



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, January to February 2015

This Situation Update describes issues occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District during the period between January and February 2015, including ethnic/religious discrimination, forced labour, education challenges, healthcare disparities, development projects, civilians' situation, administration, and military movements.

- *Sein Than Aung, a police officer in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, is an ethnic Rakhine and discriminates against his subordinates who are ethnic Karen and Muslim.*
 - *In Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, teachers are reported to not be teaching effectively; they write down the lesson without explanation and then proceed to play games on their mobile phones. As a result, students find it hard to understand what they are supposed to be learning.*
 - *Rather than providing the community with the proper injection against elephantiasis, the healthcare workers in Thandaunggyi Township gave out pills to community representatives that they tasked with dispensing the pills to their communities. After ingesting the pills, many people suffered severe side-effects from the medication, including dizziness and vomiting, but there was no response to villagers' complaints from the health workers.*
 - *A private company affiliated with the Burma/Myanmar government that was tasked with erecting electrical infrastructure from Thandaung Myo Thit Town to Baw Ga Lee village in Toungoo District, used villagers' forced and unpaid labour to dig the holes for the electrical pylons.*
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Situation Update | Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (January to February 2015)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in March 2015. It was written by a community member in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local 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 Toungoo District, including two incident reports, 21 interviews and 396 photographs.²

The collected information about social issues, education, healthcare, development, the civilian situation, administration situation and the situation of military movement that started from

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar 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.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, 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. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

January 12th 2015 to February 23rd 2015, in the region of Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township, is written in this report.

Social

The human rights violation that local people in Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township are facing is race and colour discrimination. Sein Than Aung is a police officer of Thandaung Myut Thit [Town] and he has subordinate [police station employees] of different ethnicities and he regularly discriminates against them. Police officer Sein Than Aung is a Rakhine ethnicity and he discriminates against people of Karen ethnicity, as well as Muslims.

In Shwe Nyaung Pin village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District there was also a report of social conflict, where a husband and wife fought until [the wife] died. The case was reported to the Myanmar People's Police Force³ township officer U Htwe Win, in Thandaunggyi Township, Karen State. But the cause of the murder [the reason behind the fight] case is not clear to this day; therefore the local people claim that if [the police] are not able to solve this social problem, they will not be able to solve any upcoming problems either.

Karen people in Leik Tho Special Area⁴ in Thandaunggyi Township, even though they are of Karen nationality, split from the [main ethnic] Karen group and formed [their own ethnic-political] party [by the name of] Keh Bah Karen.⁵ Therefore this kind of social issue is leading to undesirable social problems.

Education

As for the education sector in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, after a long time, the education system has [finally] improved, [and] the salary of education department staff has also increased. Therefore, since the salary has increased, the qualified teachers have to teach the students [more] effectively.

Some school teachers who are posted in the rural areas, even though they teach the students, they [the teachers] only attend the school for two to three days per week and stay at home for the rest of the days. Teachers who come from distant areas also have to [go] back to the township just to attend the training and to collect their salary so they are delayed in teaching, and when they go back to their home it takes at least a week, after which [they have to go] back to the place where they are posted [to teach].

Teachers nowadays, in the modern era, are using their mobile phones at school and when they are teaching they just write down the lessons without explanation, so students do not understand the lessons, and then when they ask for an explanation, the teachers are not free, as they are busy with the phone that they take along with them for playing games on. Therefore while the education system of Myanmar is on its way to improving, some eighth and fourth standard⁶ students are facing big problems when they have [to take the] government examination because of this [lack of teacher effort]. In Toungoo District, southwest of Pegu Division [Bago Region], some students from Daw Ni Ma Te Kone village in Wet Kauk Sein village tract passed the qualitative [portion of the] standard [examination], but students up to third standard are having problems with the examination because they have only [been taught]

³ Myanmar Police Force, formally known as The People's Police Force, was established in 1964 as independent department under Ministry of Home Affairs. It was reorganised on October 1st 1995 and informally became part of the Tatmadaw.

⁴ Special Areas or Special Regions are areas such as Myinegyi Ngoo or Leik Tho that are delimited by the Burma/Myanmar government and given to a community to live on, without the Tatmadaw exercising control over that region. Hto Kaw Koe Special Region, for instance, is home to the KNU/KNLA Peace Council base.

⁵ Keh Bah Karen is a Karen sub-ethnic group which resides in southeast Burma/Myanmar in Toungoo District in the vicinity of Thandaung Town in the Special Area of Leik Tho and Ya Tho. This sub-ethnic Karen group has their own language and culture and most of them are animist.

