Following ceasefire talks with the Burma Government in Pa-an, the Karen National Union issued a statement today to make clear their commitment to the peace process. The KNU, 19-member delegation, met with Railways Minister, U Aung Min, and representatives of the Burmese government on Thursday, January 12. The KNU statement explained that the two parties had agreed in principle to a ceasefire. "The KNU delegation reached an initial agreement with the Burmese government's representatives towards a ceasefire agreement. When the delegation returns to our headquarters, the KNU leadership will discuss about subsequent steps required in this dialogue with the Burmese government."

The KNU also presented at the meeting its 11 point proposal that the KNU says the Burma

government delegation agreed in principle to.

"The KNU leadership will take further steps to continue concrete discussions on how the terms and conditions of the proposal will be materialized on the ground, in detail, before both sides can agree on the final ceasefire agreement." The full list of the Karen National Union 11-point proposal is printed below.

1. Establish a nationwide ceasefire and immediately cease military operations in ethnic areas.
2. Guarantee the human rights and safety of all civilians.
3. Build trust among the people.
4. Support the basic needs of the people and ensure that development projects have the full participation and support of local villagers.
5. Allow national media outlets to participate in the peace processes, in order to provide accurate

information about developments.

6. Immediately stop forced labor, arbitrary taxation and extortion of villagers.

7. Release all political prisoners and provide solutions to settle land rights issue.

8. Set out principles for all parties to ensure a genuine peace process.

9. Ensure the legitimacy of representatives involved in negotiations, provide adequate time for their consultation with respective constituencies and establish a clear role for third parties.

10. Initiate a plan for monitoring and ensuring the transparency of the peace process.

11. Establish a flexible process that guarantees progress towards sustainable peace, and in which all parties speak straightforwardly and avoid using words that may be misinterpreted. *Karen News*



## CEASEFIRE: KNU wants to hear expert advice and Karen voices on 'peacetalks'

The Karen National Union (KNU) made public decisions at an emergency meeting by its Central Committee this week about recent and future 'peace talks' with the Burma government.

The KNU emergency meeting, held at a secret location in Karen State was attended by a total of 38 representatives, 35 Central Committee members and three specially invited representatives. The KNU statement noted that in regard to the ceasefire talks with the Burma government its representatives on decided five key points.

These were –

“1. Discussions between the KNU and the Burmese (Myanmar) government on the matter relating to ceasefire will be continued.

2. For building trust in the interest of ceasefire, dialogues and discussions will be undertaken on the matter of reduction/pulling out and positioning of Burmese government troops in the KNU areas.

3. For the effectiveness and smooth progress of negotiation, the KNU will seek the advice of experts.

4. The KNU will seek suggestions of the Karen people, inside and outside of the country, and

encourage more participation of women in the negotiation process.

5. For the achievement of national (ethnic) equality and self-determination, the KNU will work together with the ethnic nationality forces, at the stage of political dialogue and negotiation.”

The KNU its statement concluded that it, “would like to state that in negotiation with the Burmese government, the KNU would strive ceaselessly for the establishment of durable peace, based on national equality and self-determination rights, after the establishment of a durable ceasefire.”

*Karen News*



**I**t was a heart-pounding moment for many Karen around the world waiting to hear the outcomes of Thursday's peace talks between the Karen National Union and the Burmese government. It was a moment of hope \_ at last thoughts of a peace that we have been longing for for decades.

The results of the talks are so far, confusing for many Karen \_ do we have a peace deal or not? Ceasefire agreements in the past between military-backed Burmese governments and the KNU have always ended in tatters.

The KNU has been fighting against the military regime that has dominated Burma for more than 60 years. I have never known peace, my father has never known peace. We live in a country that has never reaped the benefits of the stability that peace brings.

Our village of 5,000 or so people has no electricity \_ that means no refrigeration for medicine or food. It is even hard to buy candles. To get to the cities takes days during the wet season as the roads are unusable. Not only are the roads bad, but we also have to pay taxes at the many military checkpoints. Our bags are searched. If we do not have the correct travel documents, even for short trips, we are interrogated.

Our schools are run down. We cannot teach our own language to our children.

Our farmers are good at their work and care for the environment, but because of the policies of the previous military government they cannot spend time on their farms. For instance, the Burmese army places them on monthly rosters for forced labour.

More than 140,000 Karen people live in refugee camps in Thailand and thousands of others have resettled to a third country. A report, "Chronic Emergency", by the Backpack Health Workers Team, an organisation that delivers medical assistance to displaced people in eastern Burma, states that one in 10 children will die before the age of one, more than one in five before their fifth birthday and one in 12 women will lose their lives from complications of pregnancy and

childbirth. International health organisations have deemed malaria, HIV/Aids and tuberculosis rates to be at epidemic levels. For a country as rich in resources as Burma this is deplorable.

Many international humanitarian groups have documented abuses in hundreds of reports, but still we Karen live in hope for peace. We are optimistic, our country is rich in natural resources, cultural diversity and talented people. Given the chance we can make a difference. But we need the stability and relief that a only a peace with laws that protect everyone equally can bring.

