



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Field Report

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Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2013

This Field Report includes information submitted by KHRG community members describing events which occurred in Hpapun District between January and December 2013. The report describes human rights violations, including sexual harassment, violent abuses, landmine incidents, forced labour, land confiscation, gold mining, arbitrary taxation, and theft and looting. In addition, fighting between Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Border Guard Force (BGF) soldiers resulted in injury and displacement of villagers. The report also documents villagers' concerns regarding the stability of the 2012 preliminary ceasefire and issues important to the local communities, such as access to education and healthcare.

- *Between January and December 2013, villagers reported ongoing militarization and use of landmines by Tatmadaw and BGF soldiers in Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, resulting in fatalities and injury to villagers and livestock.*
 - *BGF soldiers committed human rights abuses such as sexual harassment, violent abuse, and demands for forced labour from villagers in Bu Tho Township.*
 - *Monk U Thuzana's followers ordered villagers to perform forced labour for the monk's bridge construction project.*
 - *A private gold mining enterprise has been endangering villagers' health in Dwe Lo Township. Villagers expressed their opposition to gold mining projects in the area by producing placards and posting them along the road and the river.*
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Hpapun District is a heavily militarised region, with various sections controlled by different state and ethnic armed groups (EAGs). In 2013, there were four armed groups based in Hpapun District: The Burma/Myanmar government military, including the Tatmadaw and the Border Guard Force (BGF),¹ the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA).² This multiplicity of armed

¹ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "[DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force](#)" *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and "[Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District](#)," KHRG, June 2009.

² The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at

actors in the district contributes to the complexity and variety of human rights abuses documented by KHRG, as each group vies for either power, self-determination, or control of these territories.

Tatmadaw and BGF ongoing militarisation undermine villagers' sense of security

In 2013, villagers in Hpapun District identified that since the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU signed the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement,³ the Tatmadaw soldiers in the area have decreased their demands for forced labour and restrictions on the freedom of movement of villagers. However, they continued to transport rations to their frontline camps within KNLA territories during the ceasefire period.

Specifically, in Bu Tho Township, despite the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the Tatmadaw frontline soldiers sent more weapons and repaired their military camps that are located on the border of the township. In Dwe Lo Township, there were two Tatmadaw battalions operating in the region. These were: Light Infantry Division #44 and Light Infantry Battalion #96. They have not reduced their troop numbers and they rotated their troops once every four months.

There were also two BGF battalions, based in Bu Tho Township, which operate under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government military. The two active battalions were BGF Battalion #1013 led by Battalion Commander Hla Kyaing and Battalion Deputy Commander Kyaw Win, and Battalion #1014 led by Battalion Commander Maung Chit and Battalion Deputy Commander Tin Maung Soe. They were active in Htee Th'Daw Hta, Kyaw Pah and Day Wah village tracts. The villagers raised their concerns that the Tatmadaw ordered these two BGF battalions to secure the areas around Meh Say village in Taw Kyah area where the Burma/Myanmar government plans to construct the Hatgyi dam. Villagers added that the Burma/Myanmar government wants to construct the dam without being disturbed by KNLA soldiers; therefore, they ordered the BGF to secure the area in advance of the construction of the dam, and ensure no KNLA soldiers are based and able to operate near the dam site.⁴

In addition to securing the Hatgyi dam area, villagers reported that Second Lieutenant Tha Beh⁵ from BGF Battalion #1014 spies on villagers in Meh Say village area to find

that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "[Inside the DKBA](#)," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" to reflect its secularity.

³ In this report, "ceasefire" refers to the preliminary ceasefire agreement that was signed on January 12th 2012 between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. 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. 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.

⁴ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2013.

⁵ Saw Tha Beh is a Second Lieutenant in Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District. KHRG has received multiple reports of Saw Tha Beh committing human rights abuses in Hpapun District, including forced labour, arbitrary taxation and violent abuse. For more information see: "[Hpapun Incident Report: Violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, April 2014](#)," KHRG, November 2014; "[Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 – January 2014](#)," KHRG, September 2014; "[Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014; and "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

out if they are supporting or working for the KNLA. Due to this state of affairs, villagers feel like their lives are insecure when BGF soldiers are operating in their area.⁶

Fighting results in injury and displacement

According to the reports that KHRG community members in Hpapun District submitted in 2013, there were two small clashes between BGF and KNLA soldiers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The clashes resulted in the injury of villagers and displacement of villagers to other areas due to fear of continued fighting.

