



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, November 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2011 by a villager living in a hiding site in northern Lu Thaw Township, Papun District. The villager described an incident that occurred in October 2011 in which Tatmadaw soldiers fired six mortar shells into an area in which civilians are actively seeking to avoid attacks by Tatmadaw troops; no one was killed or injured during the attack. This situation update places the occurrence of such incidents in the context of the repeated and prolonged displacement of villagers in northern Luthaw who continue to actively seek to avoid contact with government troops due to ongoing attacks against civilian objects. The villager who wrote this report raised concerns about food shortages in hiding site areas where the presence of Tatmadaw soldiers proximate to previously cultivated land has resulted in overcrowding on available farmland and the subsequent degradation of soil quality, severely limiting villagers' abilities to support themselves using traditional rotational cropping methods. For detailed analysis of the humanitarian situation in this area of Luthaw Township, see the previous KHRG report Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District, published in April 2011.

Situation Update | Lu Thaw Township, Papun District (November 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Papun District, including 26 incident reports, 31 interviews, one other situation update and 296 photographs.²

Political situation

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.

² When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Papun District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Papun District can be found in the recent Field Report, *Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control*, KHRG, August 2010.

In Lu Thaw Township, we can divide the political situation into two parts: (1) the KNU [Karen National Union] politics, and (2) SPDC [Burmese government]³ politics as described below.

KNU political situation

In Lu Thaw Township, the KNU political headquarters have a plan to engage in national politics in the future. Politics can give the whole country dignity and can give [ethnic] nation [states] control of their own destiny, produce national democracy and [contribute to] nations securing their own rights.

If we look back at the KNU's involvement in politics, the KNU has policy goals, but cannot follow them or reach those goals because the SPDC oppresses the Karen people in many ways. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] frighten [people] and kill them violently, attacking them with weapons. So, political development does not equal stability and we believe that we cannot do anything. The reason is because the SPDC Army has attacked us in many ways: with weapons, taking our land and frightening, killing and raping civilians. This started in 1949 and, until now, they have not stopped. Furthermore, they have made more frequent and aggressive attacks that have made it difficult for civilians to get together and discuss [socio-political] plans. People have to focus on their everyday lives, such as where they are going to stay and their livelihoods. It is very difficult for them because they do not have spare time for themselves. Their main worries and stresses are their concerns for their day-to-day lives. For them, time is spent meaninglessly as they cannot be politically active even though that is their goal.

SPDC political situation

After 1949, it was the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) era of control. After 1962, it was the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) era of control, and starting from 1984, it was the start of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Time after time, governments have tried to destroy the KNU organisation. Moreover, governments have tried to destroy all ethnicities that stood and asked for freedom for their own state. To make them [the ethnic groups] all disappear, they [successive governments] used violent weapons to attack and destroy all ethnic people and ethnic organisations. Furthermore, they confiscated land and constructed roads to launch attacks. They took power in [ethnic] areas so that all the civilians in these revolutionary areas became poorer and poorer. The ethnic groups became displaced, often moving to other areas because of food shortages. Some had to go to the borders and became refugees. Some settled in other countries and have had to live their lives in poverty and with difficulties. They [Burmese governments] do not care for ethnic development. They only concern themselves with keeping power and enough food to keep their power stable and *thu taw weh tee gkaw dta bay tha nu t'ka ah dta soh dta gk'maw dta dtoh soh ah ghaw neh law* [literally 'build up the power of the dictatorship policy']. Even ordinary people from their own Burman ethnicity, they have no pity for them.

³ In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this report and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this report.

When the new Thein Sein government took power in 2010, calling itself a civilian government, it was not a legal and honestly-elected government. It was [members of] the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) who had a tricky [deceitful] plan in the illegal election. They [Tatmadaw members of the USDP] took off their army uniforms and wore civilian clothes, which clearly shows that there was a tricky [deceitful] plan in some way. When they [USDP political leaders] started to take power, ethnic armed groups that had cooperated with them [the Tatmadaw] – some for ten years and others for 12 – started to oppose them because they [the Tatmadaw] founded the Border Guard in order to secure their authority.⁴ So, their politics are not the whole country's politics. It is only the policies of the group in power that create disunity. Moreover, these policies create more displacement, conflict and poverty.

Civilians' situation

Motivation

In our area, for civilians to gain independence and to liberate our nation from SPDC control, we are still strongly and consistently motivated. For cooperation and advice, however, we only have time to concentrate on the difficulties that concern our own lives, where we live and our food issues. So, we have no time to think about and work for our people.

Civilian locations

From 2006 until now, civilians have had to move and leave their own villages so they can work in better places. They have to go to work in *htee kee gkwa soe* [literally 'water source' meaning upland areas near rivers' sources] and in other places, so their locations are not yet stable.

Civilian livelihoods

As their locations are not fixed and they have to move [from one location to another], the main occupation that people do is farming and [working] on plantations. Many cannot do this work anymore because they have run out of new hill field plots to farm which they need each year [to allow recently-used plots to fallow]. The places to which people flee are crowded and the hill fields there are not good. Many people do not have farms to grow paddy, so livelihoods have become harder and there are more and more people who do not have enough food.⁵

In 2010, it was dry nearly the whole year, so the paddy on farms could not grow anymore and dried out. In 2011, it was raining when villagers started to work on the hill fields, so they could not burn their hill fields [as usual]. Then in September, it rained very

⁴ The villager trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses who wrote this report is most likely referring to the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard troops in September 2010 and the subsequent refusal of some factions, including elements of DKBA #999 in Doooplaya and Pa'an districts, to transform to Border Guard battalions. See "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Doooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, November 2010.