We have had peace talks in the past that appeared to lack structure or a coherent process. In 2004, a ceasefire was agreed to by the Burmese army and Karen leader Gen Bo Mya that turned out to be a disaster. The lack of defined rules meant the Burmese army was allowed to travel freely in Karen-held territory during the ceasefire period and map Karen military bases and internally displaced peoples' hiding sites.

In 2006, according to many international and local human rights

# Peace hopes real, but Karen remain wary

**By: Saw Wei Thoo**

groups, as many as 76,000 people in eastern Burma were forced from their homes by Burmese army operations. A detailed report in 2010, "Protracted displacement and chronic poverty in eastern Burma", by the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), shows that by 2010 little had changed and the living standards of people in Burma's rural areas were further declining. The TBBC report estimated that at least 73,000 people were forced to leave their homes in eastern Burma in 2010, and more than 446,000 remained internally displaced.

Despite the bitter experiences of the past, this time the peace talks seem different. All the signs suggest the international community wants to engage Burma. The Burmese government has taken some cautious steps towards appeasing fears that dominated our lives before the country's first national elections held in 2010. Ethnic groups have formed an alliance to offer support and resources to each other and the KNU has called for all Karen and organisations to be involved. This resulted in the KNU delegation presenting 11 key





points to the Burmese government representatives at last Thursday's talks. A pact was signed after government representatives agreed to these key points.

But despite the reported goodwill on both sides, the Karen want a third party involved in peace negotiations. Prior to the peace talks, a network of Karen Community Based Organisations (KCBO) issued a statement making this demand.

Saw Eh Htoo Soe, spokesperson for the KCBO network, said that it is important to have independent third party involvement to monitor the process and ensure no one is cheated. "The peace talks should be monitored by a third party because in the past there were [ceasefire] agreements without third-party involvement that were easily broken. This time we want to see credible and independent witnesses to ensure the agreements are binding. With independent witnesses at the talks

we will know who has not honoured the agreements," he said.

Not all Karen are pleased with or trust the reported outcomes from Thursday's meeting. The Karen want to see a peace that is genuine, transparent and long lasting. They say, "We have waited 60 years, waiting is not a problem" \_ if the details to delivering a genuine long-lasting peace to all Karen are contained in the agreement. A female Karen activist told me that she thought it was too quick for the agreement to have been signed within the first round and on the first day of talks. A senior Karen health worker also remarked that the agreement has been signed too quickly, without first informing the public and the international community about the issues in the agreement.

"What I feel is that after we reach points of agreement, we should first take these to the people and

to the international community. Whether they also agree to the points or not, at least let them know about it before signing it," said the health worker.

The KNU's 11 key points which the government agreed to in principle include a guarantee of human rights and the safety of all civilians, an immediate halt to forced labour, an end to arbitrary taxation and extortion, solutions to settle land rights issues and the release of all political prisoners. Saw Eh Htoo Soe said that at this point, the Karen should experience some benefits from the ceasefire.

"First of all, human rights violations must be stopped. Land and property confiscated or looted from the villagers should be returned or compensated for. Local villagers must be able to move, work and live freely. Internally displaced persons should be able to return to their villages if they want and the Burmese army should pull out from their outposts at the front lines because they are still a threat to local villagers who are stopped from travelling to work on their farms."

The KCBO spokesperson also said he hopes that the agreement between the KNU and the Burmese government will bring immediate benefits for the Karen. "I hope both sides will compromise and respect each others' demands. The talks and agreements should be for the benefit of the people. As a community-based organisation, we can't change their decision, but we urge them to do their best for the benefit of the people. The outcomes will show how much both sides care for the ... people."

*Continue to page ...19*

# Reform is impotent while Burma lacks basic healthcare

*Non-profit NGO clinics along the Thai-Burma border remain the best hope of healthcare for poverty struck people from Burma seeking treatment - economic migrants, refugees and internally displaced people. Henry Zwartz reports for Inside News from Mae Sot.*

A dirt road bustling with activity marks the centre of Mae Tao Clinic in the Thai border town of Mae Sot. The Clinic echoes with the babble of Burmese, and Karen. Many are families — some wait with restless babies in a vaccination queue near the clinic entrance, small groups look out from the shade of waiting areas and hallways, others just sit and wait patiently for loved ones, or stare at the walls. A haphazard motorcade of bikes and pick-up trucks drop off the injured and the ill.

They come to Mae Tao Clinic seeking help that they are unable to access in Burma.

Many of the Clinic's patients are from Karen State where 60-years of civil war and a government policy of militarisation has long prevented any hope of access to proper health care. Each new arrival is another raw indicator of the lack of basic healthcare in Burma.

## ***The Monk & His Daughter***



An elderly man waits out the front of the eye clinic wearing white-rimmed sunglasses; a grin wrinkles his tanned face. Eh Ka To Mah is a 79-year-old monk from Kru Tue Township in Karen State. The trip to the clinic "wasn't too difficult" he told *Karen News*, "I had to pay the driver, but there was no problem on the roads."

Eh Ka To Mah is getting treatment for cataracts that have progressively gotten worse as he has aged and without an operation

to remove them he will soon be blind.

Eh Ka To Mah, is with his daughter, Daw Tae Thee, 50, who travelled to the Clinic to look after her aging father.