The first incident of fighting took place in early January 2013, in K--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, between BGF soldiers from Battalion #1014 led by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh and a group of KNLA soldiers led by Officer Hpah Mee. During the fighting, a 27-year-old villager named Saw B--- from K--- village was injured on the right side of his abdomen by shrapnel from an RPG round that was fired by a BGF soldier. Saw B--- was injured because it was his turn to serve as a village sentry for the KNLA that day, and Officer Hpah Mee ordered him to porter rations for his soldiers. While Saw B--- was portering for the KNLA, BGF soldiers ambushed them, and he was caught in the line of fire and subsequently injured.⁷

The second skirmish also occurred in K--- village, in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, resulting in the injury of two villagers, and damage to one woman's house. On March 13th 2013, Second Lieutenant Tha Beh and three of his soldiers from Battalion #1014 secretly went to K--- village to gather intelligence regarding the whereabouts of the KNLA soldiers that are based and patrol in the area. By coming into the village without permission from the KNLA, the BGF soldiers broke the stipulation in the ceasefire agreement according to which they are not to cross the river and enter into KNLA territory. Hence, when the two groups encountered each other around 2 pm, they exchanged fire.⁸ According to K--- villager Naw M---, 28 years old, who witnessed the fighting, BGF soldiers fired an M79 grenade launcher and the grenade exploded in front of her house where pieces of shrapnel hit her one-month-old son in the back and her husband in one of his elbows. She added that the injuries which her son and husband sustained were not serious; however, her son had to be given a dose of intravenous saline therapy, after which she continued to treat him with traditional medicine.



⁶ This information was also included in an unpublished Incident Report from Hpapun District received by KHRG in July 2013.

⁷ This information was also included in an unpublished Incident Report from Hpapun District received by KHRG in July 2013.

⁸ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2013.

These photos were taken on April 28th 2013 in K--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The first photo shows a young boy who was injured in the right side of his head and the second photo shows his father, who was injured in the elbow on March 13th 2013 during fighting between BGF Battalion #1014 and KNLA soldiers. According to a KHRG community member, the fighting erupted after BGF soldiers crossed into KNLA-controlled territory. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Another K--- villager, Naw Y---, 47 years old, also reported to a KHRG community member that her house was hit and damaged by a BGF grenade during the March 13th clash. She was very frightened during the fighting. She added that after the incident, the KNLA soldiers helped her repair her house. Both affected women reported that they did not dare to report nor request compensation from the BGF Battalion Commander Maung Chit for the incident, because they were worried that he would accuse them of supporting the KNLA soldiers.

According to Naw Y---, in the aftermath of these clashes, each house in the village dug a bunker in the ground to protect themselves from bullets and shrapnel during bouts of fighting. Some of her neighbours, however, decided to sell their houses and move to other places to avoid being caught in future hostilities between the BGF and the KNLA.⁹



These two photos were taken by a KHRG community member on April 27th 2013 and May 21st 2013, respectively, in K--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show bomb shelters that villagers dug and concealed to protect themselves from being hit by bullets or shrapnel from shelling during bouts of fighting between the BGF and the KNLA, which were a common occurrence in the area. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Explicit threats result in injury as grenade launcher accidentally discharges

⁹ This information was also included in an unpublished Interview from Hpapun District received by KHRG in July 2013.



The above photos were taken on May 2013 in A--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The first photo shows the scar of A--- villager Ma C---, who was struck on her calf by a grenade which did not detonate, and the second photo shows scars on her son, who was also injured when the failed grenade grazed his back on January 15th 2013. According to a KHRG community member, BGF Battalion #1014 Warrant Officer Saw Day Day came to A--- village while drunk and demanded gasoline from Ma C---. When she told him she did not have any, he threatened to shoot her with his grenade launcher, which then accidentally discharged in her direction. [Photos: KHRG]

In 2013, one case of explicit violent threats and injury occurred in A--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

The incident took place on January 15th 2013. Sergeant Saw Day Day from BGF Battalion #1014, who was intoxicated at the time, came into the house of Ma C---, 24 years old, while she was breast-feeding her child, and asked her for gasoline. When Ma C--- replied that she did not have any, Saw Day Day aggressively threatened to shoot her while aiming his M79 grenade launcher at her. A few seconds later, the launcher accidentally discharged a 40 mm grenade, which did not explode but hit the calf of Ma C--- and grazed her nursing son's back. They sought treatment in Myaing Gyi Ngu Hospital; Ma C--- received six stitches for her injuries and her son received three for his. Their medical fees amounted to 250,000 kyat (US \$202.00)¹⁰ but BGF Officer Yae Thwe only gave her 100,000 kyat (US \$80.81) in compensation. Villagers reported to the KHRG that such cases of abuse make them feel insecure because they always have to fear the soldiers.¹¹

Landmines injure and kill villagers and their livestock

In 2013 KHRG received reports on four landmine incidents in Hpapun District which lead to injury and death of civilians, as well as injury and death of their livestock.

In early 2013, villagers of A--- village reported to KHRG that there had been use of a landmine by the BGF soldiers in A--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township. The villagers who witnessed the incident reported to a KHRG community member that on February 5th 2013, a group of BGF soldiers led by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh from Battalion #1014 planted a landmine beside A--- villager Daw A---'s sugarcane plantation near Meh Say village without informing the owners. Later on that

¹⁰ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the February 23rd 2016 official market rate of 1,237.60 kyat to the US \$1.

