KHRG Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Report from the Field
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Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control

This report presents information on the human rights situation in village tracts in central Papun District located near the northern section of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun Road, south of Papun Town in Bu Tho Township. Communities must confront regular threats to their livelihoods and physical security stemming from the strong SPDC and DKBA presence in, and control of the area, as these military units support themselves by extracting significant material and labour resources from the local civilian population. Villagers have reported movement restrictions and various exploitative abuses, including arbitrary taxation, forced portering, forced labour fabricating and delivering materials to military units, forced mine clearance and forced recruitment for military service. Some communities have also reported threats or acts of violent abuse, typically in the context of enforcing forced labour orders or where villagers have been accused of contacting or assisting KNLA forces operating in the area. This is the second of four reports detailing the situation in Papun District's southern townships that will be released in August 2010. Incidents documented in this report occurred between April 2009 and February 2010.

Central Papun District is heavily militarized and tightly-controlled by State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) forces, which have continued efforts to consolidate and entrench military authority over lowland areas of northern Karen State by improving military infrastructure, as well as systems of civilian control and resource extraction, to support the substantial military presence active in the area. A network of roads links Papun Town, the administrative centre for SPDC-delineated Hpapun Township and headquarters of a Strategic Operations Command (SOC) of the Southeastern Regional Command, with the fringes of Dweh Loh and Bu Tho Townships, as well as major towns in adjacent districts (see map). Military bases have been constructed on or near these roads; in many cases villagers residing far from these natural centres of authority have been forcibly relocated to sites where they can be more comprehensively controlled by SPDC or DKBA forces, as well as tapped for material and logistical support in the form of forced labour and arbitrary taxation.

This photo, taken on November 26th 2009, shows villagers from Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township, at their temporary hiding site in Bu Tho township. The residents of Pi--- decided to leave their homes in November 2009 after being subjected to increased abuse by SPDC LIB #219 when three soldiers were injured by a KNLA landmine near their village. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Villagers in central Papun District are subject to a range of regular human rights abuses that directly undercut their livelihoods and illustrate the reality of life under exploitative military control. Ma Htaw, Htee Moo Htah and Tee Tha Blu Htah village tracts in particular, which are located in Dweh Loh Township at the northern end of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road, are confronted with frequent abuses stemming from the large and permanent military presence in the area. Most communities in these tracts lie in the flat floodplain of the Yunzalin River, which approximately separates Dweh Loh and Bu Tho Townships,[1] and are bounded by the Bilin to Papun road to the west and the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road to the east. SPDC and DKBA camps are located at strategic points throughout the area, especially along the vehicle roads, and SPDC units have long attempted to forcibly relocate communities from more difficult-to-control upland areas to central locations easily accessed by military units: Ma Htaw, Htee Moo Htah, Baw Tho Htah and Tee Tha Blu Htah villages (see map) have all previously been designated by the SPDC as relocation sites.[2]

Since the beginning of 2009, KHRG has received reports of regular human rights abuses committed by SPDC and DKBA forces in these and other village tracts of central Papun District. According to KHRG's field researchers and villager testimony, units from SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #219 and DKBA Gk'saw Wah 'White elephant' Special Battalion #777 were active in the areas covered in this report in 2009; LIB #219 has since been replaced by other SPDC battalions, but Gk'saw Wah Battalion remains active in central Papun.[3] Villagers have reported extensive exploitative abuses linked to the SPDC's 'self-reliance' policy,[4] including various forms of forced labour and ad hoc demands for material support; these demands require locals to divert crucial time, energy and resources away from their own livelihoods, for token or no remuneration. Locals have also described SPDC soldiers threatening or perpetrating acts of violent abuse to encourage compliance with their demands.

Although much of central Papun is under effective SPDC or DKBA control, units of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) 5th Brigade remain active in adjacent upland areas, frequently targeting the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road to disrupt delivery of rations and supplies as well as SPDC and DKBA troop movements.[5] KNLA units continue to make infrequent 'guerrilla' style

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[1] Note that the areas indicated on KHRG's maps as Dweh Loh and Bu Tho Townships are not recognized by the SPDC authorities and therefore do not influence or constrain the operations of SPDC or DKBA forces deployed to the area. KHRG uses these designations for the purpose of consistency and clarity, because local Karen villagers frequently use them to describe village and incident locations to KHRG's field researchers. The village tracts referred to by KHRG are also local designations and not necessarily recognized by SPDC or DKBA authorities or may be referenced using different names, often in Burmese rather than Karen languages.

[2] See: *Internal Displacement and Vulnerability in Eastern Burma*, TBBC, October 2004, p.69.

[3] LIB #219 was under the command of SPDC Light Infantry Division (LID) #11 commanded by Than Htunt, headquartered at Lay Kay in Thaton District; "Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District," KHRG, October 2009. As of March 2010 KHRG's information indicated that LIB #702, under Military Operations Command (MOC) #4, Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #2, has replaced LIB #219 in the area. The unit was led by Battalion Commander Nay Myo Aye, who was based at the SPDC camp at Toung Tho Lo, in Ma Htaw village tract. Information received from KHRG field researchers as of July 2010 indicates that battalions from LID #11 have returned to Bu Tho and Dweh Loh Townships and that LIB #216, as well as LIBs #506 and #17 from MOC #1 TOC #2 have been active in Dweh Loh Township.

[4] The SPDC's 'live off the land' or 'self-reliance' policy became explicit in 1997, when Burma's War Office issued an order instructing the country's Regional Commanders that troops "*were to meet their basic logistical needs locally, rather than rely on the central supply system.*" See, Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, Norwalk: Eastbridge, 2002 p. 136. See also, Mary Callahan, "Of kyay-zu and kyet-zu: the military in 2006," pp. 36-53 in Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson (eds.), *Myanmar: The State, Community and the Environment*, Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2007 p. 46.

[5] For examples of KNLA units targeting SPDC roads and road construction operations in other parts of Bu Tho Township, see: "SPDC and DKBA road construction, forced labour and looting in Papun District," KHRG, March 2009. The KNLA formally adopted the use of guerrilla tactics in 1998 at a military conference in Mae Hta Raw Tha, Dooplaya District. See, Ashley South "Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict," New York: Routledge, 2009 (2nd ed.), p.56.

attacks and place landmines and booby traps. Local villagers are often put under heavy movement restrictions by SPDC or DKBA authorities, ostensibly to prevent any contact with KNLA soldiers; such restrictions also, however, disrupt villagers living in controlled areas from engaging in regular agricultural, labour and trading activities, exacerbating the strain on livelihoods created by exploitative abuses. Perceived violations of movement restrictions can result in heavy fines, detention or violence at the hands of the local military authorities, as well as threats to villagers' physical security in the form of violent abuse carried out as extra-judicial punishment or reprisal against individuals or communities accused of communicating with, or otherwise supporting, local KNLA units.

The following sections of this report detail the regular abuses described by local villagers to KHRG researchers, as well as the responses local communities employ in attempts to protect themselves and limit the harmful impacts of SPDC and DKBA abuses. Despite the strong military presence in central Papun District, villagers continue to find space to negotiate, reduce, or avoid abuses, and thereby retain time and resources for their own immediate livelihoods activities.