"It didn't take us long [to get to the Clinic], about one day by car," she says. Daw Tae Thee says she came to the Clinic because the treatment would be prohibitively expensive in Burma. "There is no healthcare in Burma... Here is cheap, we don't have much money," she adds, "I came here, it doesn't cost much and we only have to pay for the trip."

She brought her dad to the Clinic because it was the only option open to them.

"I heard this from a cousin who stayed in Myawaddy, she told me about this clinic, so I came here. If I knew about this clinic I would have come here earlier, because my dad's eye is getting a lot worse."

## ***The Eye-Specialist***

Dr Frank Green, a consultant ophthalmologist from Aberdeen,



Scotland told *Karen News* that last year his team had treated over 1000 patients at the Clinic. "Cases of eye trauma due to work related accidents or old age are the most common causes of cataract blindness, such cases are curable... but there aren't enough people to do the operation required to remove them."

Dr Green and his team visit the major Thai-Burma border refugee camps at least once a year to treat cases of cataract blindness.

"The rough cost of curing each case is about US\$40 if you include feeding the patients and staff costs."

Not all patients who come to Mae Tao Clinic are seeking eye treatment. Last year the Clinic in its annual report noted that it treated as many as 148,374 people – 32,530 cases turned up at out-patients, 3,422 people were admitted as inpatients, another 13,526 cases received primary eye care and surgery, 15,952 children were seen at the Child Health department, 742 people received eye surgery and 8,335 received eye glasses, 211 new cases needed artificial limbs fitted, 6,038 people required dental treatment and 37,083 slides were sent for malaria testing.

### ***The Trishaw Driver***

A family of three wait outside Mae

the mother has a broken shoulder, she came with her husband and young son. The woman declined to be named in the story for security reasons.

Her husband works as a trishaw driver back in Burma and they can't afford treatment back home. "My husband works as a trishaw driver... he earns maybe 10,000 kyat (around US\$10) on a good day, but normally we earn three or four thousand a day," she told *Karen News*.

It took the family two days to reach the clinic.

"We came because in Burma health is expensive... and I already knew about this place... I gave birth to my child here."

But the wife says it is easier to travel in Burma since the 2010 elections.

"It is better, in a daily livelihood work way... better if we compare the past... it is easier for traders to travel and my husband can hopefully get more income now."

According to UNICEF in its 2011 State of the World's Children report, Burma has the 44<sup>th</sup> highest infant mortality rate out of the 193 countries listed. The country's looming budget plan for 2012-2013 financial year will be important in highlighting whether recent political gestures by the military-backed government are genuine.

allocated a quarter of funds to the military – with just 1.3 percent left for healthcare.

### ***The Doctor***

Dr. Vit from the Center for Public Health and Human Rights at John Hopkins University paints a pessimistic picture of Burma's current health issues.

"Public health is a catastrophe," he **tells *Karen News***.

"The public system has fallen apart, the most educated health officials have fled, everything is too expensive, and there is no access to the right treatment".

To make things worse, Dr Vit says. "Drugs are not often used or given as advertised" making some medicine unhelpful, and potentially dangerous, whilst superbugs are a real concern.

Dr. Vit says implementing meaningful healthcare reform could radically improve the current situation.

"You need four key things to change. The issue of access: people need to travel freely in Burma to reach medical attention. Fund the health system and fund a proper education system that trains medical professionals and end the human rights abuses by the Burma Army."

Dr Vit says there is a lesson for the Burmese government to be learnt in how Thailand dramatically improved its healthcare system in recent decades. "Nevertheless," he says, "even if they invested millions from oil and gas revenue... it would still take decades."

Burma has no functioning healthcare infrastructure of worth and it acknowledged by international health care organisations as one of the poorest countries in Asia. Political reform in Burma will continue to lack sincerity as long as its people have to seek health care in neighbouring countries.





# Burma Army out of step with government reforms

**"...every day  
villagers have to  
follow the army  
bulldozers and  
carry food  
supplies..."**



Burma Army battalions operating in the Tantabin Township, Taungoo District, Karen State area have forced villagers to work daily on a rotation to supply front-line bases.

A local villager told *Karen News* that Light Infantry Battalions 376, 541, 540 and 380, under the Military Operation Command 9, have been since the first week of November 2011 until now been forcing villagers to carry their food supplies.

The villager said.

"At least every day villagers have to follow the army bulldozers and carry food supplies – rice, fish paste, yellow bean, sugar, milk. We also have to carry military supplies for the Burma Army. The soldiers take security for the transportation of the supplies."

The villager told *Karen News* that the Burma Army ordered villagers

who had motorbikes to take their bikes, but for those who had no motorbike they had to go by foot and carry the military supplies in the same way.

The villager explained that the Burma Army threatened villagers that if they refused to work, the army would block the road from Ye Tho Gyi, Bawgali to Taungoo Town to restrict villagers travel. The road was the main travel route for villagers to earn their living from farms running alongside the road and to get access to the market in town.

Villagers complain that working for the Burma Army everyday, prevents them doing their own work on their farms and working for the army is dangerous as the heavy loads make it hard to drive the motorbikes on the rough roads. Despite the Burma government having 'peace talks' with Karen National Union – human right

violations such as forced labor, extortion and land confiscation is ongoing in Karen State. The Karen Human Right Group spokesperson, Saw Albert told *Karen News* that unless there is a concrete signed agreement, the human right violations will not stop.