¹¹ See "[Hpapun and Hpa-an Situation Update: Bu Tho and Hlaingbwe townships, April to May 2013](#)," KHRG, June 2014.

day, one of Daw A---'s buffalo stepped on that landmine. According to Daw A---, following the explosion, the BGF soldiers killed her buffalo, taking some of the meat and leaving some for her to sell. She reported that she would have been able to make more money selling her buffalo if it was still alive and so she sustained a loss to her livelihood as a result of this incident.¹²

Later that year, villagers in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District reported to KHRG that since April 5th 2013 the Tatmadaw soldiers that are based in Htaw Muh Pleh Meh army camp, have begun going further from their camp to cut trees and bamboo, into a KNLA-controlled area where there are landmines planted. In order to avoid stepping on those landmines, the Tatmadaw soldiers strategically scatter salt in the places where they suspect the landmines may be located, and then wait for villagers' buffalo to go into that area and eat the salt. According to villagers, 20 to 30 of villagers' buffalos have been injured or killed by stepping on landmines this way; however, villagers do not dare to go into the area to retrieve their buffalo. This situation has caused hardships for villagers in earning their livelihoods, as the loss of buffalo negatively impacted their ability to cultivate their fields, and cost them money, since they have had to hire other people's buffalo.¹³

Other villagers also expressed concern over the BGF's use of landmines in the area, as it has a detrimental effect on their livelihoods. These villagers stated that they wish the BGF soldiers at least notify them of the locations of their landmines, so that they could avoid grazing their buffalo there.

In addition to their buffalo, villagers themselves had also sustained injuries due to landmines in 2013. On February 11th 2013 at 8 am, another landmine exploded between B--- and C--- villages, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. On that occasion, a total of five civilians were killed in the explosion, three of whom were under the age of 18. The villagers were hit by the landmine while transporting sand in a car for the Green Hill Company, a company affiliated with BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014. The group who planted the landmine is unknown. While no groups have taken responsibility for the incident, Green Hill Company paid 300,000 kyat (US \$242.42) to the family of each victim, and the manager of the Company, Ko Myo, personally contributed an additional 200,000 kyat (US \$161.61) to each family.¹⁴



¹² See "[Hpapun Interview: Daw A---, July 2013](#)," KHRG, May 2015.

¹³ This information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in July 2013.

¹⁴ See "[Landmine explosion and death of villagers in Papun District](#)," KHRG, May 2013.

These photos were taken on March 2013 in C--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. They show the wreckage of a car that was destroyed in a landmine explosion. The villagers driving this car were transporting sand for the Green Hill Company, which is affiliated with BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014. When they were driving between B--- and C--- villages, they accidentally drove over a landmine that was planted on the road. Five villagers were killed. [Photos: KHRG]

On another occasion, a villager's injuries also led to his death. On May 31st 2013, a 40-year-old villager named Saw Pgeh Nay Say from G--- village, Hkay Poo village tract, Lu Thaw Township, stepped on a landmine near a Tatmadaw army camp in Khaw Daw Hkoh place, which is under the control of Military Operations Command (MOC)¹⁵ #9, while crossing a vehicle road with a friend, on their way to go fishing. Due to the severity of his injuries, he died one day later, on June 1st 2013. He left behind a wife and children who are now concerned for their livelihoods.¹⁶

Forced Labour

In 2013, villagers in Hpapun District reported to KHRG that forced labour orders by the Tatmadaw had decreased; however, KHRG received two incidents where villagers raised concerns that forced labour orders by the BGF and religious leaders have become an unavoidable burden for them that year.

BGF demands for forced labour

Based on the reports that KHRG received in 2013, villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District highlighted that the BGF Battalion #1013 and #1014 ordered unpaid forced labour on a regular basis throughout the entire year.¹⁷

In January 2013, a villager reported that Major Nyunt Thein from BGF Battalion #1014 ordered villagers from Q---, R---, S--- and T--- villages, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, to send 2,000 thatch shingles to T--- village to be used for building a new camp.¹⁸



These two photos were taken by a KHRG community member on February 5th 2013 in S--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show thatch shingles made by S--- villagers for BGF Battalion #1014 Sergeant Saw Nyunt Thein. According to S--- villagers, Major Nyunt

¹⁵ Military Operations Command. Composed of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

¹⁶ See "[Hpapun Incident Report: Landmine Incident in Lu Thaw Township, May 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2014. Please note that G--- village has been censored as A--- village in this previously published report.

¹⁷ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to November 2013](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

¹⁸ This information was also included in an unpublished Interview from Hpapun District received by KHRG in February 2013.

Thein has been demanding the thatch shingles from the villagers without pay on an annual basis. [Photos: KHRG]

Villagers also reported that since Major Htun Hla and Captain Maung Soe from BGF #1013 and Major Nyunt Thein from BGF #1014 came with their soldiers and have set up base in S--- village, they have been ordering two villagers per day to serve in shifts as messengers and sentries. Regarding the forced labour in S--- village, villagers told a KHRG community member, *"We have had to stay with them [the BGF] since they started to build their camp. While staying with them, we have to look for firewood, chop firewood, carry water and find vegetables for them."*

In addition, villagers had to carry ammunition and pots for the BGF soldiers when they are on patrol.¹⁹

As of the end of 2013, villagers reported that the BGF Battalion #1014 is still forcing them to labour for them daily.



