



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**News Bulletin**

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**Papun Situation Update: Forced Labour in Bu Tho Township, January to February 2013**

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*This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in February 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Papun District, from January to February 2013. During this period, the community member describes continuous demands for forced labour in Bu Tho Township by Border Guard Force #1013 and #1014 led by Battalion Commander Saw Ha Kyaing and Saw Maung Chit, respectively. Specifically, villagers in Meh P'Ree and Kyaw Pah village tracts were demanded to collect building materials for Border Guard Force soldiers; serve as messengers; perform sentry duties; do domestic duties in the army camp and porter for the soldiers. Further, the community member describes the use of villagers for forced labour by U Thuzana, the presiding monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu; all family members from every household in five village tracts, including women and children, were forced to work on the construction of a bridge.*

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**Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (January to February 2013)**

*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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Papun District, nine interviews, one other situation update, 28 photographs<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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, November 2011 to July 2012," KHRG, March 2013.

## **The Human Rights abuses that happened in Meh Mweh village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract from January 28<sup>th</sup> 2013 to February 14<sup>th</sup> 2013**

The human rights abuses that are going to be described [in this report] happened during [the period between] January 28<sup>th</sup> and February 14<sup>th</sup> 2013. The abuses happened largely in Mu Traw [Papun] District, Bu Tho Township, from Meh Mweh village tract to Day Wah village tract, [and in] Kyaw Pah village tract, Meh P'Ree village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract.

The first human rights abuse that is going to be reported is forced labour. The perpetrator that clearly committed the abuse is BGF [Border Guard Force] Battalion #1013 Battalion Commander Saw Hla Kyaing and BGF #1014 Battalion Commander, Saw Maung Chit.<sup>3</sup>

Either to build their army camp or to build the stage for a stage show, to get attention and support from the villagers, the BGF #1013 and #1014 ordered the villagers to do forced labour such as [the collection of] bamboo poles and thatch shingles.

For the project of building a bridge that is called Htee Lah Eh Hta, which will cross the Yunzalin River, close to Noh Hta village tract, they are using the [Buddhist] religion<sup>4</sup> and ordered the villagers for forced labour. They ordered each family member from each household in five different village tracts [to perform work for the construction of the bridge]. The five village tracts are Meh Mweh village tract, Day Wah village tract, Kyaw Pah village tract, Meh P'Ree village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract. The person who leads the project is U Thuzana<sup>5</sup> who is the presiding monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu.

The recent human rights abuses that are currently happening are:

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<sup>3</sup> KHRG has published numerous recent reports discussing abuses involving BGF Battalion #1013 and #1014, including: "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011 to July 2012," KHRG, April 2013; "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012," KHRG April 2013 and "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012," KHRG, April 2013. Further reports detailing abuses involving these Battalions are also available on the KHRG website.

<sup>4</sup> Incidents of work or forced labour spoken of in relation to religious duty can be associated with the Burmese term *Loh ah pay*, a traditionally referred to voluntary service for temples or the local community. In this case, while the work could have been framed as a voluntary religious duty, the community member who submitted the report clearly discusses the involvement of villagers in the construction of the bridge as an abuse and as forced labour.

<sup>5</sup> Monk U Thuzana led the formation of the then-Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in 1994 with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which was the name of the military government in Burma at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, 1996.

- BGF #1013 and #1014 order the villagers to serve as *set tha*<sup>6</sup> everyday.
- BGF #1013 and #1014 order thatch shingles from the villagers.
- BGF #1013 and #1014 order the villagers to cut bamboo poles for them.
- The presiding monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu [U Thuzana] forces the villagers to build the bridge. These are the human rights abuses that currently occur.

If we have to describe the abuses specifically, since *Bo* [Major] Htun Hla from BGF #1013 and Corporal Saw Nyunt Thein from BGF #1014 came with his soldiers into L---village until now, the date of this report; they have been ordering two villagers per day in shifts to serve as *set tha*. Sometimes, the villagers have to perform sentry duties in their army camp and, also while doing that, they have to cook, find firewood, carry water and search for vegetables for them [BGF #1013 and #1014 soldiers]. They also have to carry bullets and pots for the BGF soldiers when they are travelling.

After travelling like that, now the season is getting close to the raining [monsoon] season, so BGF soldiers want to reinforce their roof. To do that, they need thatch shingles, so they forcibly collected them from the villagers. The one very clear example of forcible collection of thatch shingles is that: BGF #1014 Corporal Saw Nyunt Thein ordered 500 thatch shingles from each village including S--- village, T--- village and H---village, which are in Meh P'Ree village tract, and from M--- village in Kyaw Pah village tract on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2013. Until now (February 16<sup>th</sup> 2013), they are still ordering it.



These photos were taken in February 2013 in L--- village, BuTho Township, Papun District. The photos show the thatch shingles that were ordered by Border Guard Force #1014 Corporal Saw Nyunt Thein from the villagers in L--- village. The photos show the way in which the villagers piled up the thatch shingles, having worked together to collect them, to send to the BGF. [Photos: KHRG]

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<sup>6</sup> *Set tha* is a Burmese term for forced labour duty as a messenger stationed at army camps or bases and serving as a go-between to deliver orders from army officers to village heads, but also involving other menial tasks when no messages are in need of delivery.

Likewise, on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, BGF #1013 Battalion Commander Saw Htoo Loo ordered M--- villagers to cut 100 bamboo poles for them, and we were told about this by the M--- village head.

Moreover, on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2013, there was an incident of forced labour mixed with religion that happened in Bu Tho Township, P---village, which is close to Yunzalin River. In order to be able to cross the river, they [workers under U Thuzana] started constructing Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2013. To construct the bridge, five to ten people from each village will have to go and work seven days a week in shifts. In order to complete this bridge project in three years, they [villagers] will have to go on forced labour duty everyday, whether they are free or not. The villagers that have to do forced labour are from Meh Mweh village tract, Day Wah village tract, Kyaw Pah village tract, Meh P'Ree village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract. Every villager including men, women and children from those village tracts will have to go for forced labour. Until now, February 16<sup>th</sup> 2013, the villagers still have to go for forced labour in shifts.

We are told that the person who currently leads the bridge construction project is the Myaing Gyi Ngu monk. The human rights abuses are still happening in so many different ways. It is because the villagers who stay in the area do not have an understanding of their own rights and human rights, as well as they also do not know how to protect their own rights. Only if the villagers know how to stop the abuses by showing their strength and unity, the abuses problem can be solved. The human rights abuses will continue happening if the villagers knowledge is not improving.

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

- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011 to July 2012," (April 2013)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012," (April 2013)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012," (April 2013)
- "Incident Report: Violent abuse in Papun District, October 2012," (April 2013)
- "Incident Report: Forced Labour in Papun District #2, February 2012," (April 2013)