"The current human right abuses will only stop if the government and the KNU reach an agreement and it is signed. If there is no agreement reached and signed as in the past, the human right abuses will continue."

Local KNU officials say that 5,000 people from 12 villages have been forced to work for the Burma Army villages include Ye Tho Gyi, Bawgali and Thit Say Taung.

Villagers say they are scared of the Burma Army soldiers and that on December 24th 2011, troops from LIB 540 shot and killed Saw Ko

*Karen News*

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# Dam to destroy Karen villages

Karen people in Theyetchaung Township, Tavoy, in southern Burma, claim they will be forcibly evicted from their homes by government authorities to make way for the construction of a dam.

Htee Ler Klay (also known as Da Thway Kyauk) villagers say that on November 18, 2011, a Burmese construction company named, *Tha Ba Wa Shwa Ain Lain* and its senior staff, including the a director, U Kaw Yaw, and the manager U Maung Sein came into their village to start building a dam on the Te Ler Klay River.

Saw Eh Ler, a resident from Htee Ler Klay village, told *Karen News*.

“The villages of Htee Ler Klay, Nya Pya, Su Lor and Nyaw Klaw will soon be under water and the villagers will be forced to be relocated.”

Most of the local villagers are either Karen or from the indigenous Tavoyan people.

Naw Paw Lay Lay, a villager affected by the dam construction spoke to *Karen News*.

“The company people didn’t consult with us about

the construction of this dam. We saw them bring in their machinery and start constructing and destroying our plantations and betel nut trees - our only source of income.”

Villager Naw Paw Lay Lay says the local people do not want a dam.

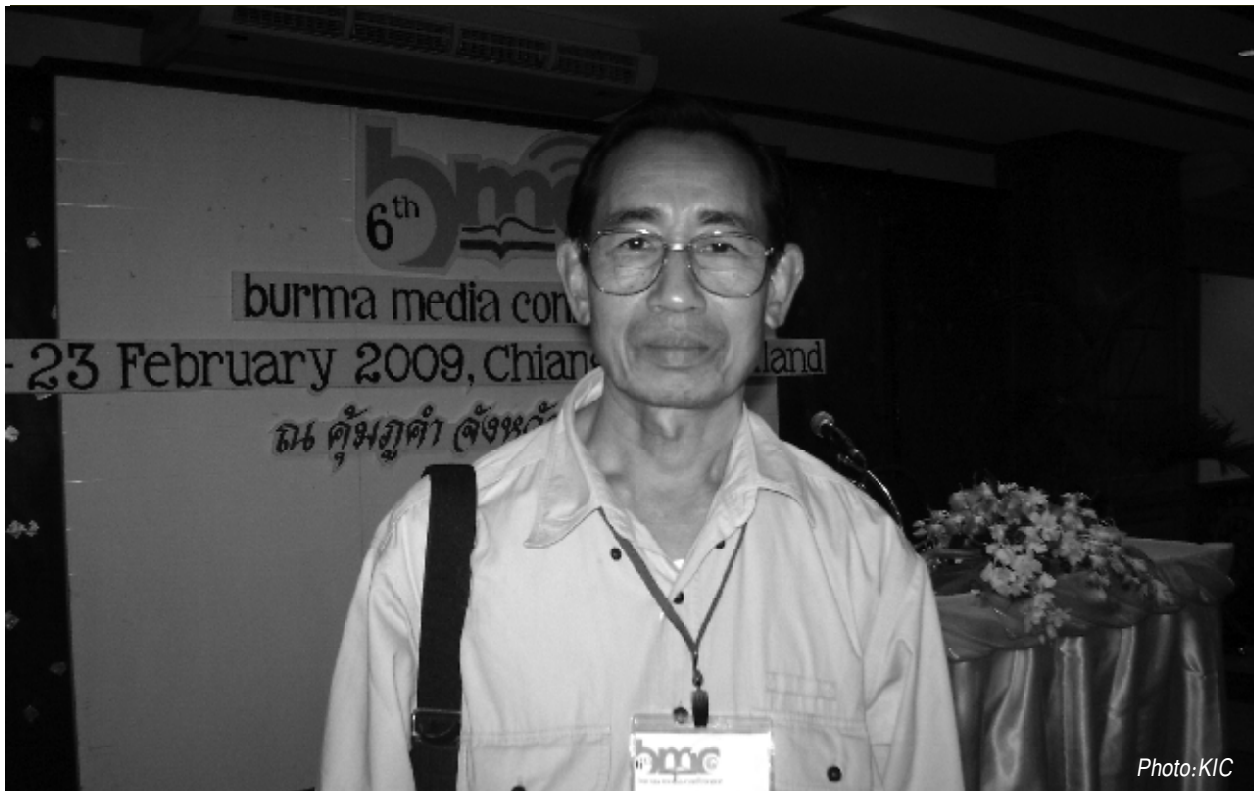
“We don’t want our village to be destroyed, we oppose this project. If we cannot oppose it, at least we should be compensated and paid a fair price for the destruction of our land and plantations. We don’t want the dam to be built.”

