



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Field Report**

February 25, 2016 / KHRG #15-2-F1

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**Toungoo Field Report: December 2013 to December 2014**

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*This Field Report describes events occurring in Toungoo District between December 2013 and December 2014. During this period, KHRG mainly received reports from Thandaunggyi Township and surrounding areas. The report includes information submitted by KHRG community members on a range of human rights abuses and issues of importance to local communities including land confiscation, militarisation, fighting between armed groups, commercial activity carried out by military actors, violent abuse, access to education, access to healthcare, and development projects.*

- *There have been ongoing cases of land confiscation at the hands of the Tatmadaw, for the purpose of building Burma/Myanmar government offices, establishing military target practice areas and increasingly, for plantations, commercial projects, and sale to private companies.*
  - *Militarisation in Toungoo District has continued, despite the 2012 preliminary ceasefire between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government, with the Tatmadaw rotating troops and replenishing their rations and ammunitions at camps in remote areas.*
  - *A local militia, the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group, have been engaged in several commercial activities, including running gambling areas, logging, and stone mining, in order to raise funds to support their operations. All of these activities have had a disruptive effect on villagers, in particular the school students.*
  - *The Burma/Myanmar government has invested in providing financial support for school students in standards one to four in Toungoo District, however this has not always been effective as in some cases the money does not reach the students.*
  - *There continues to be a lack of access to adequate healthcare in Toungoo District; the Burma/Myanmar government has only built clinics in the village tracts close to main roads, there is a shortage of properly trained healthcare workers and in the case of villagers with lower incomes, treatment is often too expensive.*
  - *Between April and June 2014 there was a meeting that was headed by the Mya Sein Yaung company, with representatives from ten villages, on the subject of the company's Reducing Poverty project being implemented in Thandaunggyi Township.*
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**Land confiscation for military purposes**

Across Toungoo District, land confiscation has been carried out by the Burma/Myanmar government military, the Tatmadaw, for several purposes including the building of government departments and military offices and for establishing target practice areas. Much of the land that the Tatmadaw has been confiscating is land upon which villagers in Toungoo District rely on in order to earn their livelihoods.

In July 2014, KHRG received information that Tatmadaw soldiers confiscated approximately 5,000 acres of land from villagers in Thandaunggyi Township, for both government and military use. Some of this land was being used by villagers for their plantations; without access to their crops, the villagers livelihoods have suffered.<sup>1</sup> In Thit Khwa Taung and Let Pet A'in villages, Thandaunggyi Township, Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>2</sup> #603 confiscated between 200 and 300 acres of villagers' land from an area being used by the villagers to grow coffee beans, cardamom, and dog fruit.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, the villagers were left with little means to earn their livelihoods, causing them significant economic and social problems. The villagers did not receive compensation for their lands. Employing a village agency strategy, the villagers signed an informal land document<sup>4</sup> and sent it to the local sub-township office, district parliament, and state parliament in an attempt to either reclaim their lands or claim compensation for their loss. They did not receive any response. Moreover, the land owners from the village were prevented from accessing the area by soldiers from LIB #603 who detained them if they were caught collecting crops from their plantations on the confiscated land. The soldiers from LIB #603 also openly told the villagers that the land no longer belonged to them.<sup>5</sup>

*"If they [the land owners] collect the crops from their plantations without getting permission from the superior officer [and if the soldiers catch them], they [the soldiers] ask them to leave the crops with them and they also say that the land no longer belongs to you [the villager] anymore."*

KHRG community member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in July 2014)<sup>6</sup>

According to reports received by KHRG, much of the land confiscated from villagers is then utilised by former Tatmadaw officers for long-term plantation projects, in addition to building government offices and establishing military camps. Increasingly, land is also confiscated for the purposes of road construction, regional development projects, and natural resource extraction.<sup>7</sup>

### **Consequences of and responses to land confiscation**

According to reports that were submitted to KHRG in 2014, the general trend and motivations behind land confiscation perpetrated by the Tatmadaw have changed, following the signing of the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma/Myanmar government.<sup>8</sup> KHRG received less reports of land confiscation for military

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<sup>1</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report, "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 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.

