



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Toungoo Situation Update: July to October 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Toungoo District during the period between July and October 2011. It details incidents of violence against civilians, including: shooting and killing by Tatmadaw LIB #540 of two villagers hunting monkeys in an area adjacent to a Tatmadaw camp; arbitrary detentions of eight civilians, of whom only three have been released by LIB #539 and IB #73; and the beating of a village head following a KNLA attack against Tatmadaw troops. The villager also cites examples of a range of abuses affecting villagers' livelihoods, including: forced labour repairing a road and producing and delivering bamboo poles to a Tatmadaw camp; theft and damage of villagers' possessions by patrolling Tatmadaw troops, including destruction of villagers' durian and dogfruit trees; the imposition of movement restrictions preventing villagers from sleeping in their field huts, backed by an explicit threat of violence against villagers violating the ban; de facto movement restrictions on villagers due to Tatmadaw activity; and arbitrary demands for payment by Tatmadaw troops. This report also raises concerns about the health situation in Tantabin Township following the 2011 monsoon, including an outbreak of cholera that interfered with the harvest of cardamom, durian and paddy crops, and may have adverse consequences on villagers' food and financial security during the coming year. The report also notes that some villagers access health services from the KNU Health Department and other relief groups in response to constraints on access to health care in areas of Tantabin Township outside consolidated Tatmadaw control.

Situation Update | Tantabin Township, Toungoo District (November 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including 57 photographs.²

SPDC [Tatmadaw]³ units order villagers to do forced labour

¹ KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, villagers are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Toungoo District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Attacks on cardamom plantations, detention and forced labour in Toungoo District," KHRG, May 2010.

³ In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to

In Toungoo District today, villagers still have to face attacks and forced labour by the SPDC.

SPDC IB [Infantry Battalion] #73, under the command of the Southern Military Headquarters, which is based in B--- village, Tantabin [Taw Ta Tu] Township in Toungoo District, demands money from villagers who live in La--- village tract. These villagers work in cardamom and betelnut plantations and flat field paddy farms, and they live in their field huts. Each household was ordered to pay 3,000 kyat (US \$3.90).⁴ The deadline for all the villagers to pay the money was July 31st 2011. Villagers have faced a problem because they do not have that money. There are over 1,000 households in the area.

On July 24th 2011, LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #539 under MOC [Military Operations Command] #9, which is based in M--- village tract, ordered five village heads in M--- village tract, including Saw P---, Saw K--- [position censored for security], Saw G---, Saw A--- [position censored for security] and Saw T--- [position censored for security], to go to L--- army camp. Then they put these people in jail and until now, those people have not been released yet.

On July 28th 2011, IB #73, which is based in B--- army camp, restricted B--- villagers from going to sleep at their farm huts and they [villagers] were not allowed to use flashlights either. The commander said: *"If I see villagers using flashlights or sleeping in their huts, I'll take action and it'll be dta thee gka dtaw ['death time' or 'time to die'] for them."*

On July 26th 2011, LIB #380 and LIB #379 started operating in T--- and L--- villages. [On August 4th] They took two small tins⁵ of rice, and five viss (8 kg. / 17.6 lb.)⁶ of fish paste from Saw B---. They also cut down durian and dogfruit trees belonging to Saw B---. They also took all of Saw W---'s property in his hut, worth 150,000 kyat (US \$194.81). When the SPDC [soldiers] went and operated in the D--- area on August 4th 2011, they saw a field hut belonging to Saw B---, a D--- villager, and they took two tins of rice [belonging to Saw B---] and destroyed all Saw W---'s possessions in the hut. All of his possessions cost 150,000 kyat.

IB #73, under the command of the Southern Military Headquarters based in B---, arrested three villagers on August 3rd 2011. The soldiers from IB #73 based in B--- village arrested one O--- villager, named Saw F--- and two A--- villagers named Saw D---, whose father's name is Saw R---, and Naw N---, whose father's name is Saw M---, and the [IB #73] soldiers accused those villagers of communicating with the revolutionaries [KNLA]. The soldiers detained these villagers for six days in their camp and then let these villagers go back on August 9th 2011. Even though they let these villagers go back, they said they will ask these villagers to come and meet them whenever they need them.

On August 5th 2011, MOC #9 which is based in H--- met H--- area leaders and told them to tell the revolutionaries [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)] not to come and shoot them. On the same day that these village heads were called to meet them, IB #73 also ordered the B---

using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this report and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this report.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of November 28th 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 770 kyat. This figure is used for all calculations above.