Saw Eh Ler said it would be difficult for villagers to restart their lives from scratch.

“Our entire community will be destroyed by this dam. We will have to start our lives from the beginning. It will be very difficult for all of us. The dam will give all of us a big problem. The [Burma] government and the company are working together, so it is difficult for us to oppose it. We urge non-government groups to hear our voice and come see how bad the situation we are in.” *Karen News*



Photo: Kwe Ka Lu



## Karen leader jailed for 17-years

**A**fter being reported 'as disappeared' during his trip to China in August 2011, Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung, a Karen National Union central executive committee member was tried and sentenced at Mingaladon court in Rangoon to 17 years in jail on December 8.

Burma's government has refused to deny or confirm Padoh Mahn Nyein Mung's sentence. The government regards the KNU as an illegal organization, in spite being in the process of holding ceasefire talks with the armed group.

Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung is a member of central executive committee of KNU and also a committee member of the ethnic alliance, United Nationalities Federal Council.

The KNU says at the next round of 'peace talks' with the Burma government they will demand the release of Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung. Padoh Saw David Taw, secretary of the KNU's Peace Committee said.

"We will demand at the next meeting that the government release him."

Padoh Saw David Taw told *Karen News* that the KNU are now preparing issues for discussion for the meeting and Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung's case will be an agenda item.

"We have to demand for the release of many people who have been jailed working for our organization [KNU], not only him. There are also villagers, who have been jailed because they gave us a meal, helped carry our loads or even gave us a glass of water – we will demand the release of all of them."

A Karen woman and member of National League for Democracy, Naw Ohn Hla, told *Karen News* earlier that she will find a lawyer for Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung to help at his trial.

Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung's problems started in July 2010 when Chinese immigration officials in Kunming arrested him while he was traveling on a Burmese

passport. Earlier he had been refused entry to Thailand and was sent back to China from Bangkok. China then deported him to Burma in August, where he was taken into custody and later sentenced to 17-years in jail Rangoon's notorious Insein Prison. Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung was charged with violating immigration laws and having connections with illegal organizations – the KNU and other ethnic opposition groups.

It is not the first time he ran foul of the government authorities. In 1967, Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung was jailed and charged with political related crimes and sent to Ko Koe Kyun detention camp - a notorious island in southern Burma in the Andaman Sea.

Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung escaped with two other prisoners crossing the sea in a small boat. He has written and published a book about his experiences - *Against the storm, crossing the sea* - under his pen name of *Ye Baw Shoune*.

*Karen News*



# A barren promise of reform – rural communities still abused in Burma

Reports by human rights groups accuse the Burma Army of ongoing abuses including rape, torture and murder.

The recent visit in November by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was supposed to nudge Burma's military leadership towards reform. But the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) claims that Burma's political reforms are almost meaningless whilst human rights continue to be widely ignored in a country stricken by mass poverty.

One report by the KHRG on rural testimonies of abuse in eastern Burma alleges a culture of endemic brutality in the Burma Army. Usually, the targets of brutality are the ethnic minorities living in East Burma. Individual testimonies of villagers are used in the report to document cases of threats, torture, rape, forced labor, and the deaths of civilians.

Attacks on civilians by the Burma Army are frequently reported and documented. One such case in the report describes how villages in Toungoo district suffered threats and violence by Burma Army units who suspected them of assisting rebel groups. According to one Toungoo villager, "they [Burma Army] killed villager's livestock... destroyed the church and shot the walls of houses." The report provided photos of houses and furniture with what seem to be riddled with bullets.

The 'landmine epidemic' across the Thai-Burma border also takes a toll on civilians. According to the report, the Burma Army places landmines in order to defend a position, but often fails to remove

them when they move elsewhere – thus many villagers are dotted with the deathtraps. "The villagers don't dare work in their hill fields or travel", one villager said.

The report provides pictures of what seem to be two dug-up landmines taken nearby village communities in Dweh Loh Township, Eastern Burma. In what seems to be a worrying trend villagers are using landmines they 'unearth' to deter the Burma Army, 'recycling' them for their own use. "We plant landmines to protect ourselves" said one villager.

The report alleges that members of the Burma Army murder villagers in cold blood, after having raped them. In one horrific case the report provides graphic photos of a young, naked dead woman, dated 22nd December 2010, the photo was taken by a KHRG volunteer. In the photo, the victim's bruised body indicates she was physical abused. The report alleges that this woman, is a local villager in Eastern Burma, who was taken away by army

soldiers, raped and then murdered.

Another case involves the testimony of a 17-year-old Burma Army deserter and child soldier, who, in the report, describes how a sergeant and three other members of his army unit had raped and killed two girls in June. "Three soldiers came back and told me that two girls were raped" he said. After the girls had been raped he claims, "The girl who was raped by the officer was killed. Her head was cut off. Another girl who was raped by them was killed like this. They did not cut off the [other] girl's head. They stabbed her with a knife."

Despite a nominally civilian administration under Thein Sein, Burma's military commandeers 40% of the national income — less than 3% is spent on healthcare. Claims of Burma Army abuses by human rights groups, such as the KHRG, undermine the perception that Burma's new government will herald meaningful changes to the lives of Burmese people.

*Karen News*



*A house hit by Burma army's mortar shells (Photo:KHRG)*



## Villagers pay the price

Burma army soldiers arrested and detained four villagers from T’Kuh Khee village in Kyain Seikgyi Township Karen State, after their food supplies were destroyed by Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) fighters, local villagers told *Karen News*. Four villagers from T’Kuh Khee village were taken by soldiers of the Burma army Infantry Battalion #32 on 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2011. The army units detained the villagers on suspicion that they were involved in a KNLA ambush on Burma Army forces on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

According to the village head, the four villagers who were sent to detention are identified as Saw Poe Chi Chi 29, Kyaw Phadoh 27, Saw Th’Dah 24 and Eh May Doh 20 all from T’Kuh Khee village. The Burma Army had been attempting to send up food supplies for soldiers in Kyaik Don area, Kyain Seikgyi Township, when the attack occurred, with the KNLA managing to destroy 160 sacks of rice as a result of the attack.

Saw Yan, district coordinator of the Committee for Internally Displace Karen People who documented the case said that the incident of ambush was close to T’Kuh Khee village and that’s why Burma army picked on T’Kuh Khee villagers.

Saw Yan said.

“Village head told me that after the incident, at first Burma army said that they would fine villagers for the price of 160 sacks of rice that were destroyed. But later on, they just arrested villagers and accused them of being rebels who are responsible for the destruction of their food supplies.”

Saw Yan said that after the incident occurred on December 8, 2011, soldiers from Burma army IB #32 came into T’Kuh Khee village on December 13 and summoned all villagers.

“They [Burma army] gathered all villagers in the village and people thought that they were going to announce something. After all villagers were gathered, they divided villagers into two groups according to their gender. They made all men to take out their shirt. From then, they took ten men and put them in detention at the village church but released six of them on the next morning.”

Saw Yan said that the remaining four villagers were accused of being rebels and tortured.

“These four villagers were beaten and taken around from village to village in the area for many days. Village head tried to approach for their release. At first, the Burma army said that if all T’Kuh Khee villagers put their signatures that the four arrested villagers are civilians; they [Burma army] would

release them. Then all villagers signed the paper but the Burma army soldiers didn't release the arrested villagers."

Naw Poh Loh, another T'Kuh Khee villager who witnessed the four villagers being taken away described the condition.

"They [Burma army] didn't give the four arrested villagers food. They didn't allow their families to contact as well. They were blind-folded as they were taken around."

### **Continue from page ...9**

Saw Eh Htoo Soe also said that to reach a long-term peace, everyone should come together and determine the best course for the country.

"A ceasefire agreement is only the first step \_ it should be followed by political dialogue involving ethnic nationalities, democratic forces and Thein Sein's government. They have to discuss and establish the best system for the country, a genuine federal union. Only then will there be long-term peace. If not [a] civil war could break out again any time. Ethnic nationalities have been struggling for equal rights, self-determination, democratic rights and human rights; these should be in place if we are to have a long-term peace."

Burma is a country without infrastructure \_ poor roads, no reliable electricity grid and a poverty

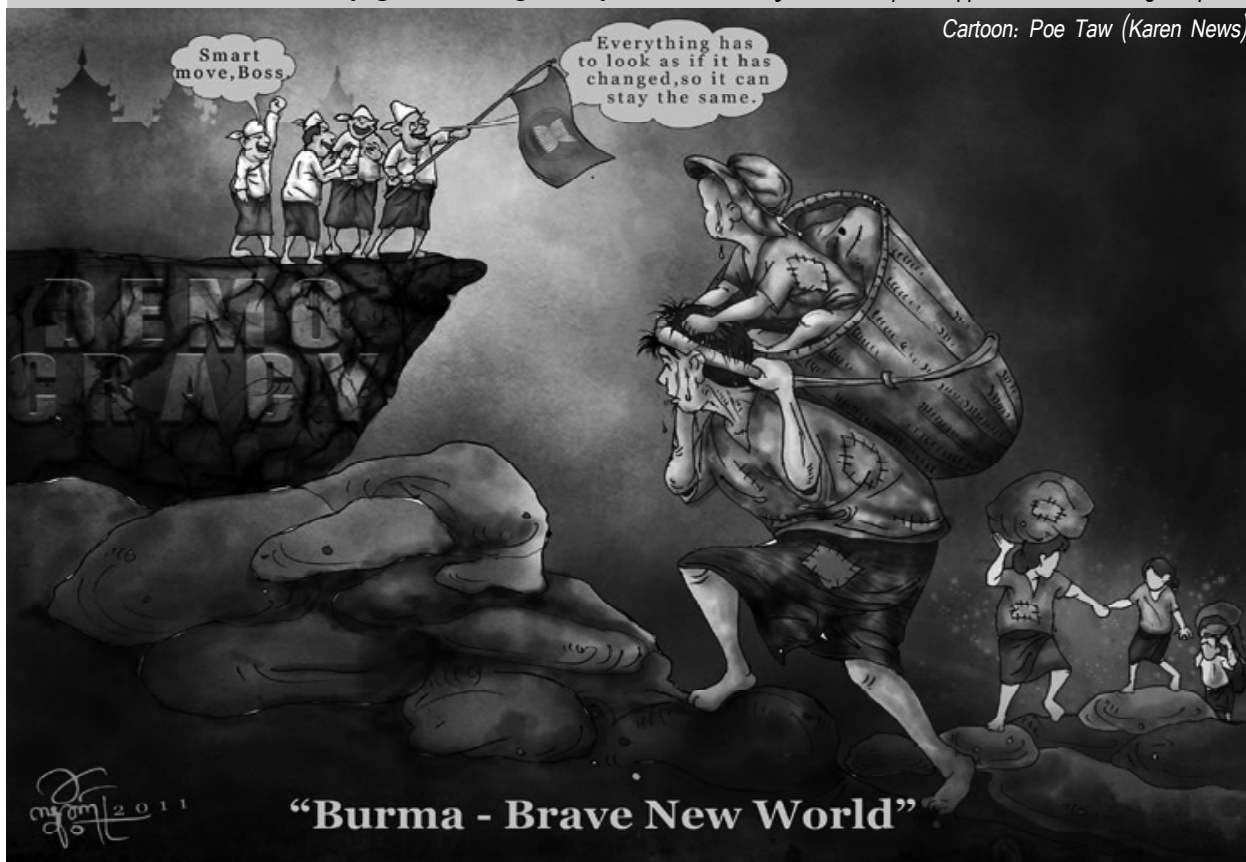
Naw Poh Loh also said that after the arrested men were taken away, villagers thought that they would have been killed, as there was no news about them for days. Later on, villagers learned that the arrested villagers were sent back to the Burma army headquarters in Mawlamyine Town in Mon State and were put in detention.

