



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Attacks on displaced villagers in Nyaunglebin District

At least 1,000 villagers have fled from ten villages during the last five days following the establishment of a new SPDC Army camp in central Nyaunglebin District. Two villagers in the area of the camp are confirmed to have been killed by soldiers from this camp. Three other villagers are missing after another SPDC battalion attacked a party of villagers that had escaped from an SPDC relocation site to tend to their farms.

On January 17th 2010 the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Army set up a camp at Kheh Der village tract, Kyauk Kyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. At least 1,000 residents of the ten villages that made up Khe Der tract have fled to avoid attack.¹ KHRG has also confirmed that these SPDC troops have killed two villagers, including a village head, from Kheh Der.

Khe Der is located in central Kyauk Kyi Township, in an upland area south of the The Loh River. The SPDC has been attempting to consolidate control of this area since beginning an offensive in northern Karen areas in early 2006. This offensive has included forced relocation of thousands of villagers to government controlled lowland areas. Thousands more villagers who seek to evade relocation² continue to be subjected to targeted attacks in which they are shot on sight and their farms, villages and food stores are destroyed.



This photo, taken on October 13th 2009, shows a family as they flee their village in Nyaunglebin District. The woman here is shown as she works to carry two children as well as vital household materials. Villagers often can only keep what they can carry; to return to their former villages, they must brave attacks and landmines from the SPDC Army.

[Photo: KHRG]

Villagers began fleeing on January 17th 2010, when soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #367 arrived in the area around Kheh Der village tract. Though villagers often prepare hiding sites and hide food stores in anticipation of SPDC attacks, at least some villagers from Kheh Der villages had to return to retrieve food and other necessary materials following flight. KHRG has confirmed that LIB #367 killed one of these

¹ Kheh Der village tract includes Khaw Taw Kee, T'Khaw Der, Thaw Weh Der, Khaw Htah, Ler Taw Lu, Day Baw Kee, Mu Kee, Htee Khaw Kee, Khoh Lu and Kheh Der villages.

² According to the Thai-Burma Border Consortium, at least 54,300 displaced villagers are actively seeking to evade SPDC control in northern Karen areas. See, *Protracted Displacement and Militarisation in Eastern Burma*, TBBC, October 2009.

villagers as he attempted to retrieve food from a hiding place near his village. The victim, Saw My---, 40, is survived by his wife Naw M--- and six children.

Two days later, on January 19th 2010, LIB #367 shot and killed Saw E--- near Tu Ghaw village. Tu Ghaw village is not a part of Kheh Der village tract, but it is in the Kheh Der area. Saw E--- was headman of Tu Ghaw village, and a KHRG researcher in the area reports that he frequently used a two-way radio to monitor SPDC Army movements and warn his villagers of approaching attacks. Saw E--- is survived by his wife Naw S--- and five children.



These photos, taken during October 2009, show villagers from Nyaunglebin District as they flee following SPDC activity near their village. [Photo: KHRG]

It is not clear if the SPDC Army presence in Kheh Der village tract is permanent. Though SPDC Army activity in Nyaunglebin District was intense from early 2006 until the end of 2008, troops withdrew from some frontline positions in December 2008. Troops continued patrols and harassment of villagers in hiding during 2009, but more established positions were confined to lowland areas and locations near permanent roads. Kheh Der village tract is well south of a major east-west road crossing central Nyaunglebin, which links Pegu Division to Kyauk Kyi Town and on into Papun District. Notably, LIB #367 is controlled by Military Operations Command (MOC)³ #10. KHRG has most recently documented activities by battalions from MOC #10 to the north in Toungoo District,⁴ to where it was deployed in November 2007.⁵ KHRG has also documented battalions from MOC #10 committing abuses in Nyaunglebin⁶ and Papun⁷ districts.

If LIB #367 establishes a permanent presence in Kheh Der village tract, 1,000 residents from these ten villages face permanent displacement. Primarily subsistence farmers, this will mean lost access to vital land and agricultural equipment, not to mention personal possessions and infrastructure like village schools. In spite of villagers' best

³ A Military Operations Command (MOC) typically consists of ten battalions. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁴ "Rural development and displacement: SPDC abuses in Toungoo District," KHRG, January 2009.

⁵ "Militarisation, violence and exploitation in Toungoo District," KHRG, February 2008.

⁶ "SPDC Attacks on Villages in Nyaunglebin and Papun Districts and the Civilian Response," KHRG, September 2006.

