



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, November 2014 to January 2015

This Situation Update describes events and issues occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District during the period between November 2014 to January 2015, including illegal logging, punishment, education, and livelihoods.

- *In C--- village, Pa Heh village tract, primary school students who did not pass the examinations were punished by their teacher who made them sit down and stand up 500 to 1,000 times.*
 - *Karen National Union (KNU) soldiers arrested two people found on a bamboo raft carrying logs which had been cut down on November 3rd 2014.*
 - *Saw A---, the representative of the Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD), came to hold a meeting in B--- IDP camp regarding cuts to rations and how internally displaced persons (IDPs) can earn their livelihoods in the future.*
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Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (November 2014 to January 2015)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in March 2015. It was written by a community member in Hpapun 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 Hpapun District, including four interviews and 44 photographs.²

Introduction

The human right violations that occurred in Bu Tho Township, from what I know, saw, and documented, is illegal logging on November 3rd 2014.

1. Children's right to education was abused

I went to document the information in C--- village, Pa Heh village tract on November 16th 2014. There is a primary school with only two standards.³ The female teacher who teaches in that

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.

³ 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.

school is called Naw Mee. When I went to document the information, one of [the] students' parents told me that she gave out punishment to the students. The student's parents said their child did not pass one subject and so she made them touch their ears and sit down and stand up 500 times [if they failed] one subject. [If they failed] two subjects [they had to sit down and stand up] 1,000 times. They [the parents] said, *"My two children go to school, one is female and the other one is male. Her [the daughter's] name is Naw D---. She is an eight-year-old and his [the son's] name is Saw E---. He is a five-year-old. It has not only happened to my children [but also to] other children. Every student who [does] not pass an exam is given this punishment."* That school is managed [supported] by [the] Karen government [Karen National Union (KNU)], therefore the parents [are] not happy with it because their children are told by the teacher to sit down and stand up, up to 1,000 times. After this [punishment], the children are not able to go to school for three days.⁴ On November 17th 2014, I met with that teacher [Naw Mee] and questioned her [asking if she] did make the students sit down and stand up 500 to 1,000 times. She said, *"Yes I did. I told them [the students] that if [they did] not pass one subject you [will have to] do it 500 times; if [they fail] two [exams], 1,000 times."*

2. Illegal logging for trading

KNU soldiers arrested the [two people on the] log raft in Dah Hkwa on November 3rd 2014. The names of those two people are Maung F--- who lives in Section #3 of B--- [Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)] camp, Pa Heh village tract. The other one's name is Saw G---. He lives in Section #2 of B--- IDP camp. They were arrested on November 3rd 2014. The next day, the log raft was missing so the people [KNU] speculated that [the] perpetrators might be [more than just] Maung F--- and his friend. They were questioned by soldiers and asked where they had done [the] logging, who asked them to do it, and how many people are involved. When [the] KNU soldiers questioned them they named the people who were involved in [the] logging one by one.

Names:

- (1) Saw H---
- (2) Saw I---
- (3) Saw J---
- (4) Saw K---
- (5) Saw L---
- (6) Saw M---
- (7) Saw N---
- (8) Saw O---
- (9) Saw P---

They all live in Pa Heh village tract in B--- IDP camp. There are 11 people [in total] including the two people who were interrogated.

The place [where the] 11 people did the illegal logging is called Koh Kya Hkoh. Before KNU soldiers went to arrest them, they [KNU] already knew the location of the logging area so they took a motorboat and shot warning shots to scare them. They opened fire at 12 [noon]. During that period the loggers ran away. During this time one of the loggers was eating lunch. He brought rice [in a] tiffin box. During lunch time his tiffin box was hit by [a bullet] and it created a hole in the box. This guy [whose tiffin box was shot] told me this information because his name was not mentioned by his friends when they were questioned by [the] soldiers. He is very scared to say anything to me. He told me, *"I will tell you about it, but do not show my picture or voice recording."* The person who told me this information is named Saw Q---⁵ and I conducted an interview with him. They [took the] dry [dead] logs [and left] the logs which [were] alive. They

⁴ They are unable to go to school due to the pain inflicted from having to stand up and sit down 500-1,000 times.

