



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011 to July 2012

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2012 by a community member, describing events occurring in Papun District from November 2011 to July 2012. The report describes restrictions placed upon villagers' movement by Major Thi Ha of Tatmadaw LIB #212; villagers were told not to travel to their farms and were threatened with being shot at if they were seen outside of their village. Villagers also faced restrictions on their movement as a result of unexploded landmines. The community member also describes the use of villagers for forced labour in May 2012 by BGF Battalions #1013 and #1014, including the collection of materials for the building of an army camp for Battalion #1013. The village heads of P---, as well as two villagers, were ordered to stay at BGF #1014's camp in order to work in the camp and porter for the soldiers. Also described, is an incident prompting fear amongst villagers, in which KNLA Battalion #102 Major Saw Hsa Yu Moo shot a gun in front of a villager's house. The community member raises concerns that, despite the ceasefire, cases of villagers being threatened, forced labour, and risks from landmines, continue to pose serious problems for villagers.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (November 2011 to July 2012)

The following situation update was written by a community member in Papun 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 Papun District, including five incident reports, 14 interviews, one other situation update and 66 photographs.²

¹ KHRG trains community members 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, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2013. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the report, "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012," KHRG, April 2013.

As far as I know, the problems from abuses started happening on July 6th 2012, and we followed up on this in order to get more information; it took 17 days, so it [the abuses] happened until July 23rd 2012.

The abuses happened in: Pgheh Kay village [Myin Ta Pyin Lay], Meh P'Ree village, Meh K'Naw village [Hatgyi village], Bu Wah Kw ee village and Thaw Hkeh Hta village, which are in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District.

The perpetrators who caused the abuses are NPD (Nay Pyi Taw) government army [Tatmadaw]; NPD's BGF [Border Guard Force]³ and the Karen National Union's (KNU) Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

The abuses that happened are: the NPD government army Light Infantry Battalion [LIB] #212 Major Thi Ha and his soldiers threatened villagers from Thaw Hkeh Hta village, Bu Wah Kw ee village and Kw ee Neh village. The NPD government army BGF issued orders for forced labour to Meh P'Ree villagers and Meh K'Naw villagers. The Karen National Liberation Army Major Saw Hsa Yu Moo, Company #4, Company 2nd-in-command, threatened the villagers in Meh Mweh Hta village [Daung Meh village] while they were travelling.

The objectives are also different between each group of perpetrators, who caused the different problems. For LIB #212, they usually want to have influence over the villagers; use a dictatorial governing system on the villagers; and cause the problems for the villagers. For the NPD government army's BGF, they do not have any knowledge regarding politics, so they do not know whether their work is correct or incorrect, and they abuse human rights without realizing it. For the KNLA, they want to show their power in front of the villagers because they can stay more openly now-a-days, so they want to show their power and cause the problems, as we mentioned before.

As I mentioned above, the first [of the] problems that were caused, is that the NPD government army threatened the villagers. The second problem is the BGF ordered

³ Border Guard 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 formalized ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. Border Guard battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry or 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 see Border Guard transformation footnote above.

forced labour from the villagers, and the last one is the KNLA threatening the villagers. These problems are the problems that recently occurred.

The details of the problems that are occurring are, on November 11th 2011, Thein Sein's government army [Tatmadaw] LIB #212, lead by Major Thi Ha, based in K'Ter Tee [K'Taing Tee], came to T--- village. As soon as they arrived, they ordered the village heads to go and meet with them. The village heads are T--- village head, Ch--- village head and M--- village head.

When the village heads arrived, they [Tatmadaw] threatened the village heads [by saying]: *"During the time when we are in your area, each of the villagers and you have to go back and stay in your home, which is in the village. You are not allowed to go and stay in your hill field or flat field. You are not allowed to go anywhere. If you travel in the forest and the NPD soldiers see you and shoot at you, I won't take responsibility for that. If they see you in the forest, really, they will shoot at you"*. Major Thi Ha and his soldiers stayed in T--- village for three days. During those three days, the villagers from M--- village, T--- village and Ch--- village couldnot travel anywhere. They also could not work and they faced so many problems.

The second problem is BGF Battalion #1013 and #1014⁴ ordered forced labour from the villagers. This problem began on May 25th 2012. On May 25th 2012, the NPD government army BGF Battalion #1013, Major Saw Maung Soe and his soldiers, from K'Ter Tee army camp, came to the BGF army camp in Th'Ree Hta and built their new army camp. In order to build their new camp, they ordered 1,000 single grass thatches from the Y--- village head, and the Y--- village head had to collect [them] from the villagers.