⁶ A Standard refers to a grade in the Burmese education system. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 4, middle school is Standards 5-8 and high school is Standards 9-10.

for the quantitative standard and they cannot write properly, so there are students who quit the school.

In some villages they just built the school on a self-help basis. Many good schools in the downtown have been built with government funding but some rural villages were ignored. Although the school construction is good, there is still weakness in teaching. The international support for the primary school is not sufficiently achieved in some areas. In some remote areas teachers are also asking for money from the students' parents for various reasons.

Healthcare

Regarding healthcare, people usually get treatment at hospitals and clinics but there is no free service. The medicines are being sold at the hospital even though the hospital is a [Burma/Myanmar] government hospital. People do not usually go to the government hospital if they are sick, they just buy the medicine from the pharmacies and use the medication at home. If they [need to be] hospitalised the cost is expensive, more than outside [clinics], so they just get the treatment for as long as they can afford it. Recently many children got dengue haemorrhagic fever but they cannot afford to hospitalise [them] so they just get the treatment from the clinics. The medics who give the treatment at clinics are the staff from the hospital and they prefer to treat the patients from the clinics. The treatment at hospitals is not as good as at clinics.

The health workers should go to the community and provide injections for the immunisation against elephantiasis. Instead, they just provide pills, so there is no injection that is provided by the health workers. They just picked out a section representative and empowered them to provide medication on a specific date and there were complications that happened after section representatives provided pills to the community.⁷ After they [villagers] took the pills, they suffered dizziness and vomited, and people got sick because of the properties of the medicine. When people [villagers] complained about the complication to the village agencies [section representative] they said that they would report to the superior person in charge [health worker] but there was no solution for this.

Dengue haemorrhagic fever and some other diseases are commonly occurring in the Thandaunggyi surroundings. Clinics for the local community were provided by the government but there were only clinics and no medicines so the medics had to buy the medicines with their own money to give the treatment to the patients. Some medics disclosed that the treatment provided was not effective because they cannot afford the [more effective] medication that is needed.

When a group of state ministers came to Thandaung Myo Thit, Baw Ga Lee and Leik Tho [towns] for the persuasion [political campaigning] there were medical professors accompanying them and [they] informed the local people that they can access the healthcare service for free. Many local people came and accessed the service [which] lasted from one pm to five pm and the medication and treatment was perfectly served. But some villagers who live far away did not know that the ministers were coming to the rural area every four years like this, so they were not able to access the service on time, since the service period lasted [only] a few hours.

Development

Community development projects are frequently launched in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District and are mostly just road and bridge construction projects. The road and bridge construction is especially for the improvement of the old roads and bridges. [However], the companies are implementing a new road construction. Since they have [Burma/Myanmar]

⁷ KHRG has received several other reports of villagers experiencing negative side effects after taking medicine for elephantiasis provided by the Burma/Myanmar government. See for example, "[Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, September to December 2013](#)," KHRG, September 2014; as well as "[Hpa-an Interview: Saw A---, May 2014](#)," KHRG, May 2014; "[Hpa-an Interview: Saw U---, December 2013](#)," KHRG, October 2014; and "[Field Report: Thaton District, September 2012 to December 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

government permission, companies do not have any discussion [consultation] with local people and also do not ask for any permission from the local organisations.

During the construction of roads and bridges it also destroys the local lands and there is no compensation. If the local people demand compensation they just construct the road for the local community and say that they have no profit and they can [get away with] that because of their government permit. There are clinics and libraries that have been built as well, but there is no service in the clinics and no books to read in the libraries. The roads that the government does not use much were constructed to a lower quality standard, while in the places [parts of the road] that are profitable [to the government] they overlaid the road with asphalt. The development projects are operating only in the area where the government office [departmental building] is and in the area of military camps.