Abuses by SPDC forces and local responses

In 2009, villages in Ma Htaw village tract faced frequent exploitative demands, as both of the two most senior officers of LIB #219, Battalion Commander Aung Naing Oo and Deputy Battalion Commander Moe Zaw Oo, operated out of Toung Tho Lo (aka. "Three Mountains") camp in Ma Htaw village tract. Toung Tho Lo lies approximately 19 miles (31 kilometres) south of Papun Town on the Papun to Ka Ma Maung vehicle road.[6] According to KHRG's field researchers, detachments of LIB #219 based in Toung Tho Lo, Ma Htaw village, Htwee Thee Uh (*Chaw Tha Yar* in Burmese), and Ku Seik all made regular and onerous forced labour and other exploitative demands from the surrounding villages in 2009.

> *"Their military camp is based in my village. There were 30 soldiers and they were led by a three-star commander. This military unit had to stay here for six months. We had to work for them every day since they arrived in the village. We had to carry their rations and vegetables to Toung Tho Lo military camp. They didn't do anything and they just ate and slept in their military camp."*
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> - Saw B--- (male, 45), Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

> *"Recently, the SPDC also ordered 100 bamboo poles and we had to send them to Ku Seik military camp. It was ordered by Commander Than Zin."*
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> - Saw Ya--- (male, 36), L--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

> *"Recently, we had to provide two people in our village to carry the SPDC rations from Htwee Thee Uh to Ma Htaw, and they had to walk for a day."*
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> - U Me--- (male, 55), Da--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

Major Min Soe, the SPDC Commander at Ma Htaw camp, reportedly demanded five porters from the surrounding villages to porter rations between Ma Htaw village and Ma Htaw camp once every month in 2009. SPDC units based in Ma Htaw and other camps along the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road also impose heavy demands for the fabrication and delivery of building materials including thatch shingles for roofing, and bamboo poles and wooden posts for constructing buildings and fences. In the following quote, Saw Hp---, the headman of Si--- village, Dweh Loh Township, described to a KHRG researcher the extent to which demands for forced labour are an integral part of SPDC administration of villages under its control:

[6] The distance from Papun to Ka Ma Maung is approximately 57 miles (92 kilometres).

"There are often demands for forced labor. The SPDC army recognizes Tee Tha Blu Htah, Hsar Law Teh, Baw Tho Htah, Wah Thoh Gklah, Gka Bpee Kee, Noh Ghaw, Htee Law Thee Htah and Puh Htaw Ru villages within Tee Tha Blu Htah village tract. They divide [the village tract] into three sections; the eight villages are divided into three sections and four groups. They make demands from each of these groups. They sometimes demand 100 bamboo poles and 50 thatch shingles from each village. Therefore, they demand 400 thatch shingles and 800 bamboo poles from the village tract."

- Saw Hp--- (male, 43), Si--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

Orders for forced labour and the fabrication of building materials are typically issued via written letters circulated to villages[7] or, increasingly, in meetings called by SPDC commanders with village heads from communities under their control. Such meetings themselves constitute a form of forced labour,[8] as village heads must take time out of their own livelihoods activities to travel to and from the local SPDC camp and attend the meeting.

"They demanded it in a meeting. In the past, they decided that the meeting would be held once every two weeks. Now, LIB #219 Battalion Deputy Commander Moe Zaw Oo calls us to attend the meeting once per week, sometimes every one or two days. There is no the schedule for the meetings, and the meeting time is not regular.

- Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

These photos, taken on February 18th 2010, show the Ka Ma Maung to Papun vehicle road near Ga--- village in Ma Htaw village tract, Dweh Loh Township. The photo on the left shows the road where it passes the SPDC Army camp in Ga---; in the photo on the right a group of villagers walk along road the in Ga--- village. Communities in Ma Htaw village tract faced heavy exploitative demands from LIB #219, which was headquartered in the area in 2009. *[Photos: KHRG]*

Villagers from Ma Htaw village tract and the village tracts to the north have confirmed in interviews with KHRG field researchers that they and their resources have been repeatedly tapped by SPDC authorities to provide building materials, especially bamboo poles and thatch shingles. On September 28th 2009, for example, Deputy Battalion Commander Moe Zaw Oo, commanding a unit based in Toung Tho Lo camp, ordered each of Htee Law Thee Hta, Noh Ghaw Hta, Wah Tho Koh, Hsa Law Teh, Baw Tho Htah, Pway Htaw Ro, Gka Bpee Kee and Htee Theh Lay villages to fabricate and deliver 200 thatch shingles, 1,600 shingles in total, to repair roofs on buildings in their camp. The following villager quotes illustrate further the frequent demands for forced labour faced by local villagers.

[7] For collected examples of written orders for forced labour, see: *SPDC and DKBA order documents: August 2008 to June 2009*, KHRG, August 2009; as well as previous KHRG Orders Reports available on KHRG's website.

[8] For more on forced attendance at meetings as a form of forced labour, see: *Village Agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008, pp.55-6

"Since July 2nd 2009, LIB #219, led by Battalion Deputy Commander Moe Zaw Oo and based in Toung Tho Lo army camp, demanded 150 pieces of thatch and ten small tree [posts]. They did not pay us for the cost of the thatch and trees. They told us that it was 'help'… We have to walk for two hours to reach the Toung Tho Lo army camp from our village. Htee Hsaw Meh and Htwee Thee Uh army camps are near this army camp…. On October 21st 2009, the battalion commander at Toung Tho Lo demanded 100 pieces of thatch plus 100 bamboo poles. We asked them to pay us for the cost of the thatch and bamboo, but they didn't pay us. They told us that they worked with villagers and the village head, so that they just asked for our 'help'…They said that they'd use the thatch for roofing the meeting hall and the bamboo to make fencing for the vehicle road. Finally [most recently], on October 28th 2009, the battalion commander at Toung Tho Lo demanded 50 pieces of thatch."

- Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

"The SPDC army demands thatch, bamboo, and forced labour. They demanded 50 thatch shingles and 100 bamboo poles a few days ago. They've demanded thatch many times and forced labour, too. We have to send these to Toung Tho Lo army camp. These demands come from LIB #219 Battalion Deputy Commander, Moe Zaw Oo. This commander usually demands 100 bamboo poles [at a time]. The first time, they demanded 100 bamboo poles and 100 thatch shingles in August 2009. The second time, they demanded 100 bamboo poles and 50 thatch shingles at the end of this month [November 2009]. We have to send these to Toung Tho Lo army camp. They are [used] for building their camp."

- Saw Pu--- (male, 40) Gi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

"They [SPDC troops] rarely come to my village, but they always order us to do things for them. They just stay in their military camp and order us to work for them. They order us to cut bamboo poles. Sometimes they order our village to provide them with 100 bamboo poles. This year we have to provide them with bamboo poles. We have to send them to Ma Htaw, the place that they are based… They also order us [to make] thatch shingles. They use them for the roofs of their military camp. Each household has to provide ten thatch shingles."

- Saw Pe--- (Male, 24), R--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

Demands for the fabrication of building materials are usually made on an ad hoc basis, making them difficult for rural communities to anticipate, and therefore often disrupt regular agricultural and livelihoods activities, which can be extremely damaging for those villagers dependent on subsistence farming. The impact on livelihoods is exacerbated by the fact that villagers are rarely, if ever, compensated for the time spent finding, collecting, fabricating, and delivering the materials requested. The strain on livelihoods is a powerful factor motivating attempts by villagers and their leaders to avoid or negotiate, sometimes unilaterally, orders for forced labour and the provision of materials, despite the risk inherent in opposing local military authorities.

