



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## News Bulletin

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### **Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo Township, June to November 2012**

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*This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2012 by a community member describing events occurring in Nyaunglebin District, during the period between June and November 2012. The community member suggests that human rights abuses have decreased in the Moo Township area by 60 percent after the signing of the preliminary ceasefire agreement by the Karen National Union and the Burma government. The community member raises difficulties faced by villagers, including the consequences on agriculture production of unseasonable rain, and goes on to describe human rights abuses that have continued to take place, including the restriction of movement and forced labour. In Moo Township, landmines planted by the Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army remain underground, causing villagers to feel unsafe to travel. The report describes how, on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2012, Officer Aung Ko Ko from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #590, Column #4, released an order to take action on villagers without written permission to travel to hill fields, farm huts and betel nut plantations: thus restricting freedom of movement and trade. On September 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, D--- villagers were ordered by LIB #599 soliders to cut bamboos and wood used for making fences. The existence of Tatmadaw camps has also been an obstacle to villagers doing their livelihoods safely.*

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### **Situation Update | Moo Township, Nyaunglebin District (June to November 2012)**

*The following situation update was written by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Nyaunglebin District, including 116 photographs and three interviews.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members 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, community members 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.

<sup>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Nyaunglebin District can be found in the report,

## **Introduction**

We are so glad that we have the opportunity to report human rights violations that have occurred in our area. The human rights abuses have taken place in Moo Township area from July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 to November 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.<sup>3</sup>

## **Situation report**

As many people have heard, the Burmese [Burma] government and Karen National Union signed an agreement, which is the preliminary ceasefire agreement, and [they] have struggled and reconciled to have truthful peace throughout the country. As a result, we can voice that human rights abuses, which are caused by the government army [Tatmadaw] and KNU [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)], have decreased by 60 percent in our area. But, a few human rights abuses still happen in our area at all times.

In addition, starting from the beginning of this year and until now, the unseasonable rain has come. We tried to collect the information and photos on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012 regarding water covered paddies and [the destruction caused to] a lot of flat field farms as a consequence of the flood.

## **Villagers encounters with things [difficulties] in mountainous area**

As we reported before, in Moo Township area, we live under the control of the KNU [Karen National Union] and live in the places that are acknowledged by the KNU; the places are divided into [two] parts: mountainous area and flatland area.

As far as we see, especially villagers from mountainous areas, can travel and work a lot more freely, such as the travel back and forth in the mountainous area and flatland area after the Burmese government and KNU made the preliminary ceasefire agreement.<sup>4</sup> The only thing that harms the rights of villagers in the mountain area is: the Burmese

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“Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo, Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee Townships, January to June 2012,” KHRG, October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> While the community member wrote that the human rights abuses described in the report occurred between July 1<sup>st</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup>, information is also included about the situation in June.

<sup>4</sup> For additional information and analysis on the ceasefire between the Burma government and the KNU, see “Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process,” KHRG, November 2012.

government army set up their base camps in the forest during the civil war or armed conflict period and they have not returned back to their home towns, so [villagers] have not dared doing livelihoods in the places that are close to military base camps.

As we have mentioned, in the past, Burmese soldiers [Tatmadaw] and KNU [KNLA] soldiers used landmines because of violations and armed conflict; landmines still remain under the ground, [villagers] are afraid of landmines and dare not travel,<sup>5</sup> so we can say that human rights abuses are ongoing.

## **Villagers encounters with things [difficulties] in flatland area**

In flatland area, villagers are under the control of KNU [KNLA] and the State Peace and Development Council [Tatmadaw]<sup>6</sup> therefore they always encounter human rights violations. But, after the ceasefire agreement was signed, things [human rights violations], which are against their rights, have decreased a lot in their lives. A few human rights abuses always take place among villagers without prior notice.

For instance, to repair the camp, on September 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, LIB #599 which bases at D--- village, ordered D--- villagers to cut bamboo and wood for making a fence.

Another example is: on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2012, 40 soldiers from LIB #590, Column #4, led by Aung Ko Ko came and based [themselves] at Ma La Daw camp as a military rotation; he ordered villagers to gather together and he gave a speech and said that from now on, you have to bring travel documents with you if any of you go to hill field farm huts and betel nut plantations, because [we] are going to take action if you do not bring it [with you]. He did not mention how they would take action.

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<sup>5</sup> For recent information on the death of a villager due to an old landmine and related movement restrictions in Pa'an District, see "Landmine death and injuries, old mines continue to make travel unsafe in Pa'an District," KHRG, December 2012.

<sup>6</sup> 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 Pawas used by the villager who wrote this conducted this interview and interviewee and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

## **Villagers conditions, faced with things [difficulties]**

If we review the current condition of villagers, they have to face several things, such as their rights being violated all the time. As we have mentioned above, villagers from the mountainous area and flatland area still live in danger, as some of them cannot travel freely. Front-line government troops have not returned, so KNU [KNLA] soldiers still have to take care of the security for villagers, even though there is no more armed conflict. In addition, KNLA troops still have to use landmines, which is why [villagers] do not dare to travel and do livelihoods near military base camps.

Furthermore, the government soldiers come to military camps, and send more rations and weapons regularly, hence villagers in the mountainous area live in danger and fear. We can say that human rights abuses still take place, as villagers cannot do livelihoods freely. For instance, on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2012, 120 soldiers from LIB #707, led by Battalion Commander Htun Naing Hla and Battalion Commander Saing Thi Ha, came with three bulldozers and two ration trucks; then, their rations arrived at Mu Theh village and they again sent those rations to military camps that are situated in the frontline area.

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

- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Moo, Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee townships, January to June 2012," (October 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyauk Kyi Township, July 2012," (September 2012)
- "Sustained Tatmadaw resupply operations in Thaton, Nyaunglebin and Papun during ceasefire," (May 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw P---, October 2011," (May 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Ler Doh Township, September to October 2011," (January 2012)
- "Nyaunglebin Situation Update: August to October 2011," (December 2011)