<sup>3</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report, "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Although the community member did not include a copy of the document in the report, it is likely the document contained the names of the villagers whose land was confiscated, the acreage confiscated and the villagers' signatures.

<sup>5</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report, "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

<sup>6</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report, "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

<sup>7</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>8</sup> This refers to the preliminary ceasefire agreement signed on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. However, on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, after a negotiation process marred with

purposes and increasing amounts of information on land confiscation for the implementation of infrastructure and industrial development projects, as the Burma/Myanmar government continues to engage with governments and companies from around the world and opens up the country to foreign investment.

In Toungoo District there has been increased land confiscation for road construction to support regional development projects, such as the Asian Highway Network,<sup>9</sup> hotel construction, agricultural projects, and natural resource extraction.<sup>10</sup>

*"The villagers whose lands have been confiscated, their land area [property] is [now] smaller. Some [villagers] have no land, [others] have to go away from their home area for work. They [Burma/Myanmar government and corporations] do not pay compensation for the confiscated land and they [villagers] have no land to stay on. They have no replacement land, become unemployed, work for the rich people hand to mouth, migrate, and are subject to human trafficking. It generates unwanted social problems."*

KHRG community member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in November 2014)<sup>11</sup>

In response to land confiscation, villagers in Toungoo District are now trying to protect their land from confiscation by registering their lands,<sup>12</sup> using the Burma/Myanmar government's Land Form #7.<sup>13</sup> Villagers from Thandaunggyi Township requested information on land registration from the Thandaunggyi Township's land office, non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

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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 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the 2012 preliminary ceasefire, see "[Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#)," KHRG, May 2014.

<sup>9</sup> The Asian Highway Network is a United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific-supported project that aims to link 32 countries in Asia across 141,000 kilometres of roadway. In Burma/Myanmar construction of the highways has for years involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see "[The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkaik Town road construction threatens villagers' livelihoods](#)," KHRG, March 2015; "[With only our voices, what can we do?: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar](#)," KHRG, June 2015; "[Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway](#)," KHRG, October 2009; and "[Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State](#)," KHRG, April 2007. In addition, fighting has erupted between the Tatmadaw and the DKBA along the highway, with the latest clash erupting in early July 2015, resulting in the highway between Myawaddy and Kawkaik shutting down for several days, see "[DKBA, Tatmadaw fight over illegal highway tolls](#)," Myanmar Times, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015, and "[Fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers along the Asian Highway displaces villagers in Doooplaya District, July 2015](#)," KHRG, September 2015.

<sup>10</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>11</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>12</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Form #7 is the application form needed to apply for a land grant to farm land under the Burma/Myanmar government 2012 Farmland Law. The law stipulates that land use laws in place prior to 2012 have been revoked. Land in Burma/Myanmar is ultimately owned by the Burma/Myanmar government. For details, see [Burma/Myanmar Farmland Law 2012](#).

human rights educators, and land law educators. They asked for advice about processing their land titles and strategies of response to land confiscation.<sup>14</sup>

### **Militarisation**

Information submitted to KHRG reveals that although villagers in Thandaunggyi Township have noticed a positive change in how the Tatmadaw conduct their activities since the 2012 preliminary ceasefire, their continued transportation of rations and ammunition is causing significant concern. For example, according to reports KHRG has received, forced labour in the form of portering demanded by Tatmadaw soldiers has decreased. Yet, they are using horses to transport more rations and ammunitions to remote areas than villagers believe to be necessary during a ceasefire.<sup>15</sup> To do this, the Tatmadaw have been using new roads which were originally constructed by the villagers to avoid the military transport routes. KHRG also received reports that in some cases while Tatmadaw LIBs were transporting their supplies, nearby military bases fired heavy weapons to deter any potential attacks from the KNLA, to the distress of villagers.<sup>16</sup> As militarisation has been ongoing in Thandaunggyi Township during the 2012 preliminary ceasefire period, the villagers are increasingly anxious that the ceasefire will break down and fighting between the Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) will resume.