"Sometimes, we have to go two or three times in a month and sometimes they don't order [anything] in a month. Recently, they've asked us many times… They make demands non-stop. I haven't noted the dates. [They demand] during people's harvest time, the time when people work, like now. We've already cut and sent [bamboo and thatch] to them this month. And now, they've made demands again, so we won't go. We'll stay like this. In my village, they demanded 100 bamboo poles and 150 thatch shingles. The next time, they demanded 50 thatch shingles. Another time, they demanded 70 thatch shingles one month ago, in October 2009. They called a meeting and ordered [the thatch]. If we don't do [as they order], maybe, there'll be a problem for us. They asked us and we have to do it… They don't pay us. We do everything free for them… It takes the whole day [to carry thatch to Toung Tho Lo]. I don't know how many hours, just one day… They don't feed rice to villagers [who carry materials to Toung Tho

Lo] but they give everyone one cup of sweet boiled water [condensed milk mixed with hot water]. After drinking that, they come back. They don't eat, they just drink a cup of milk. For rice, we come back and eat at home."

- Saw Ka--- (male, 59), Ku--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

"Yes, they sometimes ordered us to provide them with thatch shingles. Recently they ordered us to send 250 thatch shingles to their military camp, but we sent just 200 thatch shingles… Their military camp is based at Ma Htaw."

- Saw Ke--- (male, 28), Pa--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2010)

"Now, they've demanded 800 bamboo poles from us, but we haven't given anything and didn't inform them, yet. Also, they've demanded 400 thatch shingles and we haven't gone and informed them, yet. They often make demands from us. They demanded these [materials] in November 2009. They also demand many other things from us and never pay us money. Sometimes, as they often make demands from us, we cannot always give them [what they ask for]. Therefore, we have to go and apologise to them. To apologise, we don't dare to go alone. All village heads in the same group have to get together and go to apologize. Last week, on Wednesday, in November 2009, they ordered us to send the bamboo and thatch. We haven't sent them yet. They didn't order us to meet with them, but when the deadline comes and we can't send the bamboo and thatch to them, they'll order us to meet with them. The bamboo and thatch were demanded by LIB #219, led by Battalion Deputy Commander Moe Zaw Oo and based in Toung Tho Lo army camp. They said they'll use the bamboo to repair the fence around their camp and to re-build their huts, too. For thatch, they'll use it for roofing their camp. They don't specify how many pieces of thatch and bamboo small villages have to give and how many big villages have to give. They only told us that each household has to give 50 pieces of thatch. For us, we can't give them whenever they need and demand something."

- Saw Hp--- (male, 43), Si--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

At least two village heads have told KHRG that they can be caught between competing authorities when such demands are levied, saying that villages have to ask permission from local KNU/KNLA authorities to provide building materials to SPDC units. While these village leaders did not elaborate on the consequences of breaking an order by KNU/KNLA officials not to comply with SPDC demands, they pointed out that village heads do bring up such orders when negotiating with SPDC officers to reduce or rescind orders for the fabrication of materials.

"We have to get the permission from the KNU. If the KNU doesn't allow us to give anything, we can't give the SPDC anything. Then, the SPDC told us to negotiate with the KNU about whether they'd allow us [to give materials] or not. I didn't go and meet with the KNU for this case, but the head of Sa--- village went to meet them and told me that the KNU won't allow it. So, I've decided not to send the thatch."

- Saw Hp--- (male, 43), Si--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

"Now they've made demands again, but we haven't cut [anything]. They called us to a meeting the day before yesterday. We told him [the SPDC officer] that [the KNLA] commander wouldn't allow us [to provide materials]… we told him that it wasn't allowed and we didn't dare to cut [anything]. Then he told us to wait."

- Saw Ka--- (male, 59), Ku--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

The strain on livelihoods caused by SPDC demands for the fabrication of materials is compounded by frequent demands for forced labour, particularly clearing and repairing roads. On October 8th 2009 LIB #219 Deputy Battalion Commander Moe Zaw Oo demanded forced labour from several villages after the Tee Tha Blu Gkloh Bridge, on the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road, was burnt and damaged in an attack by KNLA soldiers. In July 2009 this bridge had been

built with forced labour, as described in the following quote from Saw Ho---, the deputy village head of Sa--- village, Dweh Loh Township:

> *"They ordered us to build a bridge on July 12th 2009. They demanded five people per day and our village had to go for four days. They didn't pay us any money. They said that they couldn't pay us for building the bridge because they didn't have any money. They also demanded people from T'Gku Kee, Khay Kee, Puh Ta Roh, Baw Tho Htah, Noh Ghaw, Noh Taw Bpler, Htee Doh Htah, and Hsar Law Teh villages. After building it, they took two pictures of us with the bridge. They said these were for remembrances. It is called Tee Tha Blu Gkloh Bridge. This bridge was built with wood for vehicles [going] from Ka Ma Maung to Papun town."*
>
> - Saw Ho--- (male, 30), Sa--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

This photo, taken on February 7th 2010, shows bamboo cut by villagers in Bu Tho Township, Papun District. Residents of villages in central Papun District are frequently ordered by local SPDC and DKBA units to find, cut and deliver bamboo poles and thatch to local military camps. *[Photo: KHRG]*

This photo, taken on February 18th 2010, shows a bridge on the Ka Ma Maung to Papun vehicle road near Ga--- village, Dweh Loh Township. Villagers in central Papun District are often forced to work maintaining and repairing bridges and roads by local SPDC units, especially at the end of the annual rainy season. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Five labourers from each of eight villages, plus the eight village heads, were ordered to work on the bridge for four full days from October 8th to 11th 2009. During the construction period, the villagers had to sleep at the work site and were only released to return to their villages in the morning if other labourers had come to replace them. The villages ordered to participate included Tee Tha Blu Htah, Hsa Law Teh, Noh Ghaw, Gka Bpee Kee, Baw Tho Htah, Wah Thoh Gklah, Htee Ah Bpee Htah and Gka Toh Roh; the village heads were threatened that their villages would be destroyed and the villagers relocated to sites closer to the main road if they did not send labourers. In the following quotes, the village heads of Si--- and Ke--- villages, Dweh Loh Township, describe the incident:

> *"After the Tee Tha Blu Gkloh Bridge was burnt, they forced villagers to re-build the bridge starting on October 8th 2009. Because the SPDC forced them to go, even though the villagers didn't dare to go and do that, they had to go and do the work full of fear. They had to go for four days. They finished re-building it on October 12th 2009. The villagers who went to re-build the bridge were Saw My---, Saw Kr---, Saw Gi---, Saw Bo---, Saw Ma---, Saw Di---, Saw Lu---, Saw Ga---, Saw Gu---, Saw Ro---, Saw Bi---, Saw Ra---, Saw Ry---, Saw Pi---, Saw So---, and Saw Tu---, in total 16 villagers. They demanded five people per day… Now, motorbikes are travelling across this bridge. They demanded forced labour not only from our village, but also from eight villages such as Tee Tha Blu Htah, Hsar Law Teh, Wah Thoh Gklah, Baw Tho Htah, Noh Ghaw, Htee Ah Bpee Htah, Gka Bpee Kee, and Gka Toh Roh. The bridge was built with wood. They provided rice, a little salt and fish paste. It was built [re-built] with wood and iron. They*

demanded we bring some other tools such as chisels and handsaws… The SPDC operating in the area threatened us after the bridge was destroyed. They told us that if we didn't go and repair it, our whole village would have to relocate and stay along the vehicle road. If we went to re-build it, our village wouldn't have to move. Full of fear, we went to re-build the bridge."

-Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

"They demanded people from eight villages. 40 villagers and eight village heads had to go to rebuild the bridge. If we didn't follow the order, they threatened us that they'd destroy our village. [They said] 'If you all dare to stay in your village, you can do that and see what will happen to you.' We started re-building the bridge on October 8th 2010, on Friday. The bridge was [originally] built with wood. They provided us with iron, food and some wood and bamboo. They told us that they'd hire us but on the day after rebuilding the bridge they called us to a meeting and told us that they wouldn't pay anymore. We had to re-build it for three days and completed the work on October 11th 2010."

-Saw Hp--- (male, 43), Si--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

Instead of receiving payment for the work as originally promised, the village heads were called to a meeting at LIB #219 camp at Toung Tho Lo, informed that they would not be paid, and given one sack of low quality rice for each village that participated in the labour.

"Then, the SPDC battalion commander based in Toung Tho Lo army camp called a meeting of village heads from every village. When we arrived at the camp, they gave us a sack of rice (50 kg. / 110 lb.) for each village. This rice was very old and out of date. It was only rice flour. When we brought it back home, we had to winnow the rice flour in a round bamboo tray. After winnowing it, we got only a basket (25 kg. / 55 lb.), two bowls (3 kg. / 7 lb.) and 4 milk tins (0.8 kg. / 1.7 lb)… They gave it for those who built the Tee Tha Blu Gkloh Bridge."

-Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

"They gave us one sack of rice for building the bridge. We shared it… Some got two bowls of rice (3 kg. / 7 lb.) and some got 1 bowl and 4 milk tins of rice (2.4 kg / 5.1 lb.)."

- Saw Pu--- (male, 40) Gi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

KNLA forces operating along this road often destroy bridges and lay landmines on the road during the rainy season to disrupt SPDC troop rotations and re-supply operations when the annual monsoon rains end. Demands for forced labour clearing roads and repairing bridges, as well as for porters when roads are not passable, are therefore frequently imposed on civilians in Ma Htaw and other village tracts along the vehicle in September and October, when the rainy season has ended. Forced labour obligations during this period can be particularly damaging for rural villagers, as the weeks following the end of the rainy season offer a small but crucial window to harvest paddy crops; demands for labour that disrupt harvest activities during this period can gravely undermine local communities' food security for the coming year. As explained throughout this field report, villagers and village leaders frequently attempt to reduce or circumvent exploitative demands in a number of ways to reduce the strain on local livelihoods. Some villagers have also reported that they have refused such demands when they felt that their physical security would be endangered by a certain forced labour activity.

"This year the SPDC ordered us to clear their vehicle road. The road is from Ka Ma Maung to Papun town. Recently they ordered us to rebuild their bridge. We refused it; we gave the reason that we didn't dare to do it because we were afraid of landmines. The bridge was destroyed by the outside people [KNLA].

- Saw Mo--- (male, 45), Do--- village, Bu Tho Township (October 2009)

Repair of the Tee Tha Blu Gkloh Bridge was accompanied by other measures undertaken by local authorities in October and November 2009, to secure the delivery of rations in and around Ma Htaw village tract. In October, soldiers from LIB #219 based at the Ma Htaw SPDC camp imposed tight travel restrictions, forbidding villagers from travelling to and from their farms and plantations. A few villages whose farms were located near their villages were able to continue working their land, but villages near SPDC camps and those with fields near the vehicle road could not. Locals told KHRG that eight villages had at least one plantation or paddy field destroyed because the villagers couldn't tend their land; the largest losses included 16 plantations and two paddy fields in Pi--- village, and four plantations and nine paddy fields in Bo Baw Koh.

On October 25th 2009, communities in Ma Htaw village tract were ordered provide one person per household to clear grass from along sections of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road near their villages. Forced labour clearing roadside brush is often ordered by SPDC soldiers after the end of the rainy season, during which shrubs and bushes may have grown several metres tall. Clearing this overgrowth facilitates SPDC control over roadways, allowing troops to spot villagers crossing or walking near the road, as well as opposition soldiers active near the road.[9] It can also, however, be an intensely dangerous activity for civilians in areas where unmarked landmines have been placed by SPDC, DKBA or KNLA forces.

> *We heard that this month they will ask us to clear their vehicle road. We have to start the process on October 25th. The vehicle road is from Pa'an District to Papun [Town]. Every village in Ma Htaw village tract has to complete this order."*
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> - Saw Pe--- (Male, 24), R--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

Beginning on November 9th, residents of Pi--- were ordered by SPDC troops to send villagers to serve as round the clock sentries at the nearby army camp, as an additional security measure due to fears about possible KNLA attacks and landmines in the area. Pi--- was instructed to send three villagers at a time, and rotate those on duty with fresh sentries every morning and evening.

On November 15th a DKBA unit led by Saw Pah Soo, a monk, and Company Commander Soe Myint Oo arrived in Ma Htaw village and ordered residents of Ma Htaw who owned bullock carts to drive their carts from Ma Htaw to Pi--- and back, in order to clear the road of landmines before rations and military equipment were transported. The DKBA authorities instructed the villagers to place heavy loads, but not their own rations, on their carts to ensure that any mines were triggered. The villagers were not paid or provided food during this operation; instead, they were forced to provide 50,000 kyat (US $51.28), a big tin[10] of rice [16 kg. / 35.2 lb.], and collect 50 nipa palm leaves to make thatch roofing[11] for the soldiers' approaching Karen New Year celebration. Local sources told KHRG that bullock cart owners in Dt'Bpay Kee, Pway Htaw Ruh, Taw Meh Htah, Pah Loh and Paw Htee villages had also been ordered to use their carts to clear the road of landmines.

Despite such uses of human and animal minesweepers to clear the roads for rations delivery, on November 3rd 2009 a soldier from a unit of 30 men from LIB #219 based at the Pi--- SPDC camp stepped on a landmine while walking between the camp and Pi--- village, injuring himself and two others. After the incident, the residents of the village were ordered to assemble in the

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[9] For more on road clearance as a form of forced labour see: *Village Agency: Rural rights and resistance in a militarized Karen State*, KHRG, November 2008, pp.49-50.

[10] A "big tin" is a unit of volume used locally to measure paddy, husked rice and seeds. One big tin of paddy equals 10.45 kg. / 23.04 lb. in weight; one big tin of husked rice equals 16 kg. / 35.2 lb. in weight.

[11] Called *da nih* in Burmese, the leaves of the nipa palm (*nypa fruticans*) are used by villagers in some parts of rural Burma to make thatch. It was not clear in this instance whether the villagers were ordered to fabricate the thatch, or merely to provide the leaves.

SPDC camp and for the next three days were subjected to harsh treatment including heavy forced labour and denial of sufficient food, while children were separated from their parents and forced to sit in the sun without food or water during the day. Villagers' homes and possessions were looted while they were forced to work, and adult males were ordered to sleep in the SPDC Army camp at night. The villagers were apparently subjected to this abuse as a form of punishment in retaliation for the injury of three SPDC soldiers; locally deployed SPDC units often tell villagers that they will be held accountable for KNLA landmines and ambushes on SPDC troops near their homes, regardless of whether or not the villagers have communicated or cooperated with KNLA forces in their area. Village heads living under SPDC control or have reportedly asked local KNLA commanders not to carry out operations near their communities, in order to protect villagers from such retribution.