This photo was taken on October 28th 2013, in S--- village, Mae Pree village tract, Bu Tho township, Hpapun District. The photo shows an S--- villager carrying vegetables to be given to BGF Battalion #1014 soldiers which were based in S--- village. According to a community member, there were around ten BGF soldiers based in the village and each day one villager had to go and stay with the soldiers. When the BGF did not order the daily villager to travel for then, he was ordered to go and fetch vegetables for them. [Photos: KHRG]

Buddhist monk demanded forced labour for bridge construction in exchange for "merit"

In Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, villagers reported that they were ordered to do labour for a bridge construction. The bridge, named Haw Nan Lin Aye bridge, which the local people refer to as Htee Lah Beh Hta bridge, is located in Noh Hta village, Pu Zun Myaung village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District at the northern part of the mouth of Yunzalin River.²⁰

The construction of Htee Lah Beh Hta bridge began on January 1st 2013 and has been ongoing as of the end of 2013, with continuous orders for forced labour without payment. Villagers reported they were told that the project will take three years to complete and they will have to work in shifts until the bridge is successfully built. According to the villagers, the Htee Lah Beh Hta bridge construction is led by the patron and presiding

¹⁹ See ["Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, February 2013,"](#) KHRG, July 2014.

²⁰ See ["Papun Situation Update: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, January to February 2013,"](#) KHRG, April 2013. Please note that in this previously published report, Htee Lah Beh Hta bridge has been misspelled as Htee Lah Eh Hta, however both names are referring to the same bridge.

Monk U Thuzana²¹ from Myaing Gyi Ngu Town, Hpa-an District, in collaboration with an unidentified company in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

According to the community, villagers are told by their local religious leaders, who serve Monk U Thuzana, that the labour is for gaining merit.²² The civilian men, women, elderly people and even children from Meh Mgeh, Day Wah, Kyaw Pah, Meh Pree and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts in Bu Tho Township have complained about being ordered to do forced labour in the long term bridge construction project, even though the labour is meant to be voluntary work for those wishing to gain merit. As Saw G--- from H--- village, said, *"If it was donation [voluntary] work, it would be fine if we did not go. But now, it is like you cannot refuse to go, so it is not donation [work] anymore".*²³



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on May 6th 2013, in Htee Lah Beh Hta place, Noh Hta village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show a bridge construction site named Haw Nan Lin Aye bridge on Yazalin River, which was initiated and overseen by Monk U Thuzana. According to a community member, civilian men, women, elderly people, and even children from Meh Mgeh, Day Wah, Kyaw Pah, Meh Pree and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tracts in

²¹ U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see ["Inside the DKBA,"](#) KHRG, March 1996. In 1995, KHRG reported that U Thuzana had collaborated with the Tatmadaw, and met with then-Southeastern Commander Major General Maung Hla to obtain weapons and supplies for 4,000 soldiers in his monastery. As a result of the agreement, U Thuzana's monastery in Myaing Gyi Ngu, in northern Hpa-an District, reportedly developed a reputation as a mystical safe haven for villagers avoiding Tatmadaw abuses. See ["Karen Human Rights Group commentary,"](#) KHRG, February 1995.

²² Merit (Pāli puñña) is a concept in Buddhism and Hinduism. Merit is said to be that which accumulates as a result of good deeds, acts, or thoughts, and which carries over throughout one's life and one's subsequent incarnations.

²³ See ["Incident Report: Monk orders forced labour for bridge construction, Hpapun District,"](#) KHRG, October 2013.

Bu Tho Township were being ordered by Monk U Thuzana's followers to do forced labour in the long term bridge construction project without payment. *[Photos: KHRG]*

In addition to labouring without pay, villagers have to use their own money to pay for their travel expenses from their village to the bridge construction site. Monk U Thuzana only provides them with some food when they work for him.

Theft and looting following villager displacement

In 2013, KHRG was made aware of one occasion in which BGF soldiers, led by Sergeant Saw Day Day from the BGF Battalion #1014 looted and stole villagers' property.

The incident took place on May 23rd 2013, in A--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. Villagers who witnessed the incident reported to a KHRG community member that Sergeant Saw Day Day and his BGF subordinates dismantled villagers' house poles and timber and transported them to be sold in Ka Ma Maung Town. Prior to the looting incident, there were 30 households in Meh Pree village, but villagers had fled to Myaing Gyi Ngu Town and Mae La Oo refugee camp because of two reasons: they could not continue to endure the BGF's forced labour orders any longer, and they also feared the consequences of the planned construction of the Hatgyi Dam. Hence, in early 2013, there were only five households left in the village, and the aforementioned BGF soldiers looted and dismantled the abandoned houses for their own profit.²⁴

Villagers also reported that Sergeant Saw Day Day and his followers also harvested villagers' dogfruit without permission and sold them in Ka Ma Maung Town. Villagers do not dare to say anything to the BGF soldiers because they are afraid of them.

Arbitrary taxation

Villagers reported that BGF Battalion #1014, led by Battalion Commander Maung Chit and Deputy Battalion Commander Tin Maung Soe, set up their army camp in A--- village and they also set up a checkpoint on the Pgeh Loh river bank, which is also known as Yuzalin River. At this checkpoint, they collect a tax from every passing boat. For the boats that carry passengers, they demand 500 kyat (US \$0.40) and for the boats that carry goods for trading, they demand upwards of 1,000 kyat (US \$0.81). Villagers voiced their dismay that although the Burma/Myanmar government provides a salary to BGF soldiers, they continue to collect taxes from villagers.²⁵

²⁴ See "[Hpapun and Hpa-an Situation Update: Bu Tho and Hlaingbwe townships, April to May 2013](#)," KHRG, June 2014.

²⁵ This information was also included in an unpublished Incident Report from Hpapun District received by KHRG in July 2013.



This photo was taken by a KHRG community member on April 4th 2013, in Meh Pree Kloh Hta place, Meh Pree village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The title on the signboard reads, “*Stop at Meh Pree checkpoint for inspection.*” The sign further states that the logs and bamboo that are cut and processed in Meh Pree area and along Yuzalin River are subject to taxes at the checkpoint, ranging from 1,000 (US \$0.81) to 5,000 kyat (US \$4.04), and each passing passenger motorboat is subject to a tax of 500 kyat (US \$0.40). According to a community member, these rules were written by the DKBA before they transformed into a BGF in 2010. Although this particular checkpoint is no longer operational, some BGF-controlled checkpoints remain in place and continue to tax passing boats according to the above guidelines.

Sexual assault

In 2013, KHRG received information on one incident of sexual assault of a female villager, perpetrated by BGF Sergeant Saw Dah Too²⁶ from BGF Battalion #1014 in S--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District.

On August 21st 2013, Sergeant Saw Dah Too sexually assaulted S--- villager Ma P---, while he was intoxicated. He and his soldiers are based in Weh Gyi area but his battalion is based in Meh Say village and his Battalion Commander is Maung Chit.²⁷

According to the villagers, Sergeant Saw Dah Too and his fellow BGF soldiers came to S--- village in order to attack the KNLA. However, when he arrived in the village on August 21st, Sergeant Saw Dah Too came into Ma P---'s house around 9 pm after an evening of drinking and sexually assaulted her. Ma P---'s mother witnessed the incident and she was angry at Sergeant Saw Dah Too so she, her friend Naw W---, and the village head went to see Saw Dah Too's commander Officer Tin Win, also known by the local people as Pgeh Kay, and reported the incident to him. Officer Tin Win told Ma P---'s mother, “*We could not do anything about the incident because it already happened. This kind of incident did not occur in the past. Since the incident had already taken place, just don't make it complicated. Let's solve the case and finish it here.*” Bo Tin Win gave Ma P---'s mother 200,000 kyat (US \$161.61) in compensation for what his sergeant had done. However, as a result of the incident, Ma P--- continues to suffer from anxiety and sometimes has seizures, therefore she was sent to a hospital in Myaing Gyi Ngu Town for a medical check and also received treatment from KNLA medics.

Land confiscation

²⁶ In previously published KHRG reports, the Sergeant's name was also spelled Saw Dah Tu, rather than Saw Dah Too; however, both spellings refer to the same individual.

²⁷ See “[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to October 2013](#),” KHRG, February 2014.

In 2013, KHRG received three land confiscation cases; one was perpetrated by the Burma/Myanmar government agriculture department and the other two were perpetrated by the Tatmadaw in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. Villagers reported to KHRG community members that in Bu Tho Township, land confiscation primarily occurred in the vicinity of the vehicle road that is close to the town and consisted primarily of flat field farms.

The Burma/Myanmar government agriculture department confiscated villager land in the beginning of May 2013 by telling the villagers in Hpapun Town who farm close to the vehicle road that they must plant round beans on their agricultural lands. These villagers could not plough to plant paddy, as they normally would, because they had to wait for the government's plan. Villagers were not informed of this plan in advance.

According to the villagers, the local Burma/Myanmar government agriculture department intended to show these fields off to their superiors when they will come to visit the area. The villagers were worried that if they grow beans, the soil will not be suitable for planting paddy anymore, but they could not oppose the plan. This kind of land confiscation mostly occurred in Hpapun Town area where Light Infantry Battalions (LIB)²⁸ #434, #341, #340, #19 and Ammunitions Supply Battalion, also known as Sa Sa Na #642 army camps are located. Most of the farms that have been confiscated belong to the villagers. These Tatmadaw camps also have not yet returned the lands that they had confiscated from villagers prior to the 2012 ceasefire.²⁹

On July 10th 2013, Sa Sa Na #642 Camp Commander Khin Zaw Htun confiscated the land of a 69-year-old E--- villager, Saw D--- from Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, for military use. According to Saw D---, Camp Commander Khin Zaw Htun measured and parcelled his farm without notifying him or asking for his permission. Saw D--- reported the case to Hpapun Town Land Registration Officer U Htein Lin from Burma/Myanmar government, with the hopes of reclaiming his land. As of the end of the 2013 reporting period, he has not heard back from U Htein Lin and did not receive any compensation from the Camp Commander.³⁰

Although Saw D--- reported his case to the Burma/Myanmar government, in most other cases where the Tatmadaw confiscates land, villagers usually do not dare to report it to the Burma/Myanmar government. Instead, they report these cases to the KNU or KNLA, as well as KHRG and other organisations. In addition to the cases above, KHRG also continued to receive reports on previously confiscated land which has not been returned to villagers and for which they did not receive any compensation.

Gold mining

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ See, "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2013.

³⁰ This information was also included in an unpublished Incident Report from Hpapun District received by KHRG in November 2013.



These photos were taken on April 7th 2013 in Ma Lay Ler village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. The photos show the gold mining site that is operated by unidentified companies in Meh Kleh Klo river. As can be seen in the photos, extensive lands that have been damaged in the process, and water has become polluted, which is endangering the lives of villagers in the area. [Photos: KHRG]

In 2013, villagers in Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District, reported that they have observed an increase in gold mining, specifically along the Bilin River, by private companies and some local residents. Villagers noted that back in 2009, the then-Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)'s Lieutenant Maung Chit Thu³¹ and his soldiers initiated the first gold mining operation in that area. Lieutenant Maung Chit Thu and his soldiers left the area in 2010, but private companies continued mining. Since 2012, local villagers have also been allowed by the KNLA leaders to conduct gold mining in the same location, if they pay them a gold mining tax. Due to the lack of machines and materials, there were only a few villagers who could engage in the mining. Some villagers who could not afford to mine the gold themselves, sought assistance from fellow business-savvy villagers who helped them contact and cooperate with business people and companies from the town, and these villagers sold their lands to them to

³¹ Maung Chit Thu, commonly referred to as Chit Thu, was the operations commander of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) Battalion #999 prior to the DKBA transformation into the Tatmadaw Border Guard Force, which began in September 2010. His role has grown considerably since the transformation, and he is now second in command of Tatmadaw BGF forces, overseeing BGF battalions #1017, #1018, #1019 and #1012 based in Ko Ko, Hpa-an District. Abuses committed by Maung Chit Thu have been cited in previous KHRG reports, including ordering the forcible relocation of villagers from eight villages in Lu Pleh Township in July 2011, while acting as a Border Guard commander, see, "[Pa'an Situation Update: June to August 2011](#)," KHRG, October 2011. For more information on the DKBA/Border Guard transformation, see, for example: "[Border Guard Forces of Southeast Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State](#)," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 22nd 2010; and "[Border Guard Force formed at Atwinkwinkalay region, Myawaddy Township, Kayin State](#)," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25th 2010.

mine gold. The business people paid 7,000,000 kyat (US \$5,656.49) to the villagers for each piece of land on which they planned to mine gold.³²



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on May 8th 2013 in Waw Muh village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. The first two photos show the small wells which villagers in Waw Muh village tract dug to obtain some clean water for drinking and cooking. The last two photos show villagers carrying water from far away to their village using a cart. According to a community member, prior to the establishment of gold mining operations in the area, villagers used to collect their cooking and drinking water from Bu Loh River. In 2010, unidentified private companies, in collusion with local Tatmadaw and KLNA officers, came and mined in Bu Loh river and nearby lands. As a result, the water in Bu Loh River became polluted and villagers do not dare to use it for cooking, bathing or drinking anymore; therefore, they have to transport all their water from far away to their village using carts. [Photos: KHRG]

Regarding the gold mining, a 62-year-old villager named Saw L--- who lives in J--- village, Meh Hkyoh village tract, in Dwe Lo Township, said, *"I have been living in J--- [village] since I was a child. I am a farmer and I have worked on this [my] paddy nursery field every year. This year, there is a gold mining [project in the area] and they [company] constructed a road [to facilitate access to it]. My nursery field was destroyed, so I cannot scatter seeds and have to face very big difficulties [...] and I am very upset. In the coming year, in order to sow paddy [seeds], I have to find a new place for a paddy nursery field and it will be very difficult for me. If I look at [think about] the gold mining [project], I am not the only person who has had to suffer. The people from my surrounding area also might have suffered a lot. For some people, their sluices are being destroyed. Some of the people's lands are being destroyed, and for some people, their crops are being destroyed. Moreover, the natural environment, trees, bamboo and the rivers and streams are also being destroyed. The animals have to drink murky water and it causes them illness and death."* The chemicals used by the gold mining project which

³² See ["Papun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, March 2012 to March 2013,"](#) KHRG, July 2013

are then poured into the river have also been endangering the health of villagers, who had to dig a well on the riverbank in order to obtain clean water, but they stated the well was not very effective.³³

Saw L--- added, *"If we look at the gold mining [project], the rich people and the middlemen work on it and there is no benefit for the local people. It only benefits those individual people. I think the Karen leaders might have thought that this gold mining would benefit the civilians and opened [gave permission for] gold mining, but because there is no benefit for the civilians I think they should stop it. Finally, I will just say this: if the Karen leaders forbid gold mining, I will be very happy and also the [other] civilians will be very happy."*

Villagers in some other areas in Dwe Lo Township are also against the gold mining project because they foresee its effect on them and their future generations. Regarding this incident, on September 20th 2013, when villagers from Meh Way village tract heard that a company would come and begin gold mining in the Meh Way River, they organized themselves to campaign against the project and the village tract leaders completely prohibited the project by stating that they could not allow gold mining in the Meh Way River. They even posted notices about it along the road and river. Villagers reported to the KHRG that they want their children and future generations to be able to sustain their livelihoods without environmental damage. They added, *"Someday, if our Karen leaders allow companies to do gold mining, our future generations will face a lot of problems."*³⁴

Concerns regarding the ceasefire and ongoing militarisation

Regarding the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement that was signed by the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU, some villagers in Hpapun District observed it improving their security and livelihood situation, but some villagers continue to worry that their situation could quickly deteriorate, especially when they see the Tatmadaw troops still present and operating in the area.

In 2013, some villagers noted that they could work and travel more freely because of the ceasefire agreement, but they do not know if this ceasefire will last and are not sure of the Tatmadaw's plans for the future. Villagers noticed that the Tatmadaw soldiers are repairing the vehicle roads that are connecting their army camps and have also repaired and strengthened their army camps, sending more rations and trespassing in the KNLA's territories. These activities are making villagers feel insecure.³⁵

Education

In 2013, KHRG received several reports regarding the extent and quality of education provided by the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU, with their respective challenges and improvements in Bu Tho, Dwe Lo, and Lu Thaw townships in Hpapun District. Most of the villagers in these three townships are very motivated to find ways to support their children in obtaining an education. Unfortunately, some parents are facing financial difficulties so there are still many people who cannot send their children to school due to the high school fees.

³³ See ["Hpapun Incident Report: Destruction of paddy nursery field in Dwe Lo Township, November 2012,"](#) KHRG, July 2014. Please note that in this report, Saw L--- has been censored as Saw A--- and J--- village has been censored as K--- village.

³⁴ See ["Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, August to October 2013,"](#) KHRG, August 2014.

³⁵ See ["Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho, Lu Thaw and Dwe Lo townships, January 2013,"](#) KHRG, June 2014.



These four photos were taken by a KHRG community member on October 14th 2013 in F--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The first two photos show the new primary school that was built by the Burma/Myanmar government in June 2013 in F--- village. The school construction was led by U Thein Soe, a representative of Shin Than Thit Sa Company and U Win Naing, a senior contractor from Lucky Development Company. When they were building the school, they demanded the school headmaster Kyaw Htay to provide them with building materials in the sum of 500,000 kyat (US \$404.03), which he had to borrow from villagers. According to F--- villagers, U Thein Soe and U Win Naing left when they finished constructing the school building without repaying the school headmaster, so villagers who lent money to him now experience livelihood problems. These companies also did not pay for the food that their workers borrowed from villagers' shops. In addition, villagers complained that although this school has been built, they do not think it is physically durable, because the companies just built it with the goal of maximising their profits and used low-quality materials. The last two photos show the current F--- primary school, which was built by the villagers. F--- villagers reported to a community member that the newly constructed school building is not operational, yet. They also stated that they would not allow their children to attend the new school unless the companies pay them back the amount they had borrowed. [Photos: KHRG]

In Dwe Lo Township, most of the children are sent to school and are eager to go, but in some areas there are no high schools or proper middle schools at the village level. There are only two schools that cover first to seventh standards.³⁶ Some of the parents who live in towns and cannot afford the town school fees resort to sending their children to school in nearby villages for further studies, as the school fees are cheaper in the rural areas. Most of the families consider education for their children a priority, and some parents feel obligated to send their children to additional after-school classes, which they have to pay for separately; they worry that their children will fail their exams if they do

³⁶ 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.

not attend these classes, especially for the higher standards. The schools do not receive enough support and the teachers' salaries are very low.³⁷

In Bu Tho Township, there are schools which are administrated by the Karen Education Department (KED) in the KNU-controlled areas in which students can learn Karen, Burmese and English. The KED provides some financial support for teachers' salaries and school supplies. As for the schools in Burma/Myanmar government-controlled areas which the KED cannot reach, the students are only learning Burmese and English; the S'gaw Karen language is not taught because the Burma/Myanmar government does not allow them to teach it. The Burma/Myanmar government in Bu Tho Township also wishes to build more of their schools using bricks within KNU-controlled areas, but many villagers do not permit them because they worry that the Burma/Myanmar government would control these schools and not allow them to teach the Karen language anymore. Some villagers also worry that once the Burma/Myanmar government is allowed to construct brick schools, they will also begin establishing administration offices. In some villages, however, the villagers allowed the Burma/Myanmar government to construct their schools, as long as they only use bamboo or wood.³⁸