*"It is not easy to avoid the horses and we [the villagers] are afraid of the heavy weapons launched by the Tatmadaw. According to one of the officers who is managing security for the transportation of rations and ammunition, the process will take at least two weeks. By seeing it, the villagers are worried that the war will start again because the Tatmadaw is sending more food and ammunition than they need during the ceasefire."*

KHRG community member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in March 2014)<sup>17</sup>

Tatmadaw activity such as this continues throughout 2014. On December 21<sup>st</sup> 2014, Tatmadaw soldiers were photographed by a KHRG community member transporting up to 150 horses through Thandaung Myo Thit Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>15</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Incident Report: Tatmadaw transport rations and ammunition in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013](#)," KHRG, May 2014.

<sup>16</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Incident Report: Tatmadaw transport rations and ammunition in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013](#)," KHRG, May 2014

<sup>17</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Incident Report: Tatmadaw transport rations and ammunition in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013](#)," KHRG, May 2014

<sup>18</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Photo Set: Militarisation in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2014 to February 2015](#)," KHRG, October 2015.



The above photos were taken on December 21<sup>st</sup> 2014 in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District.<sup>19</sup> They show the Burma/Myanmar Tatmadaw transporting horses, which were then used to transport rations to the frontline, where transport by truck over the rough terrain is not possible. Each truck can carry six horses, and there were 25 trucks, amounting to 150 horses. The local community in Thandaung Myo Thit Town reported that this occurred while they were celebrating the Karen New Year on December 21<sup>st</sup> 2014. As it is during the ceasefire period, the local villagers reported being worried about this activity by the Tatmadaw. [Photos: KHRG]

In 2014, Tatmadaw LIB #124 confiscated villagers' cardamom plantation in Thandaunggyi Town area to make way for a military target practice area. Soldiers from LIB #124 have now begun their heavy weapons target practice on this land and as a consequence, the villagers are in danger when collecting their crops from the plantation. Further militarisation took place in Bu Yin Naung, Thandaunggyi Township, where the Tatmadaw Bu Yin Naung military training centre is located. In 2014, the training centre increased their intake of military trainees.<sup>20</sup>

### **Commercial activity by military actors**

According to a report that KHRG received in July 2014, in 1998 Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB)<sup>21</sup> #39 confiscated farmland from the villagers in Pyin Gaa village, Htantabin Township, Toungoo District.<sup>22</sup> The Tatmadaw soldiers then cultivated the paddy fields themselves and now lease the land that they confiscated back to the villagers. The villagers are required to lease back their land, paying in rice, the amount depending on the size of the land. These lands were originally passed down to the villagers by their ancestors. Ever since the Tatmadaw confiscated the land in 1998, the villagers have had to sign a farming contract with the Tatmadaw every year, before they can start working on the land.

*"They will provide us with a military land title if we are working on the land [that was confiscated]. They give us the military contract and we have to give them [the Tatmadaw] 15*

<sup>19</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Photo Set: Militarisation in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2014 to February 2015](#)," KHRG, October 2015.

<sup>20</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)" KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for garrison duty but sometimes used in offensive operations.

<sup>22</sup> This information was included in an unpublished interview from Toungoo District received by KHRG in July 2014.

baskets (313.5 kg or 691.2 lb)<sup>23</sup> of paddy when the time comes. Then they give us the receipt after we give them paddy.”

Naw N---, (Female, age unknown), Htantabin Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in July 2014)<sup>24</sup>

In 2000, the Bu Yin Naung cantonment area commander confiscated 350 acres of land from villagers in Pa Tauk Gon village, Kwan Bin village tract, Thandaunggyi Township, to establish a rubber plantation. Tatmadaw soldiers continue to grow and tap rubber trees on the land, the profits from which support the military offices and training centre in the area. The villagers whose lands were confiscated have struggled to earn their livelihoods ever since and work hand to mouth.<sup>25</sup>



These two photos were taken on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2014 in Bago Region, Thandaunggyi Township, Kwan Bin village tract, Pa Tauk Gon village. The pictures show the rubber plantation and land that the Bu Yin Naung Cantonment Area Commander confiscated in 2000. The villagers are still suffering the consequences of having had their lands confiscated. The sign in the first photo states “Infantry Battalion #124’s Rubber Plantation. Area of Plantation: 5 Acres.” The sign in the second photo states: “Factory Platoon #9’s Plantation Land Area.”<sup>26</sup> [Photos KHRG]

Between February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014 and February 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, Karen National Union Day celebrations were held in Pya Sa Khan village area, Toungoo District. As part of the celebrations, dice gambling organised by the Thaundaung Special Region Peace Group, also known as *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A’pweh*,<sup>27</sup> was permitted by the Burma/Myanmar government.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> This information was included in an unpublished interview from Toungoo District received by KHRG in July 2014.