⁵ Saw Q--- is one of the loggers, but as the researcher mentioned, he was not implicated by Maung F--- or Saw G--- when they were questioned.

went to saw the logs which [were] left behind in the jungle because people will buy them. They did not cut down the living teak trees. When Thai people did logging in Karen State, dead logs [were] left behind in the jungle, therefore they [B--- IDP camp residents] went to log them. He [Saw Q---] asked why they [the KNU] arrested us and gave us punishment? *"If it [they were] the living trees, we [would] definitely not say anything [about being arrested]."*⁶ His friends were arrested and sent to [Bu Tho] Township. After one week they were sent to the district⁷ and I heard that among them [the loggers], there were two soldiers from [the] KNU. One of them I know, his name is Saw R---.

Another [case] also [regarding] illegal logging occurred in a different place with different perpetrators [who are] mostly from S--- and T--- [refugee] camps. They came to do logging in Karen State. They were mostly contracted by wealthy Thai individuals and people who live in Thaw Leh Hta [village in Thailand], but some of them went to do it by themselves. They went to do logging in [the] Salween valley and on the bank of the [Salween] River. On Sunday, December 7th 2014, in [the] afternoon at 3:18 pm, one of [the] people who live in S--- [refugee camp], [who is] called Saw U---, told me that he went to do logging in Meh Kaw Hta. The logs that they mostly logged are living trees, including teak [trees], and 70 to 80 people were involved in [this] logging. The logging took place in the whole of the Salween valley. The logs which [have] already [been] cut down are around 1,000 logs. His [Saw U---'s] boss told him that [the] KNU Forest Department will come to assess the forest, therefore he told him [Saw U---] to go back [to the refugee camps]. He [Saw U---] told me by himself. There are many wealthy people in Thaw Leh Hta; he also mentions one person's name. He lives in Thaw Leh Hta, Thailand. His name is Hka Hsoo. He went to do logging in Karen State on the further [Karen] side of Salween River. He [Hka Hsoo] asked the people [refugees] [from S--- and T--- refugee camps] to do the illegal logging for him. Most of the workers are from S--- and T--- [refugee] camps.

They did it [logging] at night time and used a carriage to carry the logs to the river bank. When the logs reached the bank they used the raft to carry the logs on the river at night time to Meh Pa [village]. The wealthy people who live in Kaw Taw came to get the logs from Meh Pa. I reported as he told me. I want to conduct an interview with him but he was hesitant. He told me that he is not free often. I am not certain if he is scared around me, however the illegal logging truly occurred.

On December 8th 2014, I went to Saw U---'s house on Monday night at 10 pm. One of [his friends] came back from [Meh Kaw Hta] at night and said that the [KNU] Forest Department [had] already reached there [Meh Kaw Hta]. [Saw U---'s friend said], "the KNU Forest Department came to assess the forest and I saw them with my [own] eyes. I saw them and left [straight away] at night." The people who deserted from the logging area live in T--- [refugee] camp. I do not know his name. He told it [the logging issues] in Saw U---'s house. He said the Forest Department and some home guards⁸ [were there] as well. They also asked one or two villagers to go along with them for [the forest assessment]. On December 8th 2014, after one or two days [since Saw U---'s boss told him to go back], they [the loggers] contacted their boss to continue doing it [logging]. The boss replied to them that today [December 8th 2014] the KNU held a meeting in Meh Kaw Hta at a check point, so do not come back [as they risk being

⁶ Here they are referring to the fact that they know that logging living trees is illegal, so they would accept their punishment and would not complain about being arrested.

⁷ KHRG does not have information regarding exactly where in Hpapun District they were sent.

⁸ 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen 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. The Forest Department sent a home guard with them for multiple reasons. Firstly they could provide directions; second they can provide security and lastly they are likely to have family in the area which means they will know the area very well.

arrested]. I asked them [Saw U--- and his friend] that what kind of trees were logged. They told me that [it was] mostly teak [trees]. There are 1,000's of trees which have been illegally logged amounting to around 300 tonnes. They carry it on a raft at night on the Salween River and send it to Kyoh Loh [village]. The people from Myaing Gyi Ngu [Town], also called Hkaw Taw Town,⁹ come to get it. In Hkaw Taw Town there are the wealthy people who buy the logs. I do not know the wealthy [individuals] names and I asked them [Saw U--- and his friend], and they also do not know their names.