⁵ While the villager who wrote this report did not specify the exact size of the two tins of rice that were taken from Saw B---'s hut, the modifier "small" suggests that they were not two "big tins" of rice (32 kg. / 70.4 lb.), and likely either two milk tins (0.5 kg. / 1.1 lb.) or two mess tins (2 kg. / 4.4 lb.) of husked rice.

⁶ A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. or 3.52 lb.

regional leaders to go and meet them in Y--- and they also told those village heads to tell the revolutionaries [KNLA] not to come and shoot at them. Starting from July, through August and until now, the SPDC entered and operated in the area close to the [Toungoo to Kler La] road in our Tantabin and Than Daung Townships. These things are still happening in our two townships. Especially the villagers who live in that area and have to go and buy food [outside of their villages] have to cross the vehicle road, so they are faced with difficulties.

On August 8th 2011, the LIB #375 from H--- ordered H--- villagers to cut 500 bamboo poles to repair their army camp.

On August 8th 2011, the KNLA also went and shot at SPDC soldiers and then the SPDC arrested the local village head and beat him seriously. His name is Saw De---, 35 years old, and his father's name is Saw Th---. He is not guilty of doing anything wrong. They beat him and abused him until he could not eat and he became sick. He has had to stay lying down in his bed until now.

On August 15th 2011, LIB #380 went to rotate with another battalion and they entered See Kheh Der village. They took a basket of rice (32 kg. / 70.4 lb.) and a musket from Saw Dt--- and other things in his house worth 95,000 kyat (US \$123.38), as reported by the owner.

On August 27th 2011, LIB #375 from H--- army camp ordered villagers from the H--- area to cut big bamboo poles to rebuild their army camp. They ordered 150 bamboo poles from H--- village, 70 bamboo poles from E---, 42 bamboo poles from P---, and 150 bamboo poles from U---, O--- and W--- villages. They also asked the H--- village head to send them a household list.

For the above information we went and met with the village heads in their villages, and some we met outside of their villages. They told us this so that is how we know this information.

Killing

On August 18th 2011, LIB #540 from Dh--- army camp in Tantabin Township in Toungoo District shot two Hs--- villagers while those villagers were hunting in the jungle. There were six villagers hunting monkeys in the jungle at night. The monkeys ran close to the army camp. The SPDC soldiers were patrolling on the lower side of their camp when they saw the villagers and they shot at the villagers. The two villagers who were killed were Saw Hs---, 32 years old, whose father's name is Saw Pa---, and Saw C---, 23 years old, whose father's name is Saw Gh---. They were shot in the lower part of Dh--- army camp in the Wa--- area.

Forced labour

In 2011, there was so much rain so the roads were damaged. Because of the rain, the vehicle road in Le--- area at the lower part of Ki--- was damaged and cars could not go. So, the SPDC officers based in Le--- ordered villagers to go and repair the road. The road was damaged on October 8th 2011. Villagers had to go and repair the road as the SPDC ordered them. On October 10th 2011, the SPDC ordered 43 villagers from Le--- village to go and rebuild the road. The names of the villagers who had to go and rebuild the road are: Saw E---, Saw L---, Saw Ka---, Saw Z---, Saw Bp---, Saw Gk---, Saw E---, Naw Y---, Saw Wi---, Saw Re---, Saw L---, Naw Ny---, Saw S---, Saw Ba---, Saw Ka---, Naw Ga---, Saw Po---, Saw K---, Saw Z---, Naw Ky---, Saw Tu---, Saw Hte---, Saw Bp---, Saw Do---, Saw Eh---, Saw Pw---, Saw Gk---, Saw Za---, Saw Kh---, Saw T---, Saw Kw---, Saw Tw---, Saw Lw---, Saw Aw---, Saw Wa---, Saw Ah---, Saw Ma---, Saw Bo---, Saw De---, Saw Se---, Saw Si---, Saw Ra---, Naw La---, Saw Ay---, Saw Ni---, Saw Bw---, Naw Ta---, Saw Ku---, and Saw Lw---. These villagers who had to go and rebuild the road

had to bring their own food when they went to rebuild the road. The SPDC soldiers did not provide any food to the villagers. One of the Le--- village heads told us [the above information] about the Le--- villagers who had to go and repair the road.