<sup>25</sup> This information was included in an unpublished photo set from Toungoo District received by KHRG in November 2014.

<sup>26</sup> These photos were included in an unpublished photo set from Toungoo District received by KHRG in November 2014.

<sup>27</sup> *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A’pweh*, or ‘Thaundaung Peace Group’, is a local militia located in Toungoo District. The group split from the Karen National Union in 1997 and was initially led by PPhe Ra Mo. Reports from the field claim that they are currently led by General Bo Than Myin, have around 300 troops stationed at Leik Tho Base (Battalion Commander Bo Kyaw Win), in Leik Tho Township, and an additional 40 soldiers at Pya Sa Khan Base (Battalion Commander Khin Maung Lwin), near Thandaung town. It has been reported that they control a number of

The Thandaung Special Region Peace Group set up a gambling area and charged 150,000 kyat (US \$128.54)<sup>29</sup> per day for a table. The celebrations took place during the school students' exam time, and the villagers complained about the disruption caused by the gambling to the police, but the police did not put a stop to the gambling, explaining that it was permitted by the government. Following the celebrations, they continued to open the gambling area twice a week.<sup>30</sup>

The Thandaung Special Region Peace Group, also conducted natural resource extraction projects in Toungoo District, that have had negative implications for the local villagers. The deforestation caused by the logging in the area is to such an extent that the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group have begun underground mineral and stone mining as an alternative.<sup>31</sup> The forest land from which they were logging was confiscated land, however rather than return this land, the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group have used it to establish rubber plantations. According to information submitted to KHRG, the commander of the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group Kyaw Win, monk Ah Lu Maung from Ngway Taung Ka Lay monastery, and the Burma/Myanmar government share the profits made from the stone mine between them. Furthermore, the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group and local government sponsored militia, *Aye Chan Yay A'pweh*<sup>32</sup> are often arguing over land issues, and villagers are concerned that the disputes will escalate into violent conflict.<sup>33</sup>

### Indiscriminate firing of small arms

On December 25<sup>th</sup> 2013 at 10 pm, in Kyaung Na Kwa village, Si Pin village tract, Thandaunggyi Township, there was an incident involving the indiscriminate firing of small arms by Battalion

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different illicit operations, including gambling and black market car licencing. They are also allegedly employed as security personnel by local companies and wealthy individuals involved in logging and mineral resource extraction, in addition to having direct involvement in the lumber and mineral business. *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh* should not be confused with *Nyein Chan Yay A'pweh*, which is occasionally translated as Peace Group but refers to the Karen Peace Army (KPA), aka the Karen Peace Force (KPF). Nor should it be conflated with *Aye Chan Yay*, another small militia group also operating in Toungoo District that the Thandaung Peace Group has come into conflict with. It is also distinct from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council, which is also sometimes translated as 'Peace Group'.

<sup>28</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

<sup>29</sup> All estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the August 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 official market rate of 1,167 kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>30</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

<sup>31</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

<sup>32</sup> *Aye Chan Yay A'pweh*, which translates as 'Peace Group', is a government sponsored militia formed in 1998 and consisting of roughly 800 reserve soldiers and significantly less active members. Field reports indicate that the group is led by U Ko Gyi and operates mainly out of a base in the upper region of the Kyaung Haung area in Leik Tho Township, Toungoo District near the Kayah State border. They also have small camps in the Mya Tha Gone, Tat Sel Khyang, Yay Ni and Myauk Lon Chaung areas in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. Community members in the field have stated that they are involved in the rubber, teak and agarwood industry, and have accused them of illegal land confiscations and cases of forced labour.