Land confiscation is happening because of the implementation of the development projects. For example, there are community development projects that are operating along the Pegu Yoma mountain range in the west of Toungoo District. For the Yangon to Naypyidaw road [six-lane wide] construction, a lot of locals' lands were also lost. On January 8th 2015 villagers from around 20 villages from the west of Pegu Yoma mountain range in Toungoo District lost their lands without compensation and consultation because according to the government land grant [registry] U Khin Muang Aye [former Tatmadaw officer] applied [to the Burma/Myanmar government] to [get a land title for] the lands numbered (601 - B) 4,100 acres, (606 - B) 2,430 acres, (605) 4,000 acres, and (607 - B) to open an industrial zone for building hotels and motels for the purpose of business.⁸

The NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council], which is a humanitarian association, also provided [Burma/Myanmar] ID registration to the local people. As NRC is doing the development work with government permission, they have a lack of consultation with the local community. Instead, they just cooperate with the local level administration team. KPP [Karen People's Party]⁹ also works for the development of Thandaung Myo Thit [Town], in particular the water supply. Although this is [supposed to be] for the local community, not all local people get the water, only the party [KPP] members got [access to] the water, as a favour, and [they] took control of the water supply. Moreover, even though the budget that has been provided [by the Burma/Myanmar government] for the school construction, it was not fully funded so the local community had to complete it as was needed.

On January 29th 2015, in Maung Nwet Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, a company called Asian Thai also distributed solar panels and batteries [which were supposed to be] sufficient for [satisfying] the local community's electricity supply [needs]. But the local villagers had to pay the transportation fee [to the people transporting the panels] and when their items arrived they did not receive [their order] in full. To connect the electricity from Thandaung Myo Thit [Town] to Baw Ga Lee village the electricity cable and pylons were put in the local lands, therefore the local villagers lost the lands where the electricity cables and pylons cross through. When digging the holes for the pylons, the villagers in the village had to provide their labour for that, as well.

Civilians' situation

⁸ The Burma/Myanmar government's Land Use Policy does not officially recognise communal and customary land use that is commonly practiced by villagers. This results in villagers' lands being classified under the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Management Law (2012), which enables the government to arbitrarily lease or sell the land to business companies and grant them a land title.

⁹ The Karen (or Kayin) People's Party is one of four ethnic Karen political parties represented in the Burma/Myanmar government, currently holding six legislative seats. Traditionally the KPP represents those Karen communities living outside of Kayin State: Rangoon, Irrawaddy, Bago Region, and Mon State where there is a Karen population. Saw Htun Aung Myint, the party's chairman, once served as a colonel in the Burma/Myanmar Navy.

Local people in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, are mostly cultivating [land] for their living. As local villagers are relying on the crops and fruits that [they] produce from their plantation, even though they can get sufficient food from December to February, in the summertime the crops are not fruitful so they are facing living hardships. The weather is not stable this year so the productivity of cardamom, which is the main crop that local villagers rely on, is decreasing and the price is not good. [As a result], the local villagers have to leave their place and look for a job to improve their living situation. Likewise, the price of rubber is also only 500 kyat (US \$0.46)¹⁰ for one pound so the owners of rubber plantations and the rubber tappers [who receive half the profit] are not getting by on this [low wage]. Even though there are [qualified] workers [looking for] rubber tapping [work], there is barely [anyone] who demands these workers, therefore villagers are becoming unemployed automatically [as a consequence]. Some local people in Thandaunggyi [Town] are also working in stone mining as the stones are being bought by the army for the Ba Yint Naung Army Camp City.¹¹ Even though they are working, the wage is only 3,000 kyat (US \$2.73) [per day] so it is not convenient for the family. Some villagers are cutting and selling brooms. The price of brooms is 1,000 kyat (US \$0.91) for a thousand brooms¹² so they can cut a thousand brooms to sell in a day. Since some sellers and buyers of traded goods cannot offer a good price for the local output, the consumer goods, which are the commodities, are also not good [of lower quality].¹³ Daily wages workers are experiencing problems as the selling and buying business is not as good as before, and they do not know what to do now that the price of commodities is getting higher after the salary of civil servants has increased.

Administration

The [Burma/Myanmar government] administrators in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District have to attend the township meeting every month. Despite them [the administrators] attending the meeting, there is no response when they [administrators] report the issues [raised] in the meeting [to the Burma/Myanmar government]. The local people do not know anything of any kind of development project that is going to be implemented. The implementation takes place according to the supervision of the administration team. Some administrators in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, were not elected by the public, just by the priority of their relatives [through nepotism]. There is no action or response to any issue that [the local people] complained to the administrator [about]. Mostly the administrators are working only for their own profit. In Toungoo District, Thandaunggyi Township, Maung Nweh Gyi village, the administrator demanded money from the villagers according to an order from above [from his superiors in the Burma/Myanmar government], because there is an [unknown] team [organisation] that is going to provide solar panels, so each household has to do the household registration and each household has to pay 3,000 kyat (US \$2.73) and it [the administrators] said that it is for [the] departmental fund. Then the administrator also asked NRC to provide the ID registration service for the [national] election so NRC provided free service for the ID registration but the administrator still collected money [from the villagers], 500 kyat (US \$0.45) for one ID card. Therefore, although NRC provided free service, the local villagers still had to pay the fee.