The people who did the illegal logging said that [the] KNU who live along the border on the Salween River bank might gain some money [investment from wealthy individual people].¹⁰ If they [do] not gain anything we are not able to do logging. That is what they [Saw U--- and his friend] said. I want to conduct an interview with them [Saw U--- and his friend] to know if the leaders are included in that or not. In order to get their answers, firstly, I talked to them and they said that they know some of them [leaders] but they not dare to mention their names. I asked him [Saw U---], [if I] could interview him. He allowed me to do it. On December 12th 2014, Friday at noon, I took out my pen, voice recorder, and papers for the interview. I went to his house, but he left me and told me that he had to go somewhere. I waited for him for one hour but he [did] not come back. However, illegal logging truly occurred. On December 31st I went again to interview him. He [was] again not free so, I did not conduct the interview with him. I got this information from many people who did the illegal logging. Even though I could not conduct the interview I can note it in my mind. Firstly, I decided to document it as much as I could, but in the end I could not do it. During 2015, I think I will try to document detailed information about the logging cases. I will try to search for it gradually and not stop myself.

On February 3rd 2015, one of the T--- [camp] refugees talked to the loggers from T--- [refugee camp] and said that, "*You cannot go to do logging again in Meh Ra River area.*" Meh Ra River area is based in Karen State and is next to one of the Tatmadaw army camps. They said in the last ten months, one of the T--- [camp refugees] who lives in [Section] V--- went to do logging along with 19 people, including people from other places. About the logging cases, some of the villagers said that the wealthy people who live in Thaw Leh Hta will give money to the KNU leaders who live on [the] country boundary [Thai-Burma/Myanmar border]. If they do not give anything to them, we do not dare go there [to log]. Some leaders are also [openly] working together with wealthy individuals in Thaw Leh Hta. They want to say that Thaw Leh Hta is in Thailand, but most of the wealthy people do illegal logging in Karen State.

According to KNU 5th Brigade [Hpapun District] Forestry Department policy, logging activities along the Salween River are strictly prohibited.

3. Villagers' situation

After the ceasefire¹¹ took place I have seen that villagers can travel [more] freely. Now, they do not have to flee and can live in their own village. The other problem is that villagers argue with each other because of land issues, mainly plantations and other lands [which will help villagers to] earn a living. Most of all villagers in all village tracts are arguing with each other about land issues. I will explain a little bit about how they are arguing. [For] example, during the war period, the land which was not able to be worked on and the [land which] people do not dare to go to, none of these places were worked on and no trees were planted. After the [preliminary]

⁹ Hkaw Taw is the Karen name for Myaing Gyi Ngu. The researcher used both names in this sentence.

¹⁰ The KNU may be bribed by wealthy individuals to do logging.

¹¹ The researcher is referring to the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement, signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. However, on October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see "[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#)," Reuters, October 15th 2015. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

ceasefire period, one of them said this [land] is mine, another one said that their grandparents [had] left it to them, [another person said] said their father [had] planted the trees on it.¹² Because of this, arguments exist among the villagers.

4. Livelihoods

On November 10th 2014, unfavourable weather brought rain and it impacted some of the cultivator's [villagers] paddy. They have not finished [harvesting] their paddy yet. Some of their paddy was destroyed because of the unfavourable weather.

5. Diseases

In October 2014, there was a disease which occurred in Pa Heh village tract, Kaw Poo village tract, and other village tracts. The disease is called eyes sore [conjunctivitis]. This disease infected the people one to another and it infected [spread] very quickly. If you see the people's eyes for a while you might know that your eyes also will begin to become sore because the air brought the infection.¹³ I went to document the information [while people were suffering from eye sore], therefore I myself also got this sickness. My eyes are also sore. When you get this sickness it will take one week to recover. It [the disease] went through place to place and makes you sick at the same time. The infection [was] brought by the air [was airborne] and it infected village after village. In November, many villagers still suffered from it and have not gotten better yet. The villages which [have] encountered the sickness as I knew are Htoh Wee Der village, Hsaw Bgeh Der [village], Ee Too Hta [IDP camp], Paw Ner Moo Loo village, and other villages.

6. Treatment

Regarding treatment, sometimes the sickness occurred in villages and reached village tracts, but the nurses, [medics] and health workers were not able to effectively [reach] every area. The villagers who live near the clinic can go by themselves, but for the people [who do] not live near [a clinic], some of them are not able to go. During the [time the] eyes sore [conjunctivitis] was occurring I did not see health workers come to give medicines. Some of them got some medicine but they [did] not get better. In some village tracts there are some nurses [medics] and health workers from Mae Sot [in Thailand] who came to check [on] the sickness in Bgah Der village tract. I heard the villagers in Bgah Der village area said that they mostly checked for malaria and elephantiasis. After they checked it they gave the medicine [to villagers]. We have seen that health workers [are] more active [in giving] treatment to villagers.