<sup>33</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015

Deputy Commander Sein Win of LIB #540, which is under MOC #9.<sup>34</sup> Deputy Commander Sein Win went to a restaurant close to Kyaung Na Kwa village without wearing his military uniform, and started drinking alcohol. There were Kyaung Na Kwa villagers also eating and drinking at the same restaurant. A misunderstanding resulted in Battalion Deputy Commander Sein Win pointing his pistol at the villagers and shots being fired. Although no one was injured, the Kyaung Na Kwa village head expressed concerns that incidents such as this taking place during the ceasefire can affect the peace process, and that the incident is an example of why it is important for armed groups to withdraw from the area.<sup>35</sup>

### **Violent abuse**

KHRG received several reports regarding incidents of violent abuse at the hands of armed actors in Toungoo District between December 2013 and December 2014. According to these reports, villagers in Toungoo District were often left unsatisfied with the efforts made by armed actors to resolve the incidents, revealing a wider issue of persisting military impunity in the area.

Another fundraising event was held in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District for *Aye Chan Yay A'pweh*,<sup>36</sup> from December 18<sup>th</sup> 2013 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013. During the event, there was a concert held and gambling allowed, with the aim of raising funds for the militia. During the concert, an argument began between Militia Officer Ba Ra and his soldiers, and villager Saw B---. The soldiers struck Saw B---'s head twice with a gun and his head was split open; it was bleeding severely and he fainted. Several days later, when he was able, Saw B--- went to see Militia Officer Ba Ra's camp Commander, Khin Maung Lwin, to report what had happened to him, but Commander Khin Maung Lwin would not reprimand his soldiers, and he angrily ordered Saw B--- to leave. According to the KHRG Community Member, this militia often creates unnecessary problems such as this during celebrations, and Commander Khin Maung Lwin does not resolve the issues with his soldiers properly.<sup>37</sup> The KHRG Community Member relayed local concerns that if camp commander Khin Maung Lwin does not enforce military discipline for his soldiers, there will be more problems in the future.<sup>38</sup>

In 2014, there was also physical, violent abuse committed by soldiers from the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group led by Commander Kyaw Win, in Aok Po village, Leik Tho Township, Thandaung Township, Toungoo District. A group of soldiers went to villager Saw C---'s house and some of them physically abused and punched him while the other soldiers surrounded him at gun point. Saw C--- later reported the case to the *Nyein Chan Yay*'s chairperson, Officer Tha Myint, and the KNU officers. However, after reviewing the case, they informed Saw C--- that they could do nothing for him, but if Commander Kyaw Win were to allow

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<sup>34</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

<sup>35</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

<sup>36</sup> *Aye Chan Yay A'pweh* should not be confused with *Nyein Chan Yay A'pweh*, which can also be translated as 'Peace Group' but refers to the Karen Peace Army (KPA), aka the Karen Peace Force (KPF), nor *Htanay Pyithu Sitt A'pweh*, another militia also known as the Thandaung Peace Group that has been in conflict with *Aye Chan Yay A'pweh* in Toungoo District. It is also distinct from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council, which has, on occasion, been referred to as 'Peace Group'.

<sup>37</sup> See "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>38</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

more abuses like this in the future, he will be discharged from his position by the Tatmadaw, who sponsor his militia.<sup>39</sup>

On August 8<sup>th</sup> 2014, Saw D--- from A'Lel Khyang a Htet village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District was playing carrom<sup>40</sup> and drinking alcohol at a restaurant with soldiers from LIB #590, including Commander Naiang Oo. An argument during the play led the soldiers to all start punching Saw D--- at the same time, and Saw D--- sustained injuries to his eyes and head. Following the beating, the soldiers left the restaurant without resolving the issue, so a villager phoned the battalion commander in an attempt to resolve the problem themselves. The next day, Saw D--- was invited to come for medical treatment at the A'Lel Khyang military camp. As a result of the beating, one of Saw D---'s eyes now has permanently blurred vision.<sup>41</sup>

### **Fighting between armed groups**

KHRG received information that villagers reported fighting between Tatmadaw soldiers under Military Operations Command (MOC) #20 and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Htantabin Township, Toungoo District, between E--- village and F--- village in 2014. According to the villagers, the fighting started when a group of MOC #20's Tatmadaw soldiers crossed a military agreed boundary line. As a result of the fighting, a Tatmadaw soldier was killed.<sup>42</sup>

### **Education**

According to information received by KHRG, in many cases access to education improved in Toungoo District during 2014 as the Burma/Myanmar government provided support for younger students and sent teachers to schools in remote areas. This is not always effective however, as money intended for students may not always reach them, and the government-sent teachers may require additional support from the villagers or may be absent from the village for extended periods of time.

There is a government primary school in Maung Nwe Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. For the students who have completed primary school, in order to continue their education they have to go to high school in another area far from their village. The Burma/Myanmar government announced that school education should be free for students up to 4<sup>th</sup> standard,<sup>43</sup> and that they will provide 1,000 kyat (US \$0.86) to each student in this age group in the 2014 to 2015 academic year. However the school teacher at the school in Maung Nwe Gyi village, Naw Mel George, kept the money that was intended for the students, claiming that she had paid for the transportation of the school books.<sup>44</sup>

As well as endeavouring to provide free education to younger students, the Burma/Myanmar government also distributed free text books in Toungoo District and tried to increase the number of teachers in the government schools by sending more teachers to schools in remote areas,

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<sup>39</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in November 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Carrom is table top, "strike and pocket", billiards style game played throughout Southeast Asia.

<sup>41</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in November 2014.

<sup>42</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014](#)," KHRG, February 2015.

<sup>43</sup> 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.

<sup>44</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

but they have not provided any accommodation, stipend or housing for the teachers.<sup>45</sup> This has meant that villagers have had to organise money for the teachers' housing or build houses for them themselves, as was done by the villagers in Maung Nwe Gyi village:

*"They [Burma/Myanmar government] send school teachers [to the school] and moreover this year they distributed the text books freely, but they did not build houses for the teachers [to live in]. The villagers had to collect money, 3,000 kyat (US \$2.90) from each house [in the village], to support [building] the housing for the teachers [to stay in]. There are 128 houses in the village and they had to build houses for the teachers by themselves."*

KHRG Community Member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in July 2014)<sup>46</sup>

Shwe L'Bo village is only three to four miles away from Leik Tho Town, but the villagers have not received financial support from the Burma/Myanmar government with which to build schools, and therefore have to be self-reliant. The issue of access to education for the children in Shwe L'Bo village has not been seriously considered by the government, as the number of villagers and students does not meet the quota required by the government in order to provide support to a village. Therefore, there is support from the government for schools in the towns and for the schools in some surrounding areas, but in KNU controlled areas particularly, the government's consideration of the villagers' perspectives and needs is still poor.<sup>47</sup>

*"There are enough teachers and students for schools located in a town, but for the village areas they ignore [their needs]. Especially in the KNU [Karen National Union] controlled areas, the [Burma/Myanmar government support of] education is still weak."*

KHRG Community Member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in November 2014)<sup>48</sup>

The earlier mentioned stone mining project established by the Thandaung Special Region Peace Group in Kwun Pin village, Kyauk Taing village tract, Toungoo Township is having a disruptive effect on local schools. The Thandaung Special Region Peace Group crush the mined stones with heavy machinery during the daytime. This disrupts the students study as the school is situated near the mountain and the machine used is loud. The villagers dare not complain as Commander Kyaw Win is running the project, and he is one of the leaders of the armed group.<sup>49</sup>

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from several villages in Leik Tho Town, displaced from their homes during the conflict, have grouped together and established a village beside the main road of Than Mo Taung village tract in Leik Tho Sub-Township and named their village Baa Bon

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<sup>45</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

<sup>46</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

<sup>47</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July to November 2014](#)," KHRG, April 2015

<sup>48</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July to November 2014](#)," KHRG, April 2015

<sup>49</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

village. They built a school to support their children's education and invest in their futures. They requested the school be recognised by the Burma/Myanmar government, which would enable the students to go on and continue their studies at a government school, but their request has been rejected. The government recognises the school as a joint-primary school, whereby the villagers are permitted to run the school, but they have to find and hire teachers themselves. Due to the insecurity of their livelihoods, the villagers may struggle to support their children's educations in this way in the future.<sup>50</sup>

### **Healthcare**

KHRG received information that villagers in Toungoo District lack access to proper healthcare, either as a result of inadequate training of healthcare workers and an absence of clinics, or due to the high costs charged for medicine and treatment.

KHRG received information that in some areas in Thandaunggyi Township there are existing clinics, but they only stock medicines for treating minor illnesses, so when patients come with more serious diseases it can be a problem for the clinics to treat them appropriately.<sup>51</sup> Further, the duty medics appointed by the Burma/Myanmar government in these clinics bought the medicines themselves with their own money, and therefore charge the patients for treatment. This is a problem for the villagers who are not able to afford to pay for medicine. In some areas of Thandaunggyi Township there are problems with treating patients because the health workers have no formal training. Patients who are able to afford it go to Bu Yin Naung military hospital, because there is plenty of medicine and the doctors have expertise in surgery.<sup>52</sup>

### **Consequences of healthcare problems**

KHRG received information on several incidents involving female villagers resulting from a lack of access to healthcare in Thandaunggyi Township.

In Maung Nwe Gyi village, Thandaunggyi Township, a woman died on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2014 as she was delivering her baby. There were midwives in the area that were appointed by the Burma/Myanmar government, but they were never present in the village so the woman hired a village midwife, who was not formally trained, to help deliver her baby. While she was in labour, being helped by the hired midwife, complications arose; the delivery took so long that the placenta did not come out, and the hired midwife had to cut the placenta out with scissors. The woman bled heavily and died as a result. Regarding this case, the KHRG Community Member expressed the villagers' opinion that if there were formally trained midwives present, they could have saved the pregnant woman's life.

*"There were mid-wives appointed by the [Burma/Myanmar] government, but they were never in the village."*

KHRG Community Member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received in July 2014)<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This information was included in an unpublished incident report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in March 2014.

<sup>51</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014

<sup>52</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014

<sup>53</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014

Another woman who suffered pregnancy related complications as a result of the lack of access to adequate healthcare in Thandaunggyi Township had not taken pre-natal vitamins during her pregnancy as there was no clinic, hospital or midwives in Meh Thin Hka Gyi village, and consequently she became unwell. On June 4<sup>th</sup> 2014, the local villagers treated her to the best of their abilities, but she suffered an adverse reaction to the medication as she was not being treated correctly. Sores appeared in her mouth and she was taken on the two day trip to hospital as the villagers did not have the medicine to treat the sores. When they arrived at the hospital, the government medics asked the villagers about the woman's situation. When the government medics found out about what had happened, they blamed the person who had administered the treatment to the pregnant woman, saying they could take legal action against the person who treated her incorrectly. After that, the pregnant woman was in the hospital for a week but the government medics did nothing for her as she was not able to pay for the hospital treatment and she had to return to the village without treatment.<sup>54</sup>

### **Village agency regarding healthcare**

For the villagers in Thandaunggyi Township who live close to a clinic and go to the clinic when they are sick, they are usually charged at least 2,000 kyat (US \$1.71) for the examination and medicine. Consequently, some villages administer their own treatment, buying oral medicine or intravenous medicine. For some of the poorest villagers, as going to the hospital or clinic is too expensive and they cannot afford the cost of medicines they treat their diseases using traditional medicines made from plants. Some villagers take a six month medical training course that is usually conducted by the Burma/Myanmar government's medics. After completing the course, they earn money by providing private healthcare to other villagers.<sup>55</sup>

A KHRG Community Member explained that as villagers are facing challenges with regard to healthcare in Thandaunggyi Township, they requested that the government set up a healthcare clinic, but the government has done nothing in response to the request. According to the villagers' perspectives and opinions on healthcare and education, some development projects that the government does in Thandaunggyi Township area benefit the people, and some projects do not benefit the people. According to the villagers, if the government were more effective in running the hospitals, clinics and schools, there would be benefits for all the people.<sup>56</sup>

### **Livelihoods**

During 2014, in Toungoo District, villagers faced several challenges to their livelihoods. These include land confiscation, low crop yields, and lack of job opportunities.

Most people in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District depend on plantations for their livelihoods. In 2000, the military confiscated land from villagers in Maung Nwe Gyi village and now Tatmadaw soldiers from the Bu Yin Naung training centre conduct heavy weapons target practice as a part of their military training in the plantation between Nan Khyein Khwin village

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<sup>54</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014

<sup>55</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July to November 2014](#)," KHRG, April 2015

<sup>56</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#)," KHRG, December 2014.

and Shwe Nyaung Bin village. This makes it dangerous for local villagers to conduct their livelihood activities in the area, and they are often unable to collect their crops.<sup>57</sup>

In 2014, in Thandaunggyi Township, the level of crops produced was lower than in previous years, and the market price of the crops was also low. The price for dog fruit sold by the villagers was between 2,500 and 3,000 kyat (US \$2.14 and \$2.57) for one big tin,<sup>58</sup> and it takes all day to pick one or two big tins of dog fruit. Further to this, the price of general goods was high in 2014 and that created problems for villagers' livelihoods as well. The plantation workers and rubber tapping workers are facing many problems as the goods price is based on the government officers' income. There are also difficulties for villagers finding jobs other than working on rubber plantations with their family.<sup>59</sup>

### **Mya Sein Yaung Company's Reducing Poverty project**

KHRG received several reports in 2014 with information regarding the Mya Sein Yaung Company's "Reducing Poverty" project in Toungoo District. Although supposedly intended as a means of supporting low income families on a money lending basis, according to KHRG Community Members the interest rates and requirements of the loan make the project inaccessible to the villagers most in need of support, while the distribution of project funds via village leaders is causing disputes among communities.

Between April and June 2014 there was a meeting that was headed by the Mya Sein Yaung Company, with representatives from ten villages, on the subject of the company's "Reducing Poverty" project being implemented in Toungoo District, in the Thandaunggyi Township area. During the meeting the Mya Sein Yaung Company representatives explained to the villagers about their project and the process by which it will be implemented. They explained to the village representatives that they will provide 30,000,000 kyat (US \$25,706.94) to each village under the project. According to the KHRG Community Member, the village representatives were pleased to hear about the planned project as they are not doing well from their plantations. However the KHRG Community Member also reported that as the Mya Sein Yaung Company plans to provide significant financial support to the local villages, there are concerns that some village representatives who were in the meeting and accepted the support will give the money only to their relatives and friends, and may threaten the other local villagers if they complain about this.<sup>60</sup>

There are 160 houses in Shwe Nyaung Bin village and the villagers mostly work as casual labourers to earn their livelihoods. The Burma/Myanmar government has proclaimed that the Reducing Poverty Project is for the benefit of poor villagers, but the way in which the project is organised means that the poorest villagers are unable to benefit, as they are not able to secure three guarantors in order to receive money from the project.<sup>61</sup> According to the company

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<sup>57</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report ["Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014," KHRG, December 2014.](#)

<sup>58</sup> A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg or 23.04 lb of paddy, and 16 kg or 35.2 lb of milled rice.

<sup>59</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report ["Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014," KHRG, December 2014.](#)

<sup>60</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report ["Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014," KHRG, December 2014](#)

<sup>61</sup> KHRG has previously reported that villagers were required to pawn assets in order to obtain money from the program. Upon follow up, it was determined that rather than pawn fixed assets, villagers were required to provide three guarantors in order to receive money; this proved to be a very difficult requirement to meet for most villagers in the area. See: ["Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014," KHRG, December 2014](#)

representatives at the meeting, they charge 50 pya (US \$0.0004) interest for every 1 kyat (US \$0.0009) loaned. This is difficult to afford for the villagers who have livelihood problems, but if they do not borrow money they will still have difficulties, so they are faced with a difficult choice.<sup>62</sup>

*“It is difficult for the people who do not have money. It is difficult for them to go on with their livelihoods if they do not borrow money and they are facing many kinds of difficulties. The government proclaimed it “Reducing Poverty”, but nothing has changed for the poor.”*

KHRG Community Member, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District  
(Received July 2014)<sup>63</sup>

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

- “Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, January 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Toungoo Photo Set: Militarisation in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2014 to February 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, January to February 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, January 2015,” (August 2015)
- Press release on *‘With only our voices, what can we do?’: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar*, (August 2015)

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<sup>62</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report “[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#),” KHRG, December 2014

<sup>63</sup> This information was included in previously published KHRG report “[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, April to June 2014](#),” KHRG, December 2014

## Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)