> *"Since the landmine exploded, we were ordered to porter rice and the women were dried under the sun for three days. They were ordered to clean vehicle road … They dried women under the sun and ordered them to carry water, clean overgrown grass beside the vehicle road, and carry rice. They also dried children under the sun and the children were crying. They took villagers' belongings and killed the animals and ate them."*
>
> - Saw Er--- (male, 26), Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

These photos, taken on November 26th 2009, show a temporary hiding site in Bu Tho Township established by residents of Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township, after they fled abuse by soldiers from SPDC LIB#219. The villagers were actively monitoring the security situation to determine whether to remain at this site or move to a more secure location further from SPDC and DKBA control, and therefore had not yet built huts or prepared land to farm. *[Photos: KHRG]*

On November 6th, after the third day of abuse, 105 residents of Pi--- held a meeting to discuss possible courses of action and decided to flee that evening to several locations in Dweh Loh and Bu Tho Townships, assessing that the acute physical and food insecurity confronted by villagers in hiding in areas beyond SPDC control would be more conducive to their survival and livelihoods activities than remaining near their own homes under worsening exploitative and abusive SPDC control. It is not uncommon for villagers from areas of Dweh Loh and Bu Tho Township with a strong SPDC or DKBA military presence to make such decisions to become strategically displaced to areas with a less permanent SPDC and DKBA presence, as a means of escaping from regular human rights abuses. Dozens of hiding villages have been established in remote parts of Meh Nyu and Meh Ku village tracts in Bu Tho Township, which have more mountainous terrain and are more difficult to control.

Living in these areas brings greater physical and food security risks as they are areas in which SPDC and DKBA forces place landmines and launch intermittent attacks against inhabited villages and agricultural operations in order to force their inhabitants to relocate to controlled areas; villagers who choose to flee to such non-state spaces typically have no established farmland and limited short-term food supplies. The living conditions in non-state controlled

spaces of Papun District have been reported in detail in other KHRG reports.[12] It is important to note here, however, that individuals and communities living in hiding appear to have evaluated the risks of irregular attacks and violent abuses, as well as food insecurity, in such areas against the severe damage to livelihoods caused by regular exploitative demands when living under military control and have decided that they stand a better chance of survival with dignity by living in areas beyond SPDC or DKBA control.

> *"We became Internally Displaced Persons because we were disturbed, abused and forced to do forced labour. We were forced to porter again and again. It never ends, [the demands] to porter. As we had to comply longer and longer, we couldn't afford to do that anymore so we fled… As the villagers could no longer suffer the abuses, they told the village head that they couldn't suffer anymore and if we continued to stay there, we'd face more problems. Then, they discussed together and fled at night. There were many belongings left in the village… The Burmese [SPDC] Army committed many different kinds of abuses. Due to their operations, we couldn't do our hill fields and we didn't have a chance to eat our bananas that we planted in our village, because we had to leave the village. We were forced to do forced labour and to go to porter. Five or six people had to go to porter per day. We were very tired of doing this as we were forced to do it longer and longer. Everything that we faced was difficult and a problem. So, we discussed with each other and fled."*
>
> - Saw Ni--- (male, 26), Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

> *"They informed us to go back and stay in our own village, but no one went back to stay... [Before the SPDC arrived in the village] We were able to live and do our livelihoods. We could do our livelihoods well. Since this year, we don't dare to stay due to the SPDC's heavy operations. They oppressed us and we fled. They ordered us four or five times per day. They ordered both men and women to work for them. They kept children in the army camp and under the sun. They looted our food and didn't allow us to pound paddy. They called us to attend a meeting. They also pretended that they didn't hear us although we complained."*
>
> - Naw Bo--- (female, 32), Pi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

These photos, taken on November 19th 2009, show residents of local communities in Bu Tho Township sharing rice and other supplies with villagers from Pi--- village in Dweh Loh Township who went into hiding at several sites around Dweh Loh and Bu Tho Townships. Assistance from and cooperation with host communities is a key protection strategy for villagers in eastern Burma seeking to evade military control and associated exploitative demands and violent abuse. *[Photos: KHRG]*

[12] See, for example: *Cycles of Displacement: Forced relocation and civilian responses in Nyaunglebin District*, KHRG, January 2009; *Food Crisis: The cumulative impact of abuse in rural Burma*, KHRG, April 2009.

Abuses by DKBA forces and local responses

Communities in Ma Htaw and the neighbouring village tracts also deal with further demands from soldiers from DKBA Gk'saw Wah Special Battalion #777. In July 2009 Gk'Saw Wah Battalion soldiers issued an order for several villages in Htee Moo Htah and Tee Tha Blu Htah village tracts in Dweh Loh Township to provide them with new recruits.[13] DKBA troops called village heads to a meeting to issue the demands, and followed this up with a written order one week later when conscripts had not yet been found.

> *"On July 14th 2009, we went to meet them in Paw Htee Ku[14] and they asked us to collect a villager in Ke--- to join the [DKBA] army as they had demanded one soldier from Ke--- village. We came back to arrange it for them, but we couldn't recruit anyone. A few days later, on July 20th 2009, they sent us a printed letter."*
>
> - Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

Most village heads had difficulty finding new recruits, and attempted to avoid meeting the demand. Villagers' hesitance to join the DKBA may be attributable to fears of poor living conditions and ill treatment among low-ranking soldiers; KHRG has previously published interviews with DKBA deserters indicating that conscripted troops serving in the rank and file do not receive adequate rations and are poorly treated; this includes physical abuse, which interviewees have cited in their reasons for desertion.[15] Saw Le---, the head of Ke--- village, also suggested that his villagers were unwilling to join the DKBA due to the perception that new recruits would be sent to fight in the joint SPDC/DKBA offensive against KNLA 7th Brigade positions in Pa'an District, conducted in mid-2009,[16] and would have to fight against other Karen soldiers:

> *"To make the offensive in Pa'an District, we couldn't recruit anyone because we thought that even if we joined, we wouldn't have any power because the DKBA army is Karen and the KNU [KNLA] is Karen. If we joined with the DKBA army, we'd have to fight other Karen and the Karen would fight each other. For us, we want unity. It isn't good to do like this."*
>
> - Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

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[13] KHRG has previously reported an increase in the DKBA's use of forced conscription since August 2008; see: "Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment, and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, May 2009. The recruitment drive was accelerated starting in May 2008 when it was decided that the DKBA needed to recruit an additional 3,000 troops to participate in the SPDC programme for cease-fire groups across the country to transform into Border Guard Forces (BGF) under at least partial SPDC control prior to elections scheduled for 2010. For more background on the use of forced recruitment by the DKBA and the group's proposed transformation into a Border Guard Force, see: "Forced recruitment of child soldiers: An interview with two DKBA deserters," KHRG, August 2009; "Abuse in Pa'an District, Insecurity in Thailand: The dilemma for new refugees in Tha Song Yang," KHRG, September 2009.

[14] Paw Htee Ku is a DKBA army camp located near Papun town at the northern end of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road. KHRG's field research indicates that as of December 2009, a detachment of DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Special Battalion #777 soldiers were stationed in Paw Htee Ku under Commander Hser Htee.

[15] Full transcripts of interviews with DKBA deserters are available in: "Forced recruitment, forced labour: interviews with DKBA deserters and escaped porters," KHRG, November 2009; and "Forced recruitment of child soldiers: An interview with two DKBA deserters," KHRG, August 2009.

[16] This campaign and its consequences for civilians in the area have been covered extensively in previous KHRG reports. See: "Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts," KHRG, May 2009; "Over 700 villagers flee to Thailand amidst fears of SPDC/DKBA attacks on a KNLA camp and an IDP camp in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009; "Over 3,000 villagers flee to Thailand amidst ongoing SPDC/DKBA attacks," KHRG, June 2009; "Update on SPDC/DKBA attacks on Ler Per Her and new refugees in Thailand," KHRG, June 2009; "Abuse in Pa'an District, Insecurity in Thailand: The dilemma for new refugees in Tha Song Yang," KHRG, September 2009; "Functionally Refoulement: Camps in Tha Song Yang District abandoned as refugees bow to pressure," KHRG, April 2010.