The military situation

The structure of the government military [Tatmadaw] in Toungoo District in [the] part of Thandaunggyi [Township] is still similar [to the structure] before the ceasefire¹⁴ had started. The

¹⁰ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the June 4th 2015 official market rate of 1,097 Myanmar kyat to the US \$1.

¹¹ 'Ba Yint Naung Army Camp City' is the name of an army camp, not a city. The camp is populated strictly by soldiers and their families.

¹² Brooms here does not refer to a finished product used to sweep floors, but rather to the raw plant material used to make finished brooms.

¹³ Given that buyers are not offering high enough prices, the quality of brooms and other goods produced locally has dropped since producers cannot afford to sell high quality commodities for the offered price.

¹⁴ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of

army camps are being renewed [repaired] and secured, moreover, the government military is guarding for security beside of the vehicle road every day. Some soldiers who were assigned for security are hiding in the position that the fight is going to happen in [setting an ambush]. While LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]¹⁵ #439 was assigned as front line security in Shwe Nyaung Pin village in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, Battalion Deputy Commander Thet Oo Lwin ordered his soldiers to cut firewood and sell it to Ba Yint Naung Tat Myut [Town] for the price of 150,000 kyat (US \$135.64) for one truck of firewood. As soldiers were cutting firewood while assigned to security [detail] they also asked the permission of the administrator to cut the wood and bamboo for the army camp, but when they got permission they [instead] cut it for commercial purposes. But when the local villagers complained, they [the soldiers] said that they did not do it for business purposes, just to use for the army camp. Then the local villagers complained to the [Burma/Myanmar] Ministry of Forestry and they [soldiers] were arrested by the forestry department and the firewood was brought to the forestry department. In the next day a group of soldiers lead by Commander Pyit Sone Pyoe took that firewood back in a military truck and they sold it to the Ba Yint Naung Tat Myut [Town].

On January 15th 2015 a team from the KNU met with the local people in Toungoo District to be able to implement the peace process and to have a firm ceasefire. While they [KNU] were meeting with the villagers for this [purpose], they [both villagers and members of the KNU] were not permitted to go to the Thauk Yay Hkat village by government military [Tatmadaw] Operations Commander Myo Aung.

While the KNU tried to meet with local people in [Leik Tho] Special Area for the ceasefire and peace process, General Kyaw Win's group of home guards¹⁶ did not permit them [villagers] to go, as they are always monitoring the KNU soldiers' goal [political motivations and interests]. They [General Kyaw Win and his group] have prohibited [the villagers in] that special region [from communicating with the KNU] as they worry that local people will report to the KNU about the illegal logging, drug use, and other inappropriate cases that are occurring in the area. The group of General Kyaw Win, who are the home guards, cooperate with the [Burma/Myanmar] government for their cooperative business so Operations Commander Myo Aung [from the] Southern Command Headquarters has to deal [with] whatever General Kyaw Win does and take the accountability for everything for them and support the needs of [General Kyaw Win's] soldiers.

The reason that forests in [Leik Tho] Special Area became deforested is because of the cooperative logging by a group of government [officials] and General Kyaw Win's group of home guards. Although local people in the Special Area welcome the KNU [as an authority] to report [to] about the situation of the region, [it] seems like they [Burma/Myanmar government and General Kyaw Win's group of home guards] are [simply] ignoring the peace process rather than them not trusting the KNU, even though they agreed to the ceasefire. It does not make sense [it is not clear] how the Operations Commander of Southern Command Headquarters regards the KNU because although he attended the Karen National Day at Thandaung Myo Thit [Town] in Toungoo District, he let his soldiers accompany him with complete equipment [weapons and ammunition] and full of security. Even though they [Operations Commander of Southern

changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

¹⁵ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties.

¹⁶ 'Home guard' or gher der groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Kayin State to address Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that gher der were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable. For more on the gher der see: ["Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State,"](#) KHRG, August 2010.

Command Headquarters and his group] have no trust in the KNU, none of the soldiers from the KNU side held any weapons, in a way that [showed] the KNU had trust in them.

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

- “Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, January 2015,” (August 2015)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014 to February 2015,” (July 2015)
- *‘With only our voices what can we do?’ Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar, (June 2015)*
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July to November 2014,” (April 2015)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014,” (February 2015)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)