These two photos were taken by a KHRG community member on October 14th 2013 in N--- village, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show a primary school that was built by the Burma/Myanmar government for N--- village in 2013. N--- villagers reported to KHRG that this new school was supposed to be built with teak and brick, but the Shin Than Thit Sa and Lucky Development companies, which were subcontracted by the Burma/Myanmar government to construct it, built it by mixing various woods that are not strong enough for a school building. Villagers complained that these companies did not accept the villagers' feedback when they told them how they wanted their school to be built. Although the exterior of the school has been built, the courtyard and fence have been left unfinished, as can be seen in the photos. The building is also not strong enough to last very long, according to villagers. They are worried because the companies who built the school were motivated by profit, and not their good-will. The government officials who were responsible for the school building project did not oversee the construction process, and they accepted the sub-par final product because they had embezzled some of the funds that were earmarked for the project. [Photos: KHRG]

In Lu Thaw Township, children are also keen to go to school, but not all of them are able to attend because of the unstable security conditions and their parents not being able to afford to send them to school. In some settlements there are no schools, because they had to flee during the conflict period and live in hiding in the mountain areas, in the jungles, so their children are not able to go to school. Consequently, some children could not even read and write the Karen language. Some children were only able to attend first and second standards in their village, and to continue to another standard, they would

³⁷ See "[Hpapun District Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, January to February 2013](#)," KHRG, July 2014.

³⁸ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to November 2013](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

have had to go to another village, which they could not do because the schools were so far away and there were also the Tatmadaw soldiers operating in the areas. Therefore, they had to stop their studies and instead help their parents with their work or take care of their younger siblings.³⁹

Healthcare

In 2013, there were noted disparities in healthcare provision systems, including availability and price of medicines and treatment, particularly between the Burma/Myanmar government-controlled areas and the KNU-controlled areas of Hpapun District.

For the people who live under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw, whenever they are sick, they go to one of the Burma/Myanmar government clinics and they have to pay for their own medical expenses. The price of the medicine also depends on the sickness or disease that the patients suffer from. According to villagers, the government claimed that the clinics are for the civilians, but there were not enough medicine, and the medics did not perform their duties regularly; they were not at the clinic when the villagers urgently needed them. According to villager reports, they would have to pay half of the expenses for the building of the clinic when the clinic is completely built.

In the areas controlled by the KNU, whenever villagers are sick, they rely on the KNU healthcare system, and they do not need to pay money for the medical treatment because it is provided primarily by Free Burma Rangers (FBR) or Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), with some distribution of medicines by KNU health workers. However, people who live far away from the KNU clinic mostly use traditional medicines; some of those patients recovered from their sickness, but some people died anyway. According to the villagers, the proportion of people who recovered and survived was higher than those who did not recover and died.⁴⁰



³⁹ This information was also included in an unpublished Situation Update from Hpapun District received by KHRG in November 2013.

⁴⁰ See "[Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, March to May 2013](#)," KHRG, December 2013.



The first two photos were taken by a KHRG community member in April 2013 in N--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The photos show N--- and U--- villagers receiving free medicines and treatment from Free Burma Rangers (FBR) health workers in collaboration with the Karen National Union (KNU). The medicines were insufficient, but they helped to cure some villagers who were sick. The last two photos were taken on April 27th 2013, in K--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township. They likewise depict the FBR health workers providing free treatment to villagers. A K--- villager who received treatment from the FBR reported that when he goes to receive treatment at the hospital in Myaing Gyi Ngu or Ka Ma Maung towns, he has to pay for both the medicines and the treatment, according to the severity of his disease. He went to Myang Gyi Ngu Town for treatment once, but the treatment there was not effective, so he sought additional treatment with the FBR health workers.

[Photos: KHRG]

Conclusion

Despite the ceasefire agreement that was signed by the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU, there are various human rights abuses that have taken place in Hpapun District in 2013, including sexual harassment, violent abuse, landmine incidents, forced labour, land confiscation, taxation, and theft and looting, as well as the negative impact on villagers' health and damage to their lands as a result of gold mining. These abuses were perpetrated by the multiplicity of armed actors operating in the district. In addition, fighting occurred between the KNLA and the BGF, which led to the injury of villagers and caused them to feel insecure about their lives. Villagers are also concerned that if the ceasefire is broken it may become more difficult for them to live in the region. However, compared the pre-ceasefire period, the security and livelihood situation for the villagers improved. Despite this, there is a long way to go to ensure true freedom for the civilians who reside close to the variety of armed groups in Hpapun District.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpa-an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "The 2015 Elections and Beyond: Perspectives from villagers in rural southeast Burma/Myanmar," (February 2016)
- "Hpapun Interview: Naw A---, April 2015," (February 2016)

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, June to October 2015,” (February 2016)
- “Hpapun Short Update: Bu Tho Township, May and June 2015,” (January 2016)
- “BGF Battalion #1014 demands forced labour, asserts heavily militarised presence in villages in Hpapun District, June 2015,” (December 2015)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)