According to Saw Pu---, the headman of Gi--- village at the time of the recruiting drive, only a few villages met the full demand for recruits. At least one village, Mu---, was able to negotiate with DKBA authorities and make a payment of 800,000 kyat (US $820.51)[17] instead of supplying villagers as conscripts. DKBA troops resorted to arresting two villagers from Htee Theh Leh in their attempts to secure recruits, but were reportedly ordered to release them and refrain from conscripting troops in this manner by senior DKBA officers and monks. Many other village heads hoped to negotiate the request, and planned to visit DKBA officers in Gka Teh Tee camp together, in order to strengthen their bargaining position. Representatives of Ke---, Gi---, and Pr--- villages, however, went to the camp first and were promptly detained, threatened that they would themselves be conscripted, and were made to do forced labour for seven days. The other village heads heard about this while en route to the camp the next day, and managed to avoid this punishment. The following quotes, from three village heads who were ordered to provide conscripts to the DKBA, describe the detention and treatment of the leaders who visited Gka Teh Tee.

> *"One time [the DKBA] demanded soldiers; they demanded one person from my village. If our village were bigger, they'd have asked for more. That time we didn't give them anyone, we talked to them. They called us [to the DKBA camp]. We went after the Ke---, Pr--- and Gi--- village heads… We went but didn't arrive. They put them in prison."*
>
> - Saw Ka--- (male, 59), Ku--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

> *"The DKBA army demanded new recruits from our village when I was a village head. I was punished for eight days because we couldn't provide them the new soldiers. They demanded them in July [2009]. They demanded two people from our village, Gi---. I went to inform them that we couldn't provide them with new soldiers because no one dared to join the army. I went to inform them at Gka Teh Tee. Then, they punished me, made me dig a canal and holes. They provided us with food. I had to start working at 7 am and took rest and lunch at 11 am. Then, I started to work again from 12 to 4 PM in the afternoon. There were three village heads including Ke---, Pr--- and Gi--- that were not allowed to come [home]. After we worked for eight days, they gave us 5,000 kyat (US $5.13) per person."*
>
> - Saw Pu--- (male, 40) Gi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

> *"We went to inform them that we couldn't recruit anyone. They told us that since the village heads couldn't recruit anyone, we'd all have to be soldiers. They didn't let the village heads go back, and forced them to plant rubber trees and cut grass for seven days. Then, they let them come back. I didn't go myself, but had asked one of my villagers go instead of me. His name is Saw Y---, he's over 30 years old. I asked him and he told me that the DKBA provided them with food when they were working. They had to start working in the morning and took a rest at lunch time. Then, they had to start working again at 2:00 PM until in the evening at 5:00 PM. The DKBA Gk'Saw Wah battalion unit [in this area] was led by Htoo Lay. At night, they had to sleep in a monastery. There were three village heads from Gi---, Ke--- and [Pr---]. The next day, the other village heads came to the camp and people on the way told them about the three village heads that were arrested. Then, they didn't dare to go and meet the DKBA commander anymore and went back. Therefore, those who went back didn't have to do forced labour. Only three village heads that made the mistake to go had to do forced labour."*
>
> - Saw Le--- (male, 48), Ke--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

[17] All conversion estimates for the kyat in this field report are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the SPDC government's official fixed rate of US$1 = 6.5 kyat. As of August 20th 2010 this unofficial rate of exchange was US$1 = 975 kyat, and this figure is used for all calculations above.

Similar orders to provide soldiers for the DKBA were reported in other villages in the area. Naw Pl---, the village headwoman of Ga--- village, in Ma Htaw village tract, described to a KHRG researcher how she refused a local commander's order for recruits and appealed to a more senior authority, the Buddhist monk and nominal head of the DKBA U Thuzana, to have the order withdrawn.

> *"We had to work for the DKBA more than the SPDC… They demanded rice and forced military recruitment. At first they ordered our village to provide them with ten people but we refused it. I went to see U Thuzana and reported to him about the [local] DKBA's forced military recruitment. He called them and demanded them to stop forcing villagers to provide people. Now they've left their camp in our village. Since they returned to Papun [Town] they haven't come back to our village."*
>
> - Naw Pl--- (female, 54), Ga--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

Naw Pl---'s statement that DKBA troops demanded rice from her village has been confirmed by numerous villager accounts. Locals have told KHRG researchers that they were frequently required to provide rice, perform construction, and fabricate and deliver materials, as well as porter rations and serve as 'human minesweepers' for the DKBA units active near their villages.

> *"When they [DKBA troops] arrived in the village they ordered us to provide them with porters. The villagers had to carry their rations and equipment. They let the porters walk in front of them and they followed the porters later."*
>
> - Saw Mu--- (male, 48), Po--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

> *"Yes, we had to rebuild their military camp at Ma Htaw; there were around 20 people who went to do it on April 18th 2009. Other villages also had to go to do* loh ah pay[18] *for them. We had to rebuild their military camp twice a year. They stayed in their military camp for a while and then returned to Papun [Town]."*
>
> - Saw Ai--- (male, 49), Lo--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

> *"Last month the DKBA ordered a big tin of rice (16 kg. / 35.2 lb.) from us and we couldn't refuse them. On August 22nd 2009 they ordered us to send 100 bamboo poles to Ma Htaw. And then on September 17th 2009 we had to carry things for them to Na Gko Hta, and at that time three people went to do this work for the DKBA. And again on September 20th 2009 we had to provide two big tins of rice [32 kg. / 70.4 lb.] to them."*
>
> -Saw Ya--- (male, 36), L--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

On September 10th 2009, Commander Pah Hsee requested that Ma Htaw, Thwa Koh, Tar Hu Loh, Tha Ma Shu Kee, Khaw Gklah, Gka Dwee Koh and Haw Baw Koh villages supply 21 big tins (336 kg. / 739 lb.) of rice to his unit because their rations had run out and new supplies had not yet arrived. He promised to return the rice when new rations arrived, but threatened to enter the villages and confiscate the rice if his request was not met. Each village supplied three big tins of rice (48 kg. / 105.6 lb.), but did not receive any back from the commander before his unit vacated its camp at Ma Htaw and returned to Papun Town. This was not an isolated case, as residents of other villages reported being asked for rice at different times during the DKBA unit's deployment to the area.

> *"Recently, the DKBA ordered us to provide them with rice. My village had to give them one big tin [16 kg. / 35.2 lb.] and four bowls [6.3 kg. / 13.8 lb.] of rice. We had to carry it from our village to Ma Htaw military camp. At first they said they'd borrow it from us and would pay it back later, but when their rations arrived they didn't give it back to us. It wasn't just my village; the other villages also had to provide them rice. It was on August*

[18] "*Loh ah pay*" a Burmese term now commonly used in reference to forced labour, although traditionally referring to voluntary service for temples or the local community, not military or state projects.

17th 2009… His name [the commander demanding the rice] is Pah Hsee and he is Deputy Company Commander. He is under Battalion #777 [Company] Commander Htoo Loh."

- Saw Ai--- (male, 49), Lo--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

"Yes, Pa Htaw Lay and Pah Hsee ordered us to provide rice to their military camp. Pah Htaw Lay was the ration manager and Pah Hsee was the company commander. They demanded it in every village."

- Saw Mo---(male, 45), C--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

"Yes, they ordered us to give them rice. There were just 10 households in my village so I could provide them with three big tins [48 kg. / 105.6 lb.] of rice."

