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Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## **DKBA burns village and forces residents to relocate in Pa'an District**

*DKBA soldiers in Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District, have burnt the small village of Gk'Law Lu and forced its residents to relocate. This incident is the second time Gk'Law Lu has been burnt and relocated by DKBA soldiers: the village was first burnt and residents forcibly relocated in October 2008. Relocated families, meanwhile, may face serious threats to their livelihoods if potential DKBA travel restrictions and risks from landmines limit access to farm fields in their home village.*

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On May 29th 2010, residents of Gk'Law Lu village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District, were forcibly relocated by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) after returning and rebuilding homes in a village burnt and relocated by the group during October 2008. Two days later, villagers in the area report that DKBA soldiers burnt the rebuilt homes and laid landmines in the village.

In an attempt to consolidate its control of Dta Greh Township, the DKBA has sought to push villagers into areas where control is more easily maintained, such as lowland areas and villages near DKBA camps. Because Gk'Law Lu village is located in an upland area where the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) remains active, DKBA soldiers first forcibly relocated the village during October 2008. On October 7<sup>th</sup> 2008, 20 DKBA soldiers from Brigade #999 under commander Mu Naw Dweh burnt Gk'Law Lu village and ordered the small hamlet's seven households to relocate. Villagers were not given advance notice of the forced relocation, and were reportedly told by DKBA soldiers, "Villagers [living in Gk'Law Lu village] are disobedient for trying to live in the mountains."<sup>1</sup>

Villagers in Gk'Law Lu and other area villages including Htee Bper Kee<sup>2</sup> were forced to relocate to Htee Bper village, which is adjacent to a DKBA camp established during October 2008. Villagers residing in Htee Bper have since been subjected to exploitative abuses including forced labour, forced military recruitment and high levels of taxation.<sup>3</sup> For instance, beginning on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2008, one person from each household in Htee Bper was required to work every day building the new DKBA camp. Nearby villages,

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the earlier burning of Gk'Law Loo village, see "Human minesweeping and forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa'an District," KHRG, October 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For more details and photos showing Htee Bper Kee after it was burned as well as families during flight, see "Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, February 2009. See also KHRG's 2008 Photo Gallery, "Forced Relocation and displacement," February 2009.

<sup>3</sup> For reports documenting exploitative abuses in Htee Bper village, see "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009. "Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, May 2009. "Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, February 2009. "Human minesweeping and forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa'an District," KHRG, October 2008.

meanwhile, were required to collect, fabricate, and transport materials for the new camp.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to protect themselves from abuse, some villagers subsequently fled Htee Bper village. On October 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 2008, 29 and 43 villagers respectively, fled Htee Bper to seek refuge in the Ler Per Her camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), then located on the bank of the Moei River near the Thailand border.<sup>5</sup>

Residents of Ler Per Her IDP camp, as well as residents of surrounding villages, were forced to abandon the area during June 2009 after a joint force of DKBA and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) soldiers attacked three strategic camps belonging to KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>6</sup> Though more than 3,000 of these villagers fled to Thailand<sup>7</sup>, five of the households originally forced out of Gk'Law Lu village decided to return and rebuild their homes.

In May 2010, the families that had returned to Gk'Law Lu were again ordered to relocate to Htee Bper village. The order was issued by Saw Pah Lay Koh, the temporary commander of the Htee Bper DKBA camp, and a subordinate named Ah Koh. Saw Pah Lay Koh and Ah Koh are under column commander Maw La Wah, and told villagers that the relocation order came directly from DKBA Brigade #999 Brigade Commander Saw Pah Nwee.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 2010, DKBA and KNLA soldiers clashed in the area between Htee Bper and Gk'Law Lu villages. Htee Bper and Gk'Law Lu are just 30 to 40 minutes apart from one another. Following this clash, DKBA soldiers fired one or two 81 mm mortars every evening for at least the next four evenings. DKBA soldiers reportedly again told villagers in Gk'Law Lu to relocate, and informed them that they would not take responsibility for death or injuries to civilians if their mortars landed in the village. This warning mirrors a similar warning issued via a paper document distributed by the DKBA during October 2008, which informed villagers that they should not contact or support the KNLA, and that the DKBA would take no responsibility for villagers injured during conflict between the DKBA and KNLA.<sup>8</sup>

On May 29<sup>th</sup> 2010, the five households residing in Gk'Law Lu relocated to Htee Bper village. At 12:30 pm on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2010, approximately ten soldiers from DKBA Brigade #999 Battalion Security Force lead by Saw Pah Lay Koh entered and burnt the rebuilt homes in Gk'Law Lu village.