Meh K'Naw villagers do not have as many single grass thatches as they were ordered [to provide], but in fear, they sent 900 single grass thatches to the BGF army camp in Th'Ree Hta on May 30th 2012. The BGF army camp in Th'Ree Hta village is located in Kyaw Pah village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun district. Other than that, BGF #1013, which is lead by Major Hla Kyaing's subordinate, Major Maung Soe and his soldiers, came and stayed at Th'Ree Hta village and ordered two porters from Meh K'Naw village

⁴ For additional KHRG reports discussing abuses perpetrated by BGF #1014, see: "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012," KHRG, April 2013; "Border Guard #1014 demands for labour and goods in Papun District, May 2012," KHRG, March, 2013; "Incident Report: Looting in Papun District #1, May 2012," KHRG, March 2013; "Incident Report: Looting in Papun District #2, May 2012," KHRG, March 2013; "Incident Report: Forced Labour in Papun District #1, May 2012," KHRG, March 2013. Further reports detailing abuses perpetrated by BGF #1014 are available on the KHRG website.

and Kyaw Pah village to porter their rice pots and bullets from village to village; the distance between each village is one day for walking.

Not only BGF #1013's group, but also BGF #1014's Battalion Commander Saw Maung Chit's soldier, Major Saw Nyut Thein, and his soldiers, came and stayed in Meh Th'Ree village. According to the village head, Saw A---, it has been two months since Saw Nyunt Thein and his soldiers came and stayed there. The BGF [Battalion] #1014 always stays in the village. The distance between Meh K'Naw village and Meh Th'Ree village is only an hour.

Since I could not go inside Meh Th'Ree village, I asked for help from Y--- village head and the village head requested a villager to go to Meh Th'Ree village. The village head ordered the villager to go and call the village head from Meh Th'Ree to come and meet with me. The villager who was ordered [to go] by the Y---village head is a villager of Y---, Saw Ht---, who is 23-years-old; it took him almost a day to go to Meh Th'Ree village, and he came back at 3:00 in the evening. None of the village heads from Meh Th'Ree came and met with me.

When I asked Saw Ht--- why none of the village heads had come to see me, he replied that: *"There are four village heads in Meh P'Ree village and none of them were available to come and meet with you because BGF #1014, led by Saw Nyunt Thein, asked them to go and stay with them. Some village heads had to porter while some other village heads were cooking, cutting fire wood and carrying water"*. Saw Ht--- told me about that on July 7th 2012. Not only the village heads have to go and stay with them, but two of Meh Th'Ree villagers also have to go and stay with them every day.

If they [BGF soldiers] are travelling, they [Meh Th'Ree villagers] will have to carry the bullets and the rice pots for them, from village to village, and it will take at least one day. These problems are the problems that are caused by Thein Sein's government's army and the BGF.

The last problem is the problem that is caused by the mother army [KNLA]. On July 13th 2012, Bu Tho Township's leader Saw Pah Hku called me and I went to see him at H--- village. I met with him, the [Bu Tho] Township leader in H---, [at] *Tharamu*⁵ Naw S---'s house on July 13th 2012. But suddenly, Battalion #102, Company (4), Company 2nd-in-command, [Major] Saw Hsa Yu Moo, came in front of us [the township leader and the

⁵ *Tharamu* is a Karen term used for a female teacher, or nurse or any person to whom the speaker wishes to show respect especially to the women.

community member] and took out his gun and shot continuously in front of *Tharamu's* house. He shot the gun ten times.

A day after, on July 14th 2012, Major Saw Hsa Yu Moo came and drank beer at H--- village until he got drunk and when he got drunk, he started shooting the gun in the village again. After shooting the gun, they [Major Saw Hsa Yu Moo and his KNLA soldiers] got on the boat and left to the source of the Pw eh Loh Kloh [river]. When they arrived by the boat stop of Pw a See Hta, they drank beer again in the beer shop and one of Major Hsa Yu Moo's soldiers, Saw Kyaw Say, shot the gun again. He shot it two times. When the mother army's [KNLA's] soldiers went around and shot the gun, the villagers were seriously threatened. Not only NPD soldiers threatened the villagers, but also the mother army did so, so the villagers had a difficult time in their lives.

Not only these problems were caused, but the movement of the villagers was also restricted. They could not travel out of the village so much. This is because there are always landmines outside of Meh Th'Ree village and Meh K'Naw village. For example, on September 15th 2011, one of Saw D---'s cows stepped on a landmine and died. A buffalo also stepped on a landmine in the western part of Y--- village.

On October 12th 2011, Y--- villager Saw B---'s buffalo went to the western part of Y--- and stepped on a landmine and died as well. By looking at that, we can assume that there are still landmines under the ground. But we do not know whether they are the KNLA's landmines or the BGF's landmines.

After the Karen National Union (KNU) arranged the ceasefire process, we thought that the villagers' lives would be a little easier, but if we look at the NPD army threatening the villagers, the BGF ordering forced labour to the villagers and the mother army going around and threatening the villagers, we will know that the villagers' lives are worse than before the ceasefire talk.

Thein Sein's government and the mother organization leaders held the ceasefire talk in order to stop the fighting, but until now, we still can not live confidently without fear. It is not possible that the threatening of the villagers, the forced labour of the villagers and the landmines problems will disappear easily even after the ceasefire.

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

- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012,”(April 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012,” (April 2013)
- “Border Guard #1014 demands for labour and goods in Papun District, May 2012,” (March 2013)
- “Incident Report: Looting in Papun District #1, May 2012,” (March 2013)
- “Incident Report: Looting in Papun District #2, May 2012,” (March 2013)