⁵ As the villager trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses notes here, repeated and prolonged displacement due to targeted attacks on civilians, coupled with over-population in hiding areas where villagers attempt to avoid these attacks, has created shortages of arable land, depleted soil fertility and reduced potential crop yields. These existing obstacles to food security were compounded by an unusually dry rainy season in 2010, coupled with other environmental factors, causing the 2010 harvest to fail. For detailed analysis, see *Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District*, KHRG, April 2011.

heavily, farms were destroyed and, in the hill fields, the rats ate the paddy, so there will be food problems again.

In the year ahead, there will again be a lot of food problems. There are hill fields and flat fields that are in good condition, such as those in Pwa Ghaw Bplaw, Saw Muh Bplaw, Ler Muh Bplaw, Dteh Bpoh Bplaw, and Kay Bpoo Bplaw. These are the hill fields that are good to plant on. We cannot work in the hill fields near the Pwa Ghaw to Saw Hta vehicle road or the Pwa Ghaw to Bu Sah Kee vehicle road. Even though trucks do not travel there, SPDC Army columns always travel from one camp to another and they are active on both sides of the vehicle roads, so the civilians are always afraid and worried.

There are two vehicle roads in the northern part of Lu Thaw Township. One road goes from Muh Theh [in Nyaunglebin District] to Pwa Ghaw and then from Pwa Ghaw to Saw Hta and the other one goes from Pwa Ghaw to Bu Sah Kee [in Toungoo District]. For the hill fields that are situated near the sides of these vehicle roads, people do not dare to go and work there. Some hill fields have been abandoned for thirty years, some for sixteen, some for ten and others for five, so it has become more and more difficult for civilians to find places to work. From 1975 until now, the villages which were dissolved and could no longer be reported to exist: 1) Taw Bpwee Der; 2) Baw Ao Der; 3) Paw Khay Koh; 4) Shway Mu Der; 5) Gku Der; 6) Tee Thu Der; 7) Ta Gku Der; 8) Thaw Kweh; 9) Maw Law; and 10) Kho Kyo. For the villages of Toh Kee, Lay Gaw, Paw Mu Der, Saw Ei Der, situated in Saw Muh Bplaw village tract, Ler Muh Bplaw village tract and Kay Bpoo village tract, although they have moved locations, they have stayed together, so we can continue to report them as being villages. For the ten villages stated above, the villagers were separated and they could not stay together [in their village] or stay together in another village, so the original village has been lost for 30 years.

SPDC Army locations and activities

SPDC Army locations

In Lu Thaw Township, starting in 2008, the SPDC Army built two vehicle roads along which Tatmadaw camps remain located in 27 places.

Table 1: Tatmadaw camps along the Muh Theh to Saw Hta vehicle road

Location	District
Mu Theh	Nyaunglebin
Ka Ser Ta Kwee	n/a
Maw Kyaw Koh	n/a
K'Baw Tu	n/a
Der Ju	n/a
Pwa Ghaw	Papun
Gkeh Deh Kyo	Papun
Dweh Ao Thee Kyo	Papun
T'Ku Per Koh	Papun
Gkhu Mu Koh	Papun
Plah Koh	Papun
Kha Koh	Papun
Gkaw Thway Kyo	Papun
Maw Bpoo	Papun
Maw Kyo	Papun
Khu Lu Daw	Papun
Ler Gklay Kyo	Papun
Ler Say Daw Koh	Papun
Saw Hta	Papun
Wa Baw Kyo	Papun

Maw Loe Day	Papun
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Table 2: Tatmadaw camps along the Pwa Ghaw to Bu Sah Kee vehicle road

Location	District
Pwa Ghaw Loh	Papun
Gko Kaw Day	n/a
Wa Gklay Tu	n/a
Taw Mu Bpleh Meh	n/a
Shah Law Kyo	n/a
Khaw Daw Koh	n/a
Tee Taw Bper	Toungoo
Buh Sah Kee	Toungoo

SPDC Army activities

The army's activities in 2010 – 2011 consisted of movement between camps along the vehicle road. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] were active by the side of the road, and it is not a great distance from the vehicle road to their camps. The distance is about 1,000 cubits, [457 metres].⁶ In 2010, they entered Tha Dah Der village twice and burned the whole village.⁷ They also entered the area of Dteh Bpoh Bplaw, where they burned one hut, one rice mill machine and also destroyed the villagers' market.⁸ The Tatmadaw soldiers made this big problem on those two occasions. Since then, they have not created this big problem. They fired mortars and also had a small number of other activities as follows. On October 1st 2011, at 3:00 pm, SPDC Army soldiers came to the old Baw Lay Der village, Kay Bpoo village tract. On October 15th 2011, at 7:00 pm, SPDC Army soldiers came to Sah Law Kyo, beside Kay Bpoo village. On October 17th 2011, at 11:45 am, SPDC Army soldiers fired six mortar shells into the Sah Law Kyo area, but nothing was damaged.

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

- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, Received in November 2011," (December 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August 2011," (October 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, April 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Incident Reports: November 2010 to January 2011," (August 2011)
- *Acute food shortages threatening 8.885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District*, (May 2011)
- "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," (April 2011)
- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, (August 2010)
- "Southern Papun District: Abuse and expansion of military control," (August 2010)

⁶ A cubit is a standard measurement of the length of bamboo poles commonly referred to in Karen as the length from one's finger tips to one's elbow, about 18 inches / 45.7 cm.

⁷ See *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*, Section C: Surviving with dignity beyond military control: The attack on Tha Dah Der village, KHRG, February 2011.

⁸ See "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," KHRG, March 2011.