Health

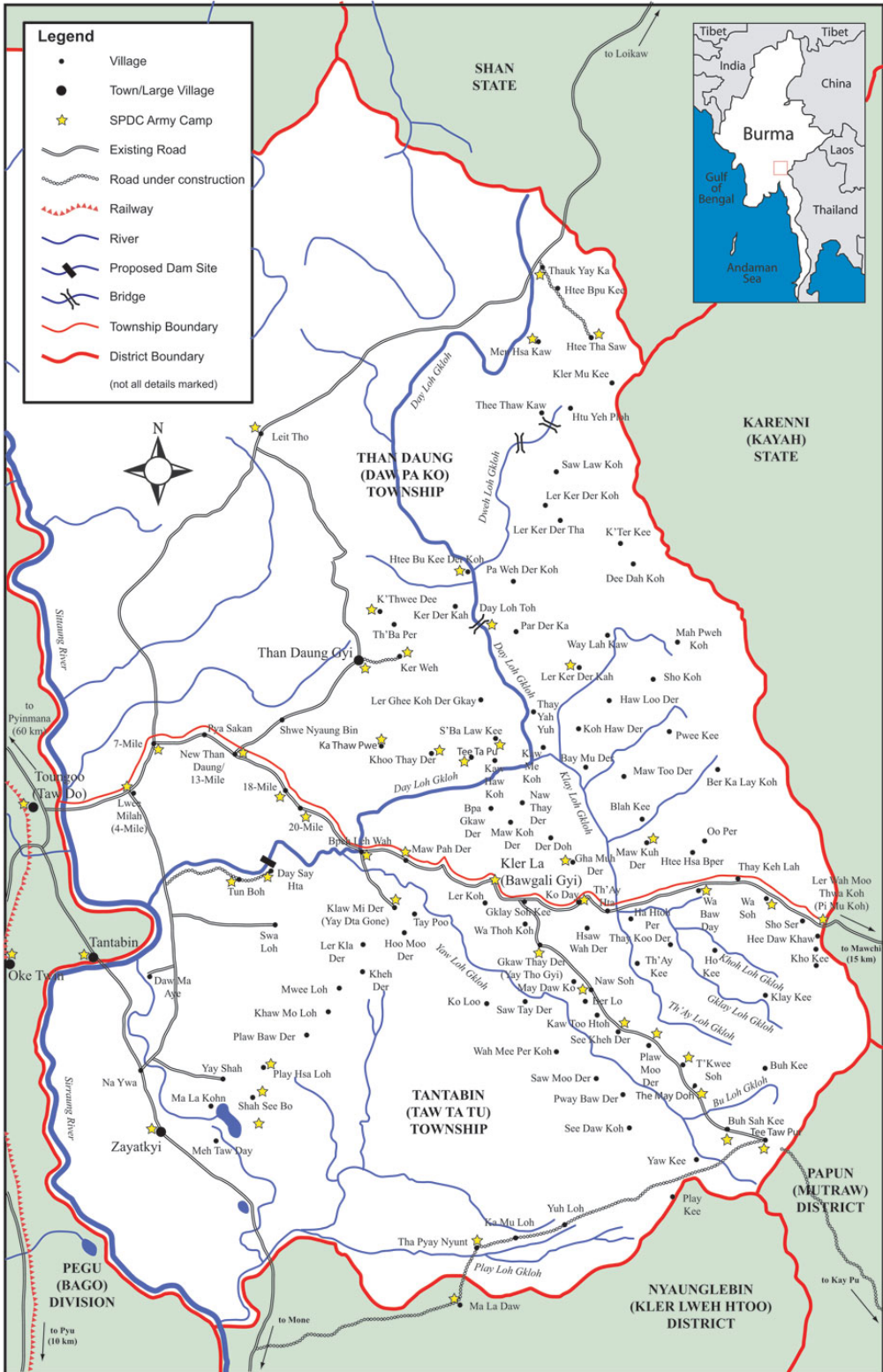
For health issues, villagers who live in government-controlled areas of Tantabin Township in Toungoo District go and get medical treatment at the hospital in Kler La when they get sick. The disease villagers have faced in September and October 2011 is *ta lu poe* [cholera]. Both children and adults have had to suffer this disease during these two months. The hospitals are full of patients. Some people went and accompanied a patient and then the disease infected them also. This disease can infect people easily so we have to be careful when we stay close to the patient. This disease occurred during the harvest period, so many villagers face livelihoods problems.

The villagers who do not live in the areas under government control live in Pw---. For them, they do not have a hospital to get medical treatment. The people who will help them are the [Karen National Union (KNU)] Health Department or other groups. These groups have to come and give those villagers medical treatment. In September and October, three villages have had to face a different health problem. [A symptom of] the disease they face is that they cannot defecate or urinate. They suffered this disease and the health group went and provided medical treatment for them.

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

- "Toungoo Situation Update: October 2011" (November 2011)
- "Toungoo Interview: Saw F---, October 2011" (November 2011)
- "Tatmadaw soldiers shell village, attack church and civilian property in Toungoo District" (November 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: May to July 2011," (October 2011)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: April to July 2011," (October 2011)
- "Toungoo Interviews: March and April 2011," (July 2011)

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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