7. The particular situation in Pa Heh and Kaw Poo village tracts

B--- camp is called a refugee [IDP] area camp. In 2014, the leaders who support the refugees, who are called the TBC [The Border Consortium], said they will stop [providing] rations. The people reported [that rations would be stopped] in B--- refugee [IDP] camp which is [supported by] TBC as I know, but the name of TBC was not [explicitly] mentioned. They asked Karen Office of Relief and Development [KORD] to be their representative. I went to document the information on November 19th 2014 at the time when they held the meeting about the rations [which] were not coming regularly. They held the meeting at the B--- [IDP camp] refugee office. In the meeting there were some leaders and religious leaders. Saw A--- is the representative of KORD [who] came to explain. He said since 2006, when that camp was founded, there have been problems with land security [in regards to how villagers can earn a living]. He gives the example that the refugee people have to cultivate the land [to earn a living]. If they do cultivation it will include four village tracts which are Kheh village tract, K'Law Hta village tract, Tah Muh Der village tract and Pa Heh village tract which are based in Brigade #5 [Hpapun District]. If the rations are going to stop, they [will] have to do cultivation, but there are not only people from Brigade #5, there are [people] from other brigades. If they do it [cultivation], it will destroy the

¹² Although it was previously stated that there are no trees on this land, that was referring to trees which bear fruit. The trees in this circumstance are referring to trees which do not bear fruit.

¹³ By this the researcher means if you are around people who are suffering from 'eyes sore' or 'conjunctivitis' you are likely to contract the illness as well because it is airborne. Conjunctivitis is not an airborne disease, but is actually contracted through touching or using something which has been previously touched by someone with the disease.

environment. They already had planned to stop rations in 2008, but they [continued to] come regularly. In 2006, each person got 16 kilos of rice [per month], but now they might get six kilos. In the future, if they do not get the rations, the villagers in that camp [will not know] how to earn a living, so KORD gave understanding [training] to the IDPs who live there [in terms of what tools they need to earn a living]. If they really are going to stop the rations, we have to find [measure] the land, count the number of people and children, as well as how many males and females there are. KORD will find some way to help them. In order to earn their living they might need machetes, paddy seed, and other seeds. We have to mention how many acres of land for cultivation there is. For paddy seeds, for example, they will give three big baskets (62.7 kg or 138.24 lb)¹⁴ of paddy seed for each household [to grow rice]. They had planned it before the rations were cut off. Based on the need, KORD will give some support and they will also report it to TBC to get some support. TBC will help as much as they can for B--- [IDP camp] villagers. The basic needs for cultivation are paddy seeds, machetes, and *baw ka hsu* [root digging bars]. For that basic need, [to get this support the], villagers have to write a letter to the responsible people within KORD.

Based on this discussion at the beginning, they [KORD representatives] asked us if we would like to go back. The villagers said that now in our village if the leaders dare to guarantee us [that we can] go back into our [original] villages [safely], we will dare to go back. [However], if our KNU leaders cannot guarantee [our safety], we do not dare to go back. If our leaders said, "Go back to your village, do not be afraid of the Tatmadaw and of landmines in your villages or on your lands", [then] we [would] want to go back there. Another problem is that if the villagers who live in this area [B--- IDP camp] have to do cultivation year by year it might impact the indigenous people's [locals who live near the IDP camp] lands. They have to go and meet the indigenous leaders, village tract, and township leaders.

Conclusion

In Bu Tho Township, from 2014 until January 2015, I documented the information that I knew and heard. I wrote up the above step by step in each section. The situation in that area as we have seen is the illegal logging [which] took place in [the] Salween valley. I got the information from the people who did the logging. I asked two of them, the first one is Saw Q--- and the second of is Saw W---. They said do not mention his [Saw Q---'s] name or photo in the report. They [are] also involved in [the] logging. I do not know [any] other information in my Bu Tho Township. I will search [for] more information and write up situation updates for next time. Now I write up everything which I know and heard.

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

- "Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNU soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015," (October 2015)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, April 2014 to February 2015," (September 2015)
- "Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015," (September 2015)
- "Human rights violations by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh of BGF Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District, between 2012 and 2015," (September 2015)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, January 2015," (August 2015)

¹⁴ A basket is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One basket is equivalent to 20.9 kg. or 46.08 lb. of paddy, and 32 kg. or 70.4 lb. of milled rice. A basket is twice the volume of a big tin.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)