- Saw Ke--- (male, 28), Pa--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

The photo on the left, taken on February 7th 2010, shows women and children working at night in their village, weaving thatch to meet an order issued by a local DKBA unit in Bu Tho Township. The photo on the right, also taken on February 7th, shows the completed thatch shingles stacked against a fence after being delivered to the DKBA camp by the villagers. Residents of villages in central Papun District are frequently ordered by local SPDC or DKBA authorities to find, fabricate and deliver thatch and other building materials to their camps. *[Photos: KHRG]*

DKBA soldiers active in village tracts along the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road also demand that villages located near their camps fabricate and deliver large numbers of thatch shingles at least once per year. The thatch is used to repair roofs in DKBA camps. Villages also face ad hoc demands for bamboo poles, which are also used in camp construction, as well as for forced porters and *set tha*.[19]

"Their [the DKBA] military camp also was based at the edge of Ma Htaw village. They ordered our village to provide them with 300 bamboo poles. Each household had to cut 20 bamboo poles. We also had to repair their military camp. It was last month. Another thing, recently they ordered us to porter for them. Each village had to provide five people. At that time they planned to attack a KNU clinic, so they demanded that we carry their rations... In September 2009 they ordered us to provide them with thatch shingles. Each village had to provide them with 100 thatch shingles. The order was from Pah Hser Htee and Pah Yuh Khay. Last month they ordered us to do set tha *for them. We had to hire people to serve* set tha *for them at their camp. Each person was hired for 3,000 kyat (US $3.08) per day. We had to hire people for four weeks. Now they've returned to Papun Town, so we don't need to do things for them."*

- Saw Pe--- (Male, 24), R--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

[19] "*Set tha;*" Forced labour 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 such as cooking, collecting water and cutting firewood

"We've also had to serve set tha *for the DKBA at Ma Htaw in the past. Now they've returned to Papun Town, so we don't need to do anything for them… [And] They ordered us to send 800 thatch shingles. That was in August 2009."*

- U Mo--- (male, 55) D--- village, Dweh Loh Township (October 2009)

"The DKBA demanded 100 thatch shingles from each household in my village. They usually demand thatch in March. This year, we had to give them 4,000 pieces of thatch. They were ordered by troops from DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Battalion [#777], led by Lieutenant Moe Kyo."

- Saw Ho--- (male, 30), Sa--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

"Yes, the DKBA army will demand thatch soon. They demand it every year. Last year, they demanded 2000 pieces of thatch. They demand it once per year. The pieces of thatch that they demand must be four cubits long and a hand span [wide]… We have to send them to Baw Doh Neh… No, they don't buy the thatch. They demand it without any payment… DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Battalion [#777] demands the thatch."

- Saw Pu--- (male, 40) Gi--- village, Dweh Loh Township (December 2009)

Despite villager reports that the DKBA troops from the Gk'Saw Wah Special Battalion #777 returned to Papun town at the end of October 2009, their departure appears to have been only temporary. At the beginning of December, Gk'Saw Wah soldiers based at the DKBA camp at Paw Htee Ku under the command of Battalion Commander Maung Nu and Deputy Commander Hser Htih demanded 180,000 kyat (US $184.62) from ten villages in Bplaw Htah village tract in southern Lu Thaw Township, which is under DKBA and SPDC control. The officers said that the money would be used to hire porters in Papun town, since the villages had resisted previous demands to provide porters for the DKBA; Hser Htih said that he would have to pay 30,000 kyat (US $30.77) to hire a porter for the month. Kler Ahoh Der, Moe Thay Der, Wah Mee Day, Maw T'Kaw Der, Klaw Hta, K'Nel Kgaw Hta, Htoh Lwee Gkyoh and Ton Thay Pu villages were each ordered to pay 15,000 kyat (US $15.38), while Day Baw Kawh and Ter Gaw Kyo had to give 30,000 kyat (US $30.77) each. These demands were repeated in January and February 2010, meaning that as of March 2010 the villages had paid 540,000 kyat (US $553.85) to avoid sending involuntary porters to the DKBA. Villagers told a KHRG researcher that they had been ordered to make similar payments between December 2008 and April 2009. Statements from local villagers in Bplaw Htah village tract indicate that the ten villages listed above were not the only villages required to pay for hiring porters.

"DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Battalion #777 demands 30,000 kyat (US $30.77) per month for porters. They demand it every month. They started demanding this in December 2008. Actually, they ordered the people to be porters, but we apologized to them that we couldn't ask villagers to be porters because they were afraid to go. They demanded at least four months' pay for porters per year. They've already demanded it again this year, since December 2009. It's not only my village that has to pay, other villages such as Kler Ghoh Der, Wah Mee Day, Gklaw Pa, Htoh Lwee Gkyoh, Day Bpaw Gkaw, Ter Ghaw Gkyoh and Du Tha Htoo. These villages are very small so they have to combine with another village and pay together. Each household has to give 1,000 kyat (US $1.03), but some have to pay over 1,000 kyat for porters. They take money and hire porters by themselves in Papun town. The porters who are hired have to carry rations and take security when the army will cross the vehicle road."

- Saw Ti--- (male, 57), T--- village, Lu Thaw Township (February 2010)

"The DKBA started demanding money, 30,000 Kyat (US $30.77) for every month since December until now. They've demanded it for two months already. Each household has to pay 1,000 Kyat (US $1.03). This money is for porters. They use this money to hire other porters. They do not demand money for porters only from our village, they also demand from other villages. They also demanded 500 thatch shingles and 150 bamboo

poles on January 27th 2010. We have not provided these to them, yet. For these demands, they issued an order to our village demanding it."

- Saw Ka--- (male, 50), Ca--- village, Lu Thaw Township (February 2010)

Between January 27th and February 6th 2010, ten more villages in Bplaw Htah village tract, Lu Thaw Township received orders from Maung Nu and Hser Htih's unit to fabricate 2000 thatch shingles and 300 bamboo poles, and deliver them to Papun town. Dter Gaw Kyo, Day Baw Koh, Kler Ahoh Der and Wah Mee Day villages were each instructed to make and deliver 500 thatch shingles, while Toe Thay Pu, Du Breh Kyo, Toe Lwee Kyo, Ka Ne Kgraw Hta, Klaw Hta and Paw Ta Kaw Der villages were told to fabricate and deliver 50 bamboo poles each. Some villages faced demands for building materials from both DKBA and SPDC authorities.

"For the DKBA army, they demand thatch, bamboo, etc. They demand these every year starting in January. For the SPDC army, they demand 200-300 thatch shingles each year. They start demanding these every year in February. This year, they've already demanded 300 thatch shingles on February 21st 2010. Likewise, the DKBA army has also demanded 300 bamboo poles and thatch shingles. But, we haven't sent these to them yet. They demand the thatch to make the roof for the DKBA soldiers and with the bamboo they'll build army barracks... They demand bamboo when they need it and they demand thatch yearly. Before they demanded thatch and bamboo, they sent us a letter [instructing us] to attend the meeting. They demanded these things in the meeting."