According to a KHRG researcher that monitored radio communications in Dta Greh Township, Saw Pah Lay Koh then contacted column commander Maw La Wah and reported that he had burned the village as well as planted landmines. Other KHRG sources also report that villagers in Htee Bper were warned not to return to Gk'Law Lu village because the area had been mined. The use of landmines to control civilian populations after relocation has been previously documented by KHRG. For example,

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<sup>4</sup> For more details on forced labour related to the establishment of the DKBA camp at Htee Bper village, see KHRG, October 2008.

<sup>5</sup> KHRG, October 2008.

<sup>6</sup> For more on flight from Ler Per Her and surrounding villages due to open conflict and related exploitative abuse, see "Update on SPDC/DKBA attacks at Ler Per Her and new refugees in Thailand," KHRG, June 2009.

<sup>7</sup> "Abuse in Pa'an District, Insecurity in Thailand: The dilemma for new refugees in Tha Song Yang," KHRG, September 2009. For details on the way these refugees were later eventually forced out of temporary camps in Thailand, see "Functionally Refoulement: Camps in Tha Song Yang District abandoned as refugees bow to pressure," KHRG, April 2010.

<sup>8</sup> KHRG, October 2008.

on January 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 2009, DKBA soldiers captured 20 villagers attempting to flee Htee Bper village because forest paths had been mined and the villagers were forced to travel using an easily monitored motor road.<sup>9</sup>

The families forced to relocate to Htee Bper village, meanwhile, face potentially serious threats to their livelihoods. Though the families likely wish to return to the fields they had been preparing near Gk'Law Lu, they may be unable to do so because of movement restrictions in Htee Bper village. Fears of landmines in the area around their home village, moreover, may also limit access to their fields. Htee Bper is now a large village, and its residents are already cultivating available arable land, leaving the newly arrived households without land on which to work. Even were land available, June marks the beginning of the rainy season and a transition point in the agricultural cycle – monsoon rains will make burning off and preparing of new land impossible, while delays risk missing a crucial initial planting period. For subsistence farmers that support their families largely by consuming the food they produce, this poses a significant threat to food security.

For more information on the impact of the DKBA on villagers in Pa'an District, see the following published KHRG reports:

- Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District (June 2009)
- Update on SPDC/DKBA attacks at Ler Per Her and new refugees in Thailand (June 2009)
- Over 3,000 villagers flee to Thailand amidst ongoing SPDC/DKBA attacks (June 2009)
- Over 700 villagers flee to Thailand amidst fears of SPDC/DKBA attacks on a KNLA camp and an IDP camp in Pa'an District (June 2009)
- Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts (May 2009)
- Extortion and restrictions under the DKBA in Pa'an District (March 2009)
- Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts (February 2009)
- Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District (September 2008)
- Daily demands and exploitation: Life under the control of SPDC and DKBA forces in Pa'an District (September 2008)

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<sup>9</sup> For more details on how landmines prevented attempted flight, see "Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, February 2009.





# Karen Districts

This map illustrates the Karen Districts in Myanmar, showing administrative boundaries, towns, and geographical features. The map includes an inset map of Myanmar in the top right corner, highlighting the location of the Karen Districts. A legend in the bottom left corner explains the symbols used on the map.

**Legend (Not all features marked)**

- Small town / Village
- Major town
- Federal capital
- District Boundary
- State Boundary
- Federal Boundary
- Vehicular Road
- River

**Map Labels:**

- MANDALAY DIVISION
- SHAN STATE
- SHAN
- MAC HONG SON
- KARENNI STATE
- TOUNGGOO DISTRICT
- TOUNGGOO
- TANTABIN
- THAN DAUNG
- KLER LAH
- KAW THAY DER
- KAW MI DER
- BU SAB KEE
- MONE
- MA LA DAW
- KYAUK KYI
- SAW HTA
- PWA GHAW
- B'NWEH GONE
- PAPUN DISTRICT
- PAPUN
- NYAUNGLEBIN DISTRICT
- NYAUNGLEBIN
- SHWEGYIN
- KU SSHAU
- KU THU HTA
- KYAUKTO
- THATON DISTRICT
- BILIN
- THATON
- THEIN SEIK
- PA'AN DISTRICT
- PA'AN
- PAUNG
- MAITABAN
- MODMEIN
- KYAWKAREIK
- MYAWADDY
- MAE SOT
- MAE LA REFUGEE CAMP
- WAH LAY
- TEE K'PLE
- UMPHANG
- DOOPLAYA DISTRICT
- KYA IN
- SEIK GYI
- KYAWDON
- AZIN
- IBEE HTA DAW
- THANBYUZAYAT
- YE
- TENASSERIM DIVISION
- THREE PAGODAS PASS
- GULF OF MARTABAN
- RANGOON
- PEGU
- THAILAND
- North

**Scale:** 1 cm to 22 km  
1 in. to 35 miles

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