⁷ "Offensive columns shell and burn villages, round up villagers in northern Papun and Toungoo districts," KHRG, June 2006.

efforts to continue farming, this type of displacement often results in intense food shortages for villagers.⁸

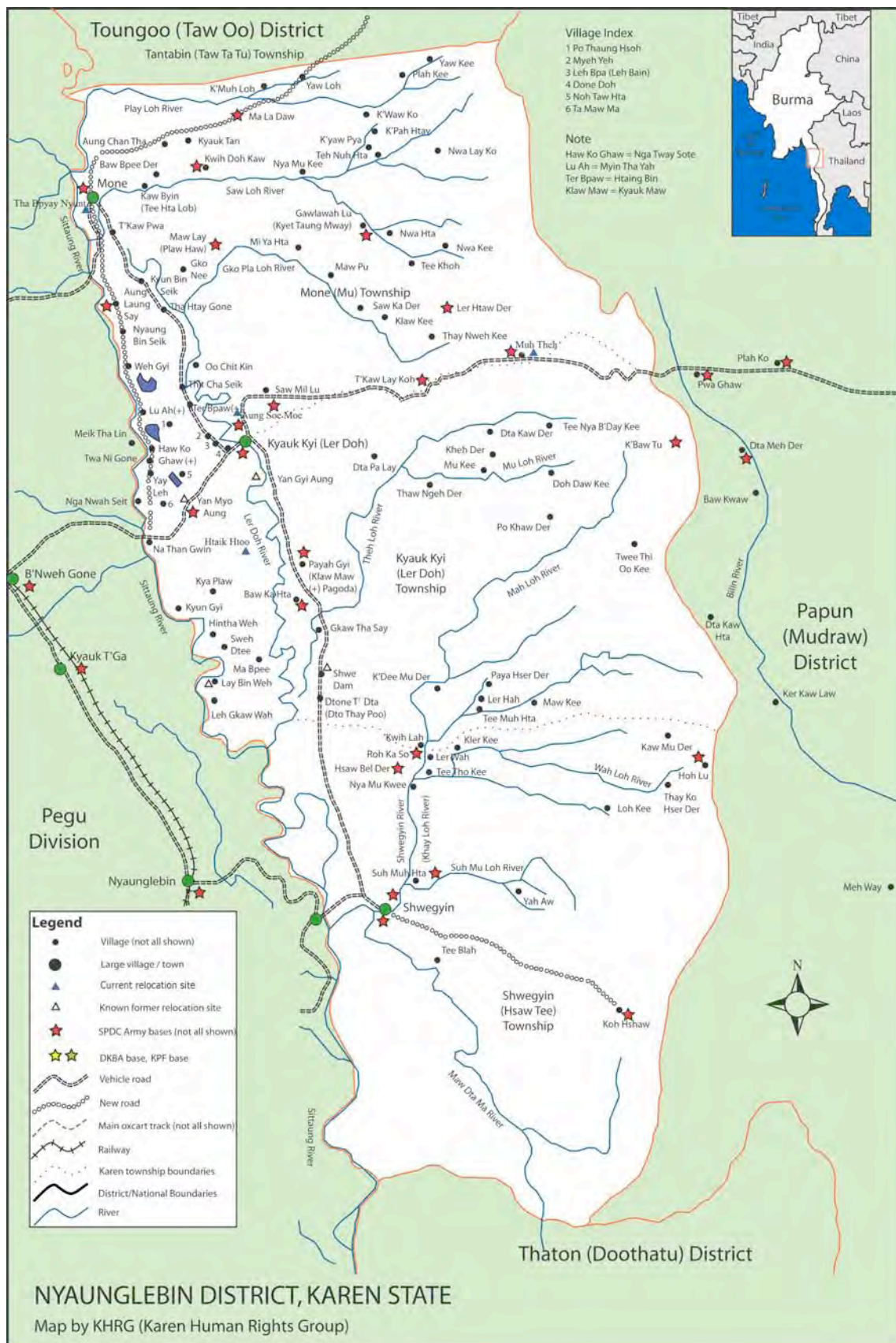
Underscoring the importance of access to farmland, even villagers forced to move to relocation sites by the SPDC Army often continue returning to their former fields, at great risk of personal injury. On January 18th 2010, for instance, a group of villagers from the Aung Soe Moe relocation site in Kyauk Kyi Township returned to Hsaw Mee Lu village to do agricultural work. The villagers did not have permission to leave Aung Soe Moe or return to their former village. The group was subsequently attacked by troops from LIB #370. KHRG has not confirmed whether any villagers were killed or wounded. Though many of the villagers were able to escape and return to Aung Soe Moe, two men and one woman remain missing. The missing villagers are Saw P---, age 40, Naw G---, age 38 and Saw T---, age 21.

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

- *Livelihood consequences of SPDC restrictions and patrols in Nyaunglebin District* (September 2009)
- *Military movements, forced labour and extortion in Nyaunglebin District* (May 2009)
- *IDP responses to food shortages in Nyaunglebin District* (April 2009)
- *Cycles of Displacement: Forced relocation and civilian response in Nyaunglebin District* (January 2009)
- *Military expansion and exploitation in Nyaunglebin District* (August 2008)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khr.org>.

⁸ For more on food shortages that result from SPDC attacks on villagers in hiding, see “Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District,” KHRG, October 2009 and *Food crisis: The cumulative impact of abuse in rural Burma*, KHRG, April 2009.



Karen Districts



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