At the time of writing the four villagers were still being held in detention at Mawlamyine Town in Mon State.

stricken health system \_ but above all these physical needs we have to have laws that are fair for all. During the civil war, many military people became rich at the expense of the Burmese people \_ future peace agreements must not let this happen again. The Karen want peace, but after many years of struggle and abuses by the Burmese military they also know they need to have a peace agreement that comes with legal guarantees.

Past peace agreements in Burma have done little for the Karen. This time it has to be different. We need legal guarantees that confiscated land is returned to the rightful owners, that all proposed development projects are done without forced labour or eviction of Karen villagers, that writing, meeting and talking with our friends does not come with a jail sentence, and that all of Burma's political prisoners are released immediately. This op-ed appeared first in Bangkok post

Cartoon: Poe Taw (Karen News)



**"Burma - Brave New World"**



# BURMA REFORM: human right violations continue in ethnic areas

*Many problems still face the people of Karen State. Despite gestures of political reform by the military-backed Burma government, there are continued reports of atrocities committed by the Burma Army. These atrocities can be broadly organized into cases of 'Extortion', 'Forced Labor', 'Land Confiscation' and 'Arbitrary Arrest and Torture'. This report collates eyewitness testimonies of Karen villagers in the period October-December 2011.*

## Extortion

■ On 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 at about 8 am Burma army Light Infantry Battalion #220 commanded by Myo Min Thu entered in to Ler Poe village in Thaton District and extorted livestock and other belongings from villagers worth 55,500 Kyat.

■ On 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2011, Burma army allied Border Guard Force battalion #1014 commanded by Thaw Ma Na entered to Noe Ka Day and Htee Pa Doh Khi villages in Thaton District, extorted 10 Viss [equivalent to 16 Kilograms] of pork worth of 30,000 Kyat.

■ On 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 the Border Guard Force battalion #1021 led by Kyaw Htay Naing forced the people in Kyone Doe Township to pay 50 baskets of paddy (raw rice) from each small villages and 100-baskets of paddy (raw rice) from each big villages in the areas.

■ On 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 the Burma army troop Light Infantry Battalion #208 base in Klih village which led by camp commander Min Naing forced the villager from Klih Poe Hta to supply 100 bamboo poles and 100 Viss [equivalent to 160 kilograms] of pork. Then the troop also forced villagers from Ta Der Koh, Kyiek Mee and Kwee Lay



Photo:FBR

to supply 100-bamboo poles from each village to rebuild their camp in Klih village, Kawkareik Township.

■ On 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 combined troops of Burma army Light Infantry Battalion #603 and Infantry Battalion 902, entered into Daw Pa Kho area extorted money and other belongings from villagers worth of 1,856,000 Kyat. All of the villagers are facing food shortage in this year.

■ On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2011, the Burma Army launched an operation in Ta Oak Hta area Myawaddy Township, bombarding the area with artillery, and terrorizing the local population. Furthermore, the troops operating in the area looted 155-tins (2480 KG) of rice from

seven villages in the area while the villagers had fled into the jungle.

■ On 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2011 the Border Guard Force battalion #1024 led by Thaw Ma Na extorted 500,000.-Kyats from Pwah Gaw village and 200,000 Kyat from Klih Si village in Ta Nay Cha (Na Bu) township, Pa-an district.

■ On 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2011 the Border Guard Force battalion #1014 led by Thaw Ma Na extorted 500,000 Kyats from Pya Gaw village and 400,000 Kyats Kru Si villages in Thaton District.

■ On 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2011 troops from Company #2 of Border Guard Force battalion #2014 extorted money and other belongings worth 1,300,000 Kyat

from villagers living in Ta Kaw Poe village tract in Thaton District.

■ On the 25<sup>th</sup> of December 2011 troops from Border Guard Forced led by Thaw Ma Na, Htay Win and Burma army column 2 of Light Infantry Battalion #102 under Light Infantry Division 44 entered into Pya Gaw village, fired a gun and summoned the village leaders in the demanding money for the celebration of New Year in Mae See Hta village. Six villages in Thaton Township were forced to pay the money as follows:

Krew See (300,000) Kyats  
 Pya Gaw (300,000) Kyats  
 Noe Oh La (300,000) Kyats  
 Pwo (300,000) Kyats  
 Noe Law Plaw (200,000) Kyats  
 and Baw Ta Prue (300,000) Kyats.

### ***Forced labor***

■ On 2<sup>nd</sup> of October the SPDC troop (IB #357) have the activities in the areas and forced 17 women and a man villagers from Sakawet in Kawkariek Township to go in front of the troop for their shield to Au Lerr village and let them free in the evening.

■ Also on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October the SPDC troop (LIB #102) led by captain Aung Thu forced villagers from Ler Kae Kau 20-bamboos/ 15-big bamboos/ and 20-bamboos/ 15-big bamboos from Noh Ta Ray villagers in Pa-an district, these bamboos are plant by the villagers and they keep it in the village.

■ On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 the SPDC (#202) base in Tihuthan led by Myo Htite Kyaw, forced the villagers Tha Mee Don village to cut 700 Bamboo poles. 300 bamboo poles from Kuh Nee

village and Win Ka village were forced to pay 50,000-Kyats instead of bamboos.

■ On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 the SPDC troop base in Tihuthan led by the camp commander Myo Htite Kyaw forced 300-bamboos from Ka Ya village, because of the difficulties in cutting bamboo in the area, the villagers paid 50,000 Kyats instead.

■ On 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2011 Burma army Light Infantry Battalion #378 forced 13 men and 3 women villagers from Ker Weh village to send food supplies from Ker Weh to Ka Thaw Pya in Taungoo District.

■ On 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2011 Burma army Light Infantry Battalion #540 and #375 forced 3 women and 18 men villagers from Ker Weh village to send their food supplies to Ka Thaw Pya in Taungoo District.

### ***Land Confiscation***

■ On 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2011 the BGF led by Saw Htay Naing entered Htee Wa Ker area in Kyain Seikgyi Township, allocated the land in the area and sold it for 40,000 Kyats per acre. The land is populated with trees, which is used for roofing and it is the main

source for local people from surrounding villages, which they can no longer use.

### ***Arbitrary arrest and torture***

■ On 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, Burma Army Infantry Battalion #310 commanded by Yae Aung Myint met a 20-year-old villager in Myawaddy Township who had been coming home from work, and tortured him, wounding his eyebrow.

■ On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2011, the BGF troop #1022 under the command of Maw Tho Entered Min Let Pan village in Pa Lu area. The unit then proceeded to randomly select a villager while he was driving a motorbike, and tortured him, breaking his left hand.

■ On 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2011, Burma Army soldiers from Infantry Battalion #32 under Light Infantry Division 22 arrested 4 villagers from T'Ku Khee village in Kyain Seikgyi Township accusing them of being soldiers from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and sent them back to detention in the army headquarters in Mawlamyine Town.



Photo: KHRG





*A displaced family hiding on the border*

## Returning home is still a dream

**H**sa Bluh Paw and her family had been forced from their home since November 2010 after conflict erupted between Burma government troops and a breakaway faction of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army. Despite Burma government moves of the reform, Hsa Bluh Paw and her family is still unable to return to their home.

Hsa Bluh Paw 45 is a mother of five children. She and her husband, Saw Baybay are farmers from Wale village in Myawaddy Township, Karen State. She still remembers vividly the nightmares of fleeing from her village that was bombarded.

Hsa Bluh Paw said.

“We fled without food and we had to stay and sleep on the ground for three days.”

Hsa Bluh Paw and her family are now temporarily residing in a border area of Phopra Township, Tak province in Thailand. They are living in a small hut and earn their living from daily labor works.

She said that it was hard for her children as all of them can't continue their school.

“Only two of my children can manage to continue study in migrant school, the others have to help their father work as daily laborers to earn money for our living.”

She said that at first, it was hard for them to be able to take shelter in Thai side as the authority had been harsh on them.

Naw Hsa Bluh Paw said.

“We were forced back while there was still fighting. We were afraid to go back but we went back with

fear. Suddenly the Burma army shelled mortars into the village and burnt down the primary school, so we escaped again into a Thai village.”

Naw Hsa Bluh Paw said that they lost their farm back home as they had to run before they could harvest the crop.

“We had a corn field back home and we couldn't harvest it as we had to run. We've lost all of our income from it.”

Over 30,000 civilians from Myawaddy and nearby townships in Karen State were forced from their homes as fighting broke out after Burma national election in November 2010 and thousands of them are still unable to return home and are living as displaced persons along the Thai-Burma border.