- Saw Ti--- (male, 57), T--- village, Lu Thaw Township (February 2010)

On February 1st 2010, Commanders Maung Nu and Hser Htih demanded nine villagers from Doh Koh Wah and three villagers from Mon Hta to porter rice from Pgway Pgah to Doh Koh Wah. The next day on February 2nd 2010, they arrived at the DKBA camp in Ma Htaw and issued an order for the surrounding villages to fabricate and deliver 3300 thatch shingles to repair the roof of the camp. The unit demanded 500 thatch shingles from Ma Htaw village, 500 from Tar Huh Lo village, 500 from Noh Pa Htaw village, 500 from Thaw Koh Loh village, 300 from Tha M'Su Lo village, 400 from Khaw Gklah village, 250 from Ta Kwee Koh village and 350 from Boh Baw Koh village. Local sources told a KHRG researcher that the DKBA soldiers based along the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road make similar demands for thatch and bamboo three or four times each year; some of the materials are used to repair the roof and huts in DKBA camps, while others are used for houses for DKBA officers' families.

This photo, taken on February 7th 2010, shows villagers in central Papun District carrying thatch shingles to a DKBA camp. Soldiers stationed in the camp ordered the villagers to find, fabricate and deliver the thatch, which is typically used as a roofing material. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Conclusion

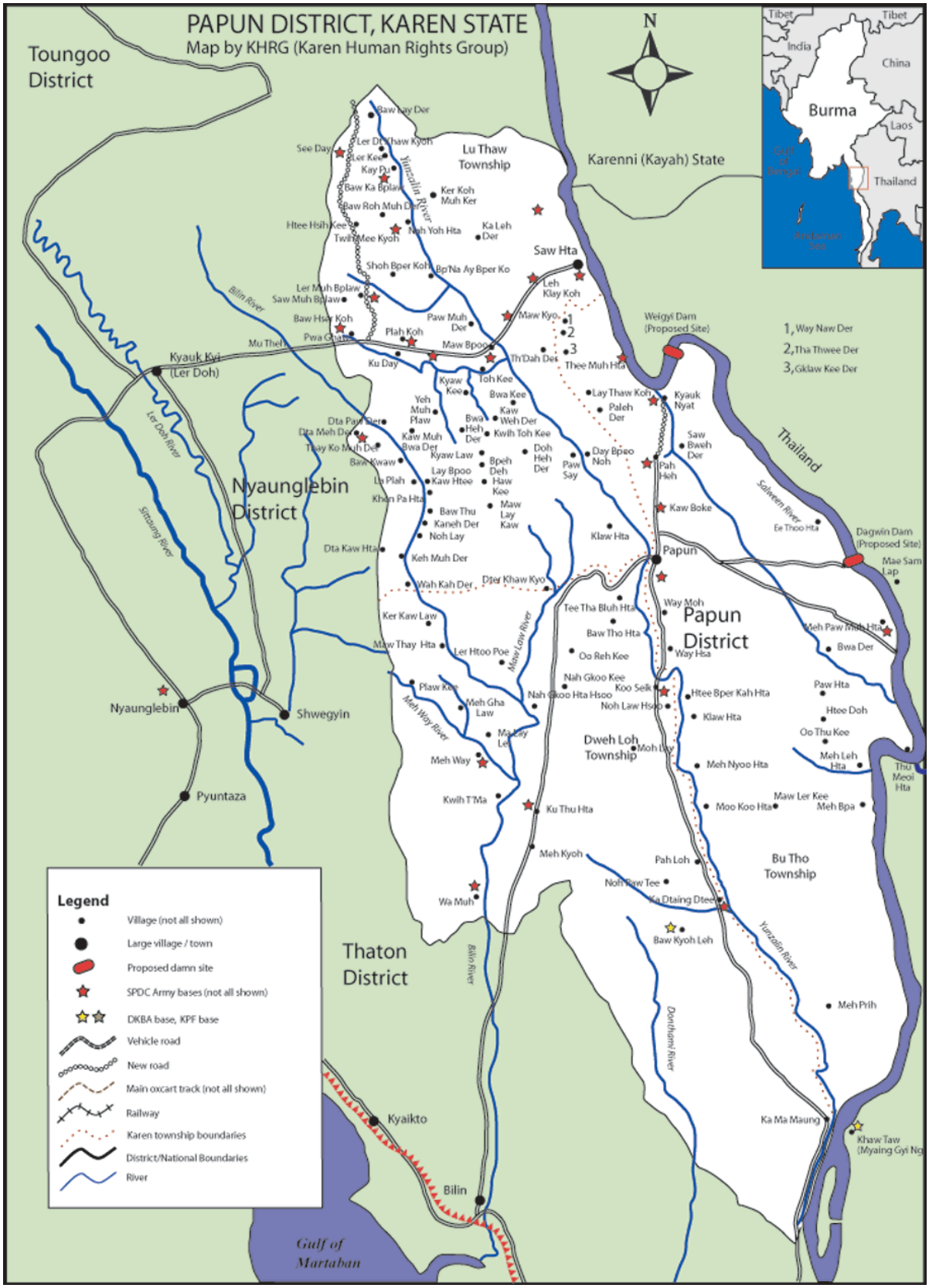
This report has provided examples of the heavy and frequent exploitative abuses – and irregular threats and violence – faced by villagers in central Papun District living in areas controlled by SPDC and DKBA forces, as well as the impact of such abuses on local livelihoods. Exploitative abuses appear to be a product of established SPDC and DKBA practices of utilising local civilian resources to support troop deployments and operations, and thereby maintain military control of a given area. That communities and their leaders in central Papun are sometimes able to reduce or avoid exploitative demands, despite the strong military presence near their

homes and the omnipresent threat of violence to encourage compliance with orders issued by local SPDC and DKBA units, testifies to the bravery and creativity with which villagers respond to protect themselves against perceived threats to their security and livelihoods. These protection responses have been developed based on local knowledge of what are feasible and effective methods of minimising the impact of regular abuses; they therefore indicate practical entry points for actors looking to materially improve human rights conditions in rural eastern Burma. Activities designed to support proven local strategies employed to avoid or mitigate the impact of exploitative abuse on security and livelihoods, such as negotiations with local military commanders, will be best placed to improve protection in communities that continue to confront abuse related to maintenance of SPDC and DKBA control.

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

- *Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River (August 2010)*
- *SPDC mortar attack on school in Papun District (February 2010)*
- *Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District (October 2009)*
- *Ongoing accounts of village-level resistance (July 2009)*
- *DKBA attack on villagers and the forced dismantling of a mosque in Papun District (July 2009)*
- *IDPs, land confiscation and forced recruitment in Papun District (July 2009)*
- *SPDC and DKBA road construction, forced labour and looting in Papun District (March 2009)*
- *Attacks, killings and the food crisis in Papun District (February 2009)*
- *Mortar attacks, landmines and the destruction of schools in Papun District (August 2008)*

Photos documenting the human rights situation in Papun District are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* (updated June 2010), *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* (updated June 2009) and other previous KHRG photo galleries and photo sets. These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at www.khrg.org.


PAPUN DISTRICT, KAREN STATE
Map by KHRG (Karen Human Rights Group)
N
Toungoo District
Karenni (Kayah) State
Thailand
Nyaunglebin District
Papun District
Thaton District
Dweh Loh Township
Bu Tho Township
Lu Thaw Township
Saw Hta
Papun
Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh)
Nyaunglebin
Shwegyin
Pyuntaza
Kyaikto
Bilin
Gulf of Martaban
Weigyi Dam (Proposed Site)
Dagwin Dam (Proposed Site)
Tibet
India
China
Burma
Laos
Thailand
Gulf of Bengal
Andaman Sea
Legend
Village (not all shown)
Large village / town
Proposed damn site
SPDC Army bases (not all shown)
DKBA base, KPF base
Vehicle road
New road
Main oxcart track (not all shown)
Railway
Karen township boundaries
District/National Boundaries
River

Karen Districts

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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles