



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Report from the Field

August 30, 2010 / KHRG #2010-F8

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### **Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control**

*This report presents information on the human rights situation in village tracts along the southern end of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road in southern Dweh Loh and Bu Tho townships. SPDC and DKBA units maintain control over strategic points in lowland areas of this part of southern Papun, including relocation sites and vehicle roads, and support their presence by levying a range of exploitative demands on the local civilian population. SPDC and DKBA forces also continue to conduct offensive military operations in upland areas of southern Papun; for villagers living beyond permanent military control, these activities entail exploitative abuses, movement restrictions and, in some cases, violence including military attacks. Communities in both lowland and upland areas employ a variety of strategies to protect themselves and their livelihoods from SPDC and DKBA abuses and the effects of abuse. Strategies documented in this report include negotiation; paying fines in lieu of compliance with demands; discreet semi- or false compliance, or overt non-compliance or refusal to meet demands; strategic displacement to areas beyond consolidated SPDC or DKBA control; and actively monitoring local security conditions to inform decisions about further self-protection responses. This is the last of four reports detailing the situation in Papun District's southern townships that have been released in August 2010. Incidents described below occurred between September 2009 and April 2010.*

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Battalions of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) continue to maintain a strong military presence and exercise considerable authority in the village tracts of Dweh Loh and Bu Tho townships that sit astride southern Papun District's Ka Ma Maung to Papun vehicle road. SPDC and DKBA forces can project military force throughout much of Meh Nyoo, Meh Gkoo, Meh Mweh, and Meh Gklaw village tracts in Bu Tho Township, and Ka Dtaing Dtee village tract in Dweh Loh Township, but fully consolidated control of some upland areas has not been established. SPDC and DKBA authority is strongest over civilians residing in low-lying areas in the floodplain of the Yunzalin River and near strategic points where military units are regularly deployed, including SPDC and DKBA camps, locations along the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road and in SPDC or DKBA-controlled relocation sites. Major relocation sites in this area include: Ka Dtaing Dtee, Baw Kyoh Leh, Noh Paw Htee, Meh Mweh Hta, Pah Loh, and Meh Nyoo Hta in



This photo, taken in November 2009, shows two villagers standing on the Ka Ma Maung to Papun vehicle road in southern Papun District. Residents of communities located along this road reported heavy exploitative demands from SPDC and DKBA forces deployed to the area in 2009. [Photo: KHRG]

Papun District and Khaw Taw (*Myaing Gyi Ngu*) in Pa'an District (see map).<sup>1</sup> Units from Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade also remain active in upland areas of southern Papun, staging irregular 'guerrilla' style attacks and placing landmines and booby traps in lowland areas.<sup>2</sup>

In areas of southern Papun under firm SPDC or DKBA control, the human rights abuses reported by villagers are typically exploitative in character, as locally deployed units from these armed groups support themselves by extracting significant material and labour resources from the local civilian population. Villagers in these areas also face irregular violent abuse and implicit or explicit threats of violence, usually to promote compliance with exploitative demands and other orders issued by local military authorities. Locals interviewed for this report described heavy forced labour demands including: the fabrication and delivery of materials and the provision of other forms of material support to local SPDC or DKBA forces; portering SPDC and DKBA rations and equipment; service as messengers in military camps (*set tha*);<sup>3</sup> involuntary labour clearing roadside brush; work on SPDC farms; building and maintaining houses for DKBA soldiers; labour in support of DKBA logging operations or other businesses; and forcible recruitment into the DKBA. Communities in areas subject to SPDC or DKBA authority also face movement restrictions which limit villagers' freedom of movement between their homes and agricultural projects, and constrain farming and other crucial livelihoods activities; individuals violating these restrictions risk death or injury from landmines or violent abuse if caught by SPDC or DKBA soldiers.

Villages in upland areas west and east of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road and in the Yunzalin River valley, meanwhile, are under nominal but unconsolidated SPDC and DKBA control; efforts to expand military control of territory and populations via offensive military operations and forced relocation of civilians remain ongoing. Villagers in these areas reported confronting exploitative abuses such as forced portering and ad hoc demands or looting when SPDC or DKBA units are based near their homes. Upland communities also, however, reported heavy movement restrictions, risks from landmines, and violent abuses including attacks on their villages, killings and physical abuse of individuals detained on suspicion of having had contact with the KNLA. Villager accounts indicate that forced relocation – and the use of military force against civilian populations that attempt to avoid relocation – remains a key tactic for military forces attempting to extend their authority into southern Papun.

Interviews with villagers and reports by KHRG field researchers indicate, however, that individuals and communities throughout southern Papun continue to employ a range of strategies to protect themselves and their livelihoods from human rights abuses and the harmful effects of abuse. Strategies of community self-protection described by villagers interviewed for this report appear to have been developed and employed according to local perceptions of protection threats, shaped by a number of factors that differ from village to village, including: the

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<sup>1</sup> This list is illustrative, not exhaustive. See: *Wholesale Destruction: The SLORC/SPDC Campaign to Obliterate All Hill Villages in Papun and Eastern Nyaunglebin Districts*, KHRG, February 1998; *Internal Displacement and Vulnerability in Eastern Burma*, TBBC, October 2004, p.69; *Damming at Gunpoint: Burma army atrocities pave the way for Salween dams in Karen State*, Karen Rivers Watch, November 2004, p.37. Although not located in Papun District, the DKBA headquarters at Khaw Taw (*Myaing Gyi Ngu*) has served as a major relocation destination for villagers from the village tracts of southern Bu Tho Township since the mid-1990's. See: "SLORC / DKBA Activities: Northern Karen Districts," KHRG, July 1995.

<sup>2</sup> 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, Doplaya District. See, Ashley South *Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict*, New York: Routledge, 2009 (2nd ed.), p.56.

<sup>3</sup> *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.

degree of SPDC or DKBA control in a given area; the character and intensity of abuses faced in a community; relationships between community members and local military personnel; and the extent to which abuses strain local food or financial resources and labour capacities, among other factors. Local protection strategies described by villagers appear to be primarily aimed at improving communities' physical security from violence or military attacks, and avoiding or reducing exploitative demands and other restrictions, and thereby securing access to labour, time and material or financial resources for local livelihoods. Protection responses described by villagers interviewed for this report include: negotiation with local military authorities; paying fines to avoid meeting demands; discreet semi- or false compliance, or overt non-compliance or refusal to meet demands; strategic displacement to areas beyond consolidated SPDC or DKBA control; and actively monitoring local security conditions to determine appropriate additional protection measures.



These photos, taken in November 2009, show the former residents of Wa--- village, Bu Tho Township, travelling from their hiding site in Meh Nyu Hta village tract to Wa--- to harvest paddy. The villagers abandoned Wa--- after soldiers from DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Special Battalion #777 became active near their community. Returning to abandoned villages to collect food supplies or harvest crops is just one of a number of protection strategies utilised by villagers in hiding to promote physical and food security during strategic displacement. [Photos: KHRG]

## Abuses and the maintenance of SPDC and DKBA control

Communities living in areas under consolidated SPDC and DKBA control in southern Papun face abuses from both dominant armed groups. In the following quotes, two village heads from village tracts in southern Bu Tho Township describe their experiences dealing with SPDC and DKBA units deployed near their villages:

*"I've served as a village head for seven years already... I've had to deal with both sides: I have to face SPDC forced labour, and also DKBA demands. The SPDC soldiers order villagers to provide them with chickens and pigs when they arrive in the village. The villagers don't have many animals to feed the SPDC; they're poor and just working for their daily survival. We follow their orders, but they sometimes they accuse us that we stay on the KNU's side [support the Karen National Union (KNU)/KNLA]. I also used to get beaten by them. As a village head I've been coping with various kinds of demands, therefore I'm so tired of the demands... The SPDC military is based close to our village, just 30 minutes [walk] from here. Recently they've ordered us to do forced labour ploughing their farms. We had to bring our own materials, but they fed us. Now, if they need us to do loh ah pay<sup>4</sup> for them, they'll first order us to meet them at their camp.*

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<sup>4</sup> *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.

*When we arrive, they tell us what we have to do for them... [The last time] They ordered us to work from 7 am till 11 am; after that they let us free. At that time, another village also had to go for loh ah pay; from my village there were 15 people who went."*

- Saw A--- (male, 39), C--- village, Bu Tho Township (July 2009)

*"I've been a village head for two years already... I have to represent the villagers. When the SPDC and DKBA order me, I have to meet with them. If they ask for something I have to come back and discuss it with villagers, and we solve the problem together... The first year I served as a village head, the SPDC didn't come to stay in our village, but they ordered us to provide them with thatch shingles. The DKBA also made the same demands as the SPDC. At the beginning of 2009 the DKBA came to stay in our village. They started to order porters from our village... They ordered villagers to cut bamboo poles for them and they built their military camp in a monastery compound. They stayed in the villages for two months; I had to provide them [villagers for] set tha, and each person had to serve set tha for three days. They had to find food for them and stayed with them. Some soldiers were not good to the villagers... They ordered us to go and pick up food for them from E---... They were from [DKBA] Gk'Saw Wah Battalion [#777]. They didn't give us any benefit while they were staying in the village. They ordered us to clean the weeds around our village... We spent two days cleaning the weeds."*

- B--- (male, 45), D--- village, Bu Tho Township (July 2009)

In some cases, villages have faced pressure to meet demands issued by multiple SPDC or DKBA units operating out of different camps located near their communities. On November 17<sup>th</sup> 2009, for example, villagers in F--- village in Meh Gklaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, were ordered to provide bamboo poles for re-building the SPDC camp at Koo Seik, in Dweh Loh Township. Twenty villagers, 19 men and one woman, went to find and cut bamboo in the jungle, and then delivered the poles to the camp at Koo Seik. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, residents of G--- and H--- villages were also ordered to cut and deliver 100 bamboo poles to the Koo Seik camp; 17 villagers spent the day completing the work. This was not the first time villages in these areas were forced to fabricate and deliver materials to the SPDC camp at Koo Seik; in the quote below Naw C---, the headwoman of F---, described having to fulfil the exact same demand as those described above.

*"[The SPDC military camp] is based at Koo Seik... Recently, they ordered us to cut 100 bamboo poles for them. Five households in my village went out to cut the bamboo poles... We have to bring with our own food whenever we go to clean their vehicle road. They don't always ask us to do this for them. Personally, I always go to do loh ah pay with my villagers."*

- Naw C--- (female, 55), F--- village, Bu Tho township (August 2009)

In a similar incident, on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010 village heads in Meh Nyoo village tract in Bu Tho Township were ordered by SPDC commanders to instruct their villages to each fabricate and deliver 300 thatch shingles to the SPDC camp at Htwee Thee Uh,<sup>5</sup> in Dweh Loh Township. On February 5<sup>th</sup> villages that could not avoid the order began delivering the thatch to Htwee Thee Uh camp. I--- village in Meh Nyoo village tract is already an SPDC relocation site in which SPDC and/or DKBA units are regularly based; these units impose their own additional demands on villagers in the area and frequently restrict villagers' travel to their agricultural projects and surrounding villages. KHRG's most recent information indicates that in 2010 a unit from SPDC LIB #702 led by Captain Phyo Way Ko Ko replaced a unit from SPDC LIB #219 at Htwee Thee Uh; it is not clear, however, whether the order to fabricate thatch was issued by SPDC LIB #702, or local SPDC or DKBA commanders in I---.

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<sup>5</sup> For more examples of incidents involving soldiers based in Htwee Thee Uh camp, see "Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control," KHRG, August 2010.

In Ka Dtaing Dtee village tract, which lies on both sides of Ka Ma Maung to Papun road on the western bank of the Yunzalin river in southern Dweh Loh Township, villagers face heavy demands for forced labour due to strong SPDC, and particularly DKBA control of the area. Residents of villages in Ka Dtaing Dtee village tract have described being forced to provide food, thatch, bamboo and firewood to local military units; to provide villagers as porters and minesweepers, and as labour constructing bridges, DKBA camps, and houses and toilets for DKBA families; and, in at least one case, to provide labour and materials for the personal business of a DKBA soldier.

In such heavily controlled areas, strategic flight or outright refusal to meet SPDC or DKBA demands for forced labour or the provision of material support are often not available options for villagers seeking to protect themselves from the harmful effects of abuse. Instead,

communities and their leaders employ more subtle strategies to reduce demands, and thus mitigate the impact of those demands on delicate rural livelihoods. One strategy reportedly utilised is to comply with a given SPDC or DKBA forced labour demand, but to supply less than the requested amount of labourers, thereby freeing up one or two villagers to pursue their livelihoods and provide for their families, and perhaps cooperate to support the livelihoods of those required to perform labour. In the following quotes, three long-serving village heads from Ka Dtaing Dtee village tract describe the range of regular human rights abuses they and their communities face, and the balance they must strike between seeking to mitigate those abuses on the one hand, and not incurring punishment by local authorities on the other.



This photo, taken on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2010, shows a villager fabricating thatch to satisfy an exploitative demand issued by a local DKBA unit in Meh Mweh village tract, Bu Tho Township. [Photo: KHRG]

*“The DKBA is very awful. We have to cut wood and make toilets for their families and we’ve had to do this [since] ten months ago... Even though our village is small they demand three people for portering. I’ve told them that three people is too much for us [to provide] because we have just a few households but they said ‘No, you have to provide them.’ We have to give them porters because the DKBA has power over us... We have to suffer a lot. Villagers aren’t rich but they have to give up their time to go and porter; it takes five or six days each time they go to porter... Mostly [the DKBA demands] us to porter, weave thatch for their fences, dig their toilets, roof their houses and cut bamboo at J---. Also, in my village there’s a DKBA soldier. His family lives there and [we have to] make firewood for them. They don’t pay us. If we don’t do it, they’ll line us up on the road and shoot us. It hasn’t been done, but we can’t say that they won’t do that. His name is Maung D---... His wife boils bamboo shoots and sells them. That means we have to make firewood for boiling the bamboo shoots. Last year, we were given responsibility for [building] three houses at J---. We have to cut bamboo, dig toilets and roof the houses once a year... We have to send one or two people at a time every year and we’ll have to do it again soon, in March [2010]... It’s not only my village that has to suffer, but every village in [our] village tract... Just suffering like this is enough because in our village, people don’t have farms; they do daily labour [wage labour]. It harms us when we have to do forced labour... DKBA [Gk’Saw Wah Battalion] #777 is the most active here; the commander is Bo K’Baw Yu, and the company commander is Bo Maung Soe... Sometimes they’ve demanded ten people and we’ve given eight people, [and*

said] 'We can't give you the other two.' We make a competition sometimes before we give them labourers."

-Saw E--- (male, 56), K--- village, Dweh Loh Township (February 2010)

*"Since this month [November 2009], the SPDC army hasn't demanded any forced labour. But, the DKBA demanded three porters from our village when commander Pah Nwee started an offensive with over 100 soldiers. Actually, they demanded four villagers but we gave them only three. They started to leave Ka Dtaing Dtee on November 14<sup>th</sup> 2009 at 7:30 am. The villagers had to carry five bottles of cooking oil, a viss (1.6 kg. / 3.6 lb.) of salt, etc. They went for six days. The villagers had to stay in Ka Dtaing Dtee for three days; they were F---, 28; Ko G---, 25; and H---, 50. In the past, they've demanded thatch and bamboo, and we have to go and repair their houses in Ka Dtaing Dtee every year, too. They order us to do this in March or April. They also demand thatch and bamboo every year. They don't pay us for repairing their houses... They demand thatch from villages which can provide thatch and bamboo from villages which can provide bamboo. If the villages can't provide either thatch or bamboo, they order them to go and build two or three houses for the DKBA soldiers."*

-Saw I--- (male, 45), L--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

*"The DKBA army from Meh Mweh demanded chicken and forced labour. They came to M--- and demanded ten people to do forced labour. At that time, I wasn't here and they demanded it from the village headwoman; it was in September. They told us these people had to build their camp at Meh Mweh. The headwoman didn't give them the people and they ordered five viss (8.2 kg. / 18 lb.) of chicken instead. She gave them three viss (4.9 kg. / 10.8 lb.) of chicken and apologized that she couldn't give [more]. This demand came from DKBA Battalion #666 under Commander Than Sain. In November, the SPDC army based in Htee Hsaw Meh demanded two bullock carts and we gave them only one bullock cart. They said that they'd use the cart to carry bamboo; actually, they used it to clear landmines. They carried only one or two pieces of bamboo [on the cart]. They knew that there were landmines in those areas; no one travelled there. The owner of the bullock cart told them that he didn't dare to go but they replied that it wasn't a problem, that people travelled there everyday... Fortunately, the bullocks didn't step on any landmines. The owner had to sleep a night [away from the village]; they let him go in the morning. The owner of the cart was forced to go to Htee Hsaw Meh... Previously, our village was ordered to build a bridge, but the village headwoman didn't go. We didn't dare to go any more. When we went the first time, the headman of N--- village got injured by a landmine. They ordered us to go twice, but we didn't go. Finally, we had to do logging for the bridge in October. We had to cut more than 20 trees. Five people from M--- went to cut the trees. The logs had to be ten feet in length. After the logging, bullock carts were ordered again to carry them. Nine villages including N---, O---, M---, P---, Q---, R--- had to carry the wood. M--- village provided five villagers to cut the trees, but we couldn't provide bullock carts that time. Later, they called M--- villagers, and the villagers didn't go [to meet DKBA officers] anymore. They wrote a letter to the village head and it said 'If you are our enemies, you don't need to come.' The villagers don't dare to go because they're afraid to get injured by landmines... The year before last we were ordered to bring tree posts, thatch, and bamboo and were forced to build houses for the DKBA army. They didn't pay us any money; they didn't even provide us with food though we went to build a house for them. Previously, we were forced to build the bridge in R---. The vehicle road on which the bridge was built goes from Ka Ma Maung to Papun Town."*

- U J--- (male, 46), M--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)



The photo on the left, taken on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2010, shows villagers from C--- village in Meh Gklaw village tract clearing roadside brush. The villagers were ordered to carry out this labour by soldiers from SPDC LIB #340 based in Ra--- village, and were not paid or provided food. The photo on the right, taken on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, shows a villager from Je--- village in Bu Tho Township delivering thatch fabricated to meet a forced labour demand issued by local SPDC soldiers. Je--- villagers reportedly face exploitative demands from both SPDC and DKBA forces active near their community. [Photos: KHRG]

## Abuse and the expansion of SPDC and DKBA control

Since most villages and relocation sites under SPDC or DKBA control in southern Dweh Loh and Bu Tho townships are in close proximity to upland areas over which military control has not been fully established, civilians in southern Papun are also impacted by SPDC and DKBA attempts to expand into new areas. Beginning on September 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, as the annual rainy season drew to a close, SPDC and DKBA units initiated offensive operations in the village tracts along the southern end of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road. SPDC units from LIB #219 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Soe Win and DKBA units from Battalion #666 and Gk'Saw Wah Special Battalion #777 were reportedly involved in the campaign. Residents of S--- village, Bu Tho Township told a KHRG researcher that approximately 130 soldiers in total were active in Meh Mweh, Meh Nyoo, and Meh Gklaw village tracts, and that civilians living in areas beyond state control were attacked by patrols and with indiscriminate shelling. As of September 16<sup>th</sup> the interviewees said that 300 villagers had already fled from Meh Nyoo village tract deeper into upland areas, to avoid military attacks or forced relocation by SPDC and DKBA troops.

Villagers living in areas in or adjacent to the areas of increased military activity had to confront demands for forced labour and for the provision of material support, especially food, whenever soldiers entered their villages; some villages faced additional demands for forced recruitment issued by DKBA officers. These villages were also placed under tight movement restrictions; residents caught in violation of these restrictions risked being shot on sight, regardless of whether they had been informed about the new regulations.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 a column of 40 DKBA soldiers led by Commander Saw Ba Yoh rotated from T--- village to U--- village. They ordered six residents of U--- to serve as messengers (*set tha*) each day for the week that they stayed in the village: a total of 42 villagers for the week. On September 17<sup>th</sup> this DKBA unit rotated again to G--- village, where they were joined by 20 soldiers from SPDC LIB #219. The SPDC and DKBA commanders called a meeting with the villagers when they arrived, during which they ordered G--- to provide seven villagers to perform *set tha* each day, a total of 56 labourers for the eight days that the columns remained in the village. The villagers were forced to collect firewood, carry water, and collect bamboo shoots and mushrooms for the soldiers to eat. On September 24<sup>th</sup> the soldiers reportedly looted ten chickens belonging to residents of G--- village; U K--- (male, 40) and Saw L--- (male, 43) each had two chickens taken, while U M--- (male, 43) lost six chickens. When the SPDC and DKBA

units left the village later in the day on September 24<sup>th</sup>, the seven villagers from G--- sent for *set tha* that day were ordered to porter military supplies back to I--- village.

After arriving in I---, the soldiers ordered six villagers per day for *set tha*, and demanded five big tins of rice (80 kg. / 176 lb.) and six chickens from the residents of the village. The SPDC and DKBA columns remained in I--- until September 30<sup>th</sup>, during which time they sent smaller patrols into the surrounding villages; these units made additional ad hoc demands on the communities they visited. V--- village, for example, was ordered to provide two big tins of rice (32 kg. / 70 lb.). On September 25<sup>th</sup>, one chicken, one goat, and one duck were taken from three villagers in W-- village by a patrol of ten DKBA soldiers led by Saw Hsa Wah (aka Pah Lo). On September 27<sup>th</sup>, a larger patrol demanded an additional five big tins of rice (80 kg. / 176 lb.) from G--- village. On September 30<sup>th</sup> 2009, the SPDC LIB #219 and the DKBA troops again left I--- to return to the SPDC camp at Htwee Thee Uh, demanding seven villagers to porter their equipment and rations.

At least one villager was killed during September 2009 while being forced to serve as a porter for the DKBA. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, a patrol of ten DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Battalion soldiers ordered the headman of T--- village, Saw N--- (male, 40), to porter supplies between X--- and Y--- villages in Bu Tho Township. Before arriving in Y--- village the group encountered a KNLA patrol and exchanged fire; three DKBA soldiers were wounded in the clash, and Saw N--- was shot and killed.

## DKBA forced recruitment

In addition to demands for messengers and forced porters, DKBA units active in September 2009 also attempted to forcibly recruit for military service residents of the communities they entered. On September 14<sup>th</sup> DKBA Gk'Saw Wah Battalion #777 officers based in I--- issued an order to a meeting of village leaders, instructing villages in Meh Gkoo, Meh Nyoo and Meh Gklaw village tracts to provide villagers to serve as DKBA soldiers. Villages were ordered to send one or two villagers to meet the recruitment order, depending on the size of each village.

If villages were unwilling or unable to provide soldiers, they were told they would have to pay a fine of 1,500,000 kyat (US \$1,530)<sup>6</sup> for each soldier that could not be provided. On September 17<sup>th</sup> DKBA soldiers visited G--- village to collect their recruits, and the village leader was able to successfully negotiate a payment of 600,000 kyat (US \$612) for each demanded soldier instead of providing villagers. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, DKBA Commander Ba Yoh demanded that I--- village provide its quota of soldiers; again, the village leaders were able to negotiate the demanded sum down from 1,500,000 kyat (US \$1,530) to 600,000 kyat (US \$612) per recruit. Z---, Ba--- and Ca--- villages also reportedly each paid 600,000 kyat (US \$612) instead of sending one of their community members to serve in the DKBA.

The DKBA's September 2009 forced recruitment campaign also extended south to Ka Dtaing Dtee village tract in Dweh Loh Township, on the western bank of the Yunzalin River.

*"When they demand soldiers, we have to protect [ourselves]... In my village, there were no people [to be soldiers] so I had to help them with 250,000 kyat (US \$255) because I couldn't give them soldiers... They said they'd have to get one person instead of our villager, so we had to help them, and they'd find [someone]. It was [DKBA Gk'Saw Wah] Battalion #777; I know the name of the previous commander was Bo Too Lu and later it was Major K'Baw Yu. We gave [the payment] to Bo Moo K'Baw Yu... He said he'd hire*

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<sup>6</sup> 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 30th 2010 this unofficial rate of exchange was US\$1 = 980 kyat, and this figure is used for all calculations above.

someone, maybe he gave [the money] to the person he hired... In Da---, they forcibly arrested three people. One was married and drank too much so they didn't take him. They took two single men. They had asked the village head [for recruits] but the village head didn't give them anyone, so they arrested [the men]. One [of the villagers who was arrested] was 26 or 27 and the other one was 23 or 24 years old... I haven't paid them [all the money] yet... They said if we can't pay they'd arrest fathers with only one or two children; if I look in my village, most people are fathers of one or two children. I was afraid so I had to give them money. We've seen that they arrested people at Da---, and we worry about that because most fathers with one or two children are 19, 20 and 21 years old. This doesn't cause any problem for me, but it's a problem to the villagers. The villagers can't pay. Until now they haven't paid everything [the total amount of the fine].”

-Saw E--- (male, 56), K---, Dweh Loh Township (February 2010)

“The other thing that I want to talk about is the DKBA demanding soldiers. Our villagers didn't want to go and we gave them money. They demanded 1,000,000 kyat (US \$1,020) but we gave them only 520,000 kyat (US \$530)... They often demand money for recruitment. I told them about the difficulties in my village and that my villagers hadn't come to give me money, yet... As the villagers can't give me enough money to reach the amount that they demanded, they can't do anything. The whole village has to pay for the recruitment. For our village, they ordered us to combine with Fa--- village and provide a soldier to them. So, L--- village had to pay 750,000 kyat (US \$765) and Fa--- village had to pay 250,000 kyat (US \$255). We had to give money because we didn't go and join the army. This demand came from Commander K'Baw Yu from Gk'Saw Wah Battalion [#777] based in Baw Gkyoh Htar... They told us that they'd hire another person with the money that they demanded from us. In our opinion, it seems they won't hire anyone because they went to arrest people in P--- village to join the [DKBA] army... Ga-- - village didn't have give any recruits, therefore our villagers sometimes complained that although the other villages didn't give any recruits, they can stay [they don't have to flee their villages or be relocated]. For us, we gave them as much as we could so that we'd be able to stay, too. So some villagers have decided not to continue paying the money anymore. I also went to meet with a monk, and the monk told me that we don't have to give [money] anymore, but we have to tell them [the DKBA] wisely and deal with them patiently. The monk suggested I wait until October and see. The case will be done when this month is over so we're waiting to see until the end of October. Now, they've asked me once when I'm going to give them the last 48,000 kyat (US \$49). I replied that I wasn't sure about the date. 'If the villagers come to give it to me, I'll come and give it to you' [I said]... They also arrested people to join the army in M--- village. They demanded a person and arrested two people to join the army from this village. At first, our village decided not to give the rest of the money, but when we saw that they arrested people from M--- village... we re-considered. At first they had demanded only one person, but if they arrested people, they'd arrest two or three villagers, and we'd face more difficulties.”

-Saw I--- (male, 45), L--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

“The DKBA army demanded recruits in September 2009. At first, they demanded only one person. Although they demanded one soldier, no one wanted to go. We told them that the villagers didn't dare to go and they [the DKBA] came to our village themselves. They called a meeting and ordered us to draw a lottery. No one dared to do the lottery, either. They slept a night in our village and in the morning they arrested villagers to join the army. They arrested two villagers. Deputy Commander Gkoh Htoo along with 20 soldiers arrested O---, P--- and another man, Q---. But when they arrived there [at their camp] they released U Q--- to come back. They didn't let the other two villagers come back... P--- is about 21 years old and O--- is 25. We heard they were attending military training in Khaw Taw [Myaing Gyi Ngu]. Their parents went to see them, but they [the DKBA] wouldn't release these two boys. For O---, they didn't release him... [But] N---

village hired him back since their village hadn't provided a soldier, yet. So, O--- became a soldier for N--- village... They paid 800,000 kyat (US \$816) for O---. M--- village also had to help P---'s parents because he became a soldier representing our village. At first, [Commander] Gkoh Htoo told us that it'd be enough if we helped them with [a payment of] 100,000 kyat (US \$102). Later, when they came back, they told us that P--- had asked for 800,000 kyat (US \$816) to pay for [his release]. Until now, we've only given them 100,000 kyat (US \$102). We gave the money to his mother... It was DKBA [Gk'Saw Wah] Battalion #777. They're based in Paw T' Ru. It takes two to three hours by boat from our village to Paw T' Ru. It's close to Thaw Htar."

- U J--- (male, 46), M--- village, Dweh Loh Township (November 2009)

## DKBA movement restrictions

While the SPDC and DKBA units were conducting offensive operations in September 2009, some villages were reportedly placed under tight movement restrictions by soldiers active near their homes. Villagers risked being shot on sight, injured by landmines, or detained and subjected to violent abuse as suspected KNLA supporters if caught violating the restrictions.



The photo on the left, taken in November 2009, shows villagers in Meh Gklaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, harvesting paddy while DKBA forces are not active in their area. Residents of communities across southern Papun reported that in 2009 they were placed under tight movement restrictions whenever DKBA units were active near their homes, limiting their access to agricultural projects. The photo on the right, taken on September 24<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Na---, from Ke--- village in Meh Mweh village tract, with one of his two children. Na---'s wife died ten days after giving birth to their second child; DKBA movement restrictions prevented her from travelling to a medical facility for the delivery. Na--- and other residents of his village later went into hiding in Lu Thaw Township to avoid a DKBA relocation order. [Photos: KHRG]

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 2009, a group of 40 soldiers from DKBA Battalion #666 led by company Commander Saw Tin Win entered Ha--- village at approximately 3 am. Ha--- is located in Meh Gkoo village tract, Bu Tho Township, and has been under SPDC control since 1995. At 5 am the soldiers spotted Saw R---, a 45-year-old resident of Ha--- village, as he was going to work on his farm in violation a movement restriction that had been imposed on the village. Saw R--- was shot and fell to the ground, having been wounded in his left side. Commander Tin Win reportedly picked up Saw R---'s flashlight and beat him with it until he died.<sup>7</sup> Later that day, Tin Win ordered the head of Ha--- village, Saw S--- (male, 39) to meet him. When Saw S--- arrived,

<sup>7</sup> This incident has been mentioned in a previous KHRG report; see: "Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District," KHRG, October 2009. The report cited a Karen Information Center (KIC) news bulletin. KHRG has since received its own, more current, information about the incident, as reflected in the description above. The previous reports did not specify the name of the DKBA commander or unit that perpetrated the act, and only stated that Saw Htoh Gkee had been shot and killed.

he was beaten and punched in the head by Tin Win without being asked any questions. The next day, on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2009, the unit continued its movement and arrived in X--- village, Bu Tho Township. Outside the village, they encountered Saw T---, a villager in violation of the movement restrictions; platoon commander Pah Dah reportedly kicked and beat Saw T--- with his rifle.

On September 17<sup>th</sup> 40 soldiers from DKBA Battalion #777 led by company commander Gkaw Pee arrived in Ja--- village, Bu Tho Township, to collect forced recruits that the village had previously been ordered to provide. While there, Saw U--- (male, 35) and V--- (male 53), two residents of Ja---, were accused of communicating with the KNLA, detained, and punched in the face and kicked by DKBA soldiers. It is not clear on what grounds the men were accused of having made contact with the KNLA, although statements made by villagers in the area indicate that they men may have been caught in violation of a movement restriction. The fact that they received public, summary punishment, however, suggests that the men were beaten as an example to other villagers, to instil fear and promote compliance with future DKBA orders and restrictions.

*“If the DKBA doesn’t stay in the village we can work as much as we want, but now we aren’t allowed to travel outside the village. If we go out they’ll accuse us that we’re connected with the KNU/KNLA.”*

- B--- (male, 45), D--- village, Bu Tho Township (July 2009)

*“They restrict us from travelling outside of our village and they don’t allow us to meet with anyone. If the KNU calls us to a meeting, they don’t allow us to go. If they heard anyone secretly went to meet with the KNU, they’d kill him or her.”*

- Saw W--- (male, 20), Ka--- village, Bu Tho Township (December 2009)

On September 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 soldiers from a combined SPDC and DKBA force consisting of 70 soldiers on patrol in D--- village, Bu Tho Township, shot and killed Saw X---, a deaf and mute 19-year-old villager, when he failed to respond to soldier who called to him. The SPDC troops were from LIB #219 and under the command of So Htun, while the DKBA unit was from DKBA Battalion #666 and commanded by Saw Tin Win. Saw X--- was returning to D--- village from tending his buffaloes with another villager, described to KHRG’s field researcher as the mother of Naw Y---, when they were spotted by one of the patrolling soldiers. When Saw X--- did not respond to the soldier’s call, he was shot, at which point he attempted to run towards D--- and away from the gunfire. Naw Y---’s mother shouted to the soldiers that they were just villagers, but more soldiers opened fire. Saw X--- was struck with five bullets and wounded in both his legs and his head; he died after reaching the school compound in the village. A relative of Saw X--- described the incident to a KHRG field researcher, including the compensation offered by Commander So Htun.

*“They arrived in the village on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 and in the same day they shot my [relative]. His name was Saw X--- and he was 19 years old. He was shot by the SPDC at two o’clock in the afternoon; it was on Friday. He was shot when was coming back from taking care of his buffaloes. He was shot by SPDC LIB #219. The commander was So Htun. He gave me 50,000 kyat (US \$51) as compensation, and he told me that he didn’t have money but he collected this money from his soldiers. On September 19<sup>th</sup> they left the village and went to Maw Law Kee. He also told me that he had never made such a big mistake before... My [relative] was hurt by five bullets from their guns. We buried my [relative] the same day; they [the SPDC and DKBA soldiers] didn’t come to help us.”*

-Ra--- (male, 57), D--- village, Bu Tho Township (October 2009)

## Increased landmine risks

All armed groups active in Papun's southern townships make extensive use of landmines. Villagers interviewed for this report, however, placed particular emphasis on recent operations by the DKBA, reporting that DKBA forces had laid a large number of landmines prior to and during their period of increased activity in September 2009. On September 28<sup>th</sup> 2009, a KHRG researcher accompanied local Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)<sup>8</sup> militia members during the removal of a DKBA landmine in Tha Bluh Hta village. The next day, in Gklaw Hta village, they removed two more landmines laid directly in front of the village school and beside a path leading to the school.<sup>9</sup> In the following quote, a deserter from DKBA Battalion #666 described the extent of the DKBA's use of landmines in areas in which it is active.

*"They usually plant landmines on small paths, beside the river, at the bottom of the mountains and on the mountains. They plant landmines to use against their enemies [KNLA soldiers] and also against villagers, according to the way they plant the landmines. Their enemies don't usually step on the landmines that they've planted. Mostly animals such as cows, buffalos, pigs and chickens step on the landmines. They don't mark the places where they've planted landmines on maps. They don't inform the villagers before they want to plant them. They inform the villagers after they've planted the mines and tell the villagers not to go the places where they've planted them... They plant landmines whenever they arrive anywhere. They usually plant them in people's workplaces such as betelnut, betel leaf, and durian plantations, and they also plant them beside people's farms and around villages. Some soldiers inform the villagers, but some don't."*

-Saw Z--- (male, 37), La--- village, Bu Tho Township (November 2009)



These photos, taken in April 2010, show different types of landmines used by DKBA forces in southern Papun District. The photo on the left shows a factory-produced Claymore mine, which are supplied by the SPDC Army to the DKBA, and are used by SPDC, DKBA and KNLA forces. The photo on the right shows improvised landmines of the type used by the DKBA and KNLA. The mines depicted here were carried by former DKBA soldiers who deserted from their unit in Bu Tho Township, Papun District. Villagers reported that DKBA soldiers placed a large number of landmines in southern Papun in 2009, including in agricultural projects and close to villages. [Photos: KHRG]

The DKBA's practice of not informing villagers of where landmines have been placed appears to reinforce movement restrictions on civilians. Villagers interviewed by KHRG researchers have reported that DKBA soldiers have mined their agricultural projects and abandoned villages, restricting or preventing civilian access; interviewees said that, if they were warned about the landmines, they were only informed about general areas that had been mined and instructed to

<sup>8</sup> The KNDO is the militia wing of the KNU.

<sup>9</sup> The incident of the mines placed in front of Gklaw Hta school was previously reported by KHRG. See: *Grave Violations: Assessing abuses of child rights in Karen areas during 2009*, KHRG, January 2010.

avoid them altogether, regardless of whether or not they had land under cultivation in the newly restricted areas. When enforced in this manner, movement restrictions can be far more devastating to livelihoods than simple written or verbal orders backed by the threat of detention and/or summary punishment. In the latter case, villagers can attempt to covertly violate prohibitions on visiting their fields and carry out vital agricultural activities despite the increased physical risk involved in doing so; this approach is particularly viable in areas where DKBA or SPDC soldiers rotate in and out of villages, and residents actively monitor and share information about troop movements. When DKBA units deploy landmines around villages and in villagers' plantations and fields, however, without telling locals where mines have been placed, individuals must risk death or injury to engage in everyday livelihoods activities without knowing the locations of mines or else give up whatever labour, financial and material resources they have invested in their agricultural projects.

*"They only allow us to work in our workplaces in the daytime, and then we have to come back and sleep in our village. They don't allow us to sleep in our workplaces. They also plant landmines so that we won't dare to go to our workplaces and look after our buffalos. When I went to porter for the DKBA army, they said that they couldn't go to one place or to another place because they were afraid to step on landmines. They can't take out landmines which were planted by DKBA battalions previously active in the area, as those battalions have already rotated out. The landmines are handmade. They're made with pipes and some with wood. Due to DKBA activity close to our village, some villagers couldn't look after their hill fields even though they had already planted their paddy. Last year, we didn't dare to go and take our rice which we left in our fields, because DKBA soldiers planted a lot of landmines and didn't tell us where the landmines were."*

- Ba--- (male, 53) Ma--- village, Bu Tho Township (December 2009)

*"I have four children and one died from a landmine... The child who was killed by the landmine was Naw Ca---. She was 10 years old. She followed her grandmother to collect chickens which were left in our abandoned village. We told them not to go back, but they went secretly. My daughter died immediately when the landmine exploded. They stepped on a landmine planted by DKBA soldiers. The DKBA didn't inform us where they had planted landmines... My occupation is doing agriculture, farming hill fields. However, we don't have enough food and we have to buy rice in Na---. The DKBA soldiers are now in Na---, so we can't go and buy rice any more even though we don't have enough food. They've planted landmines in many other areas. We don't even dare to go outside [our village]."*

- Saw Da--- (male, 42), Ka--- village, Bu Tho Township (December 2009)

*"My mother-in-law can't walk well because her neck got injured when a landmine exploded. She and her daughter Naw Fa---, who was 18, stepped on a landmine when they went to collect food in our abandoned village. Her daughter died immediately when she stepped on the mine, and my mother-in-law got injured."*

- Saw W--- (male, 20), Ka--- village, Bu Tho Township (December 2009)

*"DKBA Battalion #666 led by Commander Maung Chit stays in our village. They've been there for six months. They came here for the purpose of logging. They've already started logging. They don't sleep inside our village, but very close to it. Due to their operation the villagers can't work freely because they've planted a lot of landmines around our workplaces. They don't tell us the exact location of the mines they plant. They only tell us, 'Don't go to that place.' Then, we don't dare to go [to that place]. They also don't treat us as brothers and sisters. They've forced us to do logging for their business, but they don't pay us any money... Now, our villagers can't work freely because they're afraid to step on landmines. The DKBA soldiers have planted landmines around our village. The landmines are handmade. One villager who's over*

*40 years old, Saw Ga---, stepped on a DKBA landmine by a water canal in the G--- area. This man lived in Pa---. We also have to look after our cattle during the daytime and tie them up at night-time. We don't dare to let them find food on their own, because if we don't look after them, they'll step on landmines and die."*

- Saw Ha--- (male, 36), Qa--- village, Bu Tho Township (January 2010)

## **Protection of communities through strategic displacement**

Flight has been utilised by some individuals and communities living along the southern end of the Ka Ma Maung to Papun road as a protection strategy against SPDC or DKBA abuses. DKBA logging operations in 2009 in Meh Mweh village tract in Bu Tho Township, for example, exacerbated the strain of regular forced labour demands on the livelihoods of local communities, prompting some villages to flee to other areas in an effort to avoid abuse and the impact of abuse on their livelihoods. Local residents described being forced to cut and carry trees for no remuneration for the DKBA soldiers engaged in logging; having to meet other regular forced labour demands such as *set tha*; and being placed under movement restrictions that severely limited their access to their lands and thus their ability to carry out livelihoods activities. In at least one case where a community was able to successfully negotiate with local DKBA soldiers to refrain from imposing movement restrictions, landmines placed by the troops continued to prevent the community from engaging in livelihoods activities, prompting the village to follow the example of several other communities in the area and go into hiding. The threat to local communities and livelihoods posed by DKBA logging activities does not appear to have abated: KHRG's field researchers reported that on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2010, a group of DKBA Battalion #666 soldiers led by Commander Pah Na Dee set up camp and began patrolling in Ra--- village with the intention of expanding their logging activities there.

*"We were tired of doing forced labour, therefore we fled here. We had to work for DKBA Battalion #666. We always had to carry things for them, but they didn't pay us money. Now they're trading wood. The villagers had to find firewood and carry water for them at their military camp. They had to cut down trees for them and carry the wood for them. They didn't pay us money. If we refused to do it for them, they'd abuse us. We also had to rebuild their military camp... The commander's name was Pah Dah. I also had to go to the front lines to carry things [porter] for them... They get their rations from Mweh Hta and they order villagers to carry [rations] for them... We've had to do loh ah pay since the DKBA came to our village. We've been abused by them. At first, they said we'd work together in peace, but later on they abused the villagers. We couldn't endure their actions... We just tried to find a way to flee from them on our own. My family left the village at night-time... We couldn't bring anything with us, but we don't dare to return [to our village] to get our things back. Now maybe they've gone to our village and planted landmines."*

-Saw Ja--- (male, 30), He--- village, Bu Tho Township (October 2009)

*"I fled to stay in the jungle because we're afraid of DKBA soldiers, since they forced us to work for them. We came here a week ago... The DKBA soldiers demanded one person from our village to go and work for them. I had to go and followed them. They ordered me to cook, carry water and carry M79 [grenade launcher] rounds for them as a porter. I was very tired from climbing the mountains when I followed them to the front. They were previously based in Tha Pa Pah and they're now based in Wah Thoh. I fled from the [DKBA] army a week ago because they ordered me to work for them and didn't pay me any money. They treated us porters cruelly, so we couldn't be patient and we fled. Villagers from Ma---, Sa---, Ka--- and Ta--- had to go as porters... They came to stay in Tha Pa Pah for the purpose of logging for their business, but they forced villagers to do [logging] for them without any payment. They came there for six months... They*

ate pork sold by our villagers, but they never paid them money for that. They took trees for their logging [business] from our land and asked us to carry them for them. They said that they'd hire us and they'd pay us 5,000 kyat [US \$5.10] per tree. We had to carry the trees from Qa--- to Va---... We haven't set up our shelters permanently. It'll depend on the [security] situation. If the situation is stable, we'll set up our shelters; if not, we'll continue staying under the trees and sleeping on the ground... Be--- village fled before our village fled. DKBA soldiers called us to meet with them and they questioned us about the Be--- villagers. We told them that we didn't know about their village because we never meet with them. The DKBA soldiers didn't restrict us or trouble us because we told them that if they wanted to restrict us, they'd have to look after us for our whole lives and support us. Then, they replied that they couldn't do anything and said that we could farm our hill fields. However, the villagers didn't dare to farm their hill fields or farms because the DKBA soldiers had planted a lot of landmines beside our hill fields and farms. Some landmines are original [factory produced] and some are handmade... Ce---, De---, Fe---, Ge---, Ka---, Sa--- and Ma--- villages have already fled. All of those villagers suffered from the DKBA soldiers. We hope to stay peacefully in our own land. The current situation especially affects the children.”

-Saw W--- (male, 20), Ka--- village, Bu Tho Township (December 2009)

“The DKBA allows us to work in our fields only during the daytime. They don't allow us to sleep in our workplaces at night, and they restrict our travel outside of the village. In other cases, DKBA soldiers burnt down villagers' hill fields and huts in Wa--- village. The owners couldn't look after their hill fields any more and have already fled. They burnt down three rice barns belonging to Ka---, La--- and Ma---. Each barn held about 100 baskets (2090 kg. / 4508 lb.) of paddy. We have to walk half an hour from our village to the area where the rice barns were burnt down. They told us that they wanted to serve for peace and for their people. Now, they oppress their people.”

- Saw Ha--- (male, 36), Qa--- village, Bu Tho Township (January 2010)

“They [the DKBA] started to demand messengers from our village in July or August. I was forced to go many times. Each time took over 20 days... The last time I went to be a messenger I had to sleep five nights in the jungle [He had to follow DKBA soldiers to the front]. I had to cook and carry water. I had to carry military equipment such as M79 rounds. There were only ten soldiers in the DKBA unit I went with. They demand a lot from the villagers and don't usually pay us. They're trading wood, too; they set up a machine beside the villagers' farms to cut wood for their own business. The villagers don't like them because they order the villagers to do logging and don't pay them anything. No one dares to say that they are bad because we have to be afraid that they'll abuse us... I decided to flee to this place because I couldn't bear their demands any more. I found a way to flee because we don't want to go to be messengers any more. It's not only messenger duty; we were also forced to do logging and carry wood. I had to go and do this twice. They didn't pay me any money for my work... Due to DKBA operations, the villagers can't farm freely... Recently, they didn't allow us to meet anyone and no strangers were allowed to come into the village. They forbid us from going outside, too. We were called for a meeting by the KNU twice but we couldn't attend because they [the DKBA] banned us from travelling outside the village. We told them that we should attend meetings called by any armed group because we have to be afraid of every armed group... Before we came here, our whole village was forced to move to a relocation site. I went to stay there for four or five days. They didn't provide any food and we had to find food on our own. We couldn't continue to survive inside the relocation site and we fled.”

- Ba--- (male, 53) Ma--- village, Bu Tho Township (December 2009)

A number of villagers in hiding that have spoken with KHRG have echoed the statement above that DKBA or SPDC forced relocation orders strongly influenced their decisions to flee to areas

further from military control. Villagers resist forced relocation orders for a number of reasons. Most villagers in rural communities in Karen State depend on agricultural activities on lands near their village for families' survival, and relocation means separation from these lands and a familiar way of life. Excessive forced labour demands and movement restrictions imposed on villagers in relocation sites make it extremely difficult for villagers to access their plantations and farms with sufficient frequency to carry out regular livelihoods activities on old lands; the SPDC and DKBA practice of mining villages and fields after residents have been evicted also makes return to collect or cultivate previous resources exceedingly dangerous. Relocation sites are furthermore typically unlivable for the majority of villagers, as they receive little or no food support from local authorities and have little time to find, prepare, and cultivate new land due to heavy exploitative demands and movement restrictions, if sufficient cultivable land is even available near the site. In the first quote below, Na---, a villager who fled from his home to avoid a DKBA relocation order, explains his decision to go into hiding. Na---'s wife died just ten days after giving birth to their second child, who also later died; he had wanted to take her to a clinic for the delivery, but DKBA movement restrictions prevented them from travelling to the medical facility. In the following quotes, villagers describe how they pre-emptively fled relocation orders to avoid living under military control.

*"The DKBA were forcing us to move to their relocation site; before we were moved we fled here. We thought living here would be better than under their control... Since I arrived here it's already been three months. I came here when the DKBA started their activity in my village."*

- Na--- (male, 20), Xa---, Lu Thaw Township (September 2009)

*"We couldn't endure the DKBA's abuse, so we came here. They forced us to do loh ah pay for them all the time. We also heard that they'd order us to move to a relocation site. Therefore, before we were moved there we fled here by ourselves."*

- Pa--- (male, 38), Ya--- village, Bu Tho Township (September 2009)

*"I didn't dare to deal with the SPDC and DKBA. They ordered us to move to a relocation site, so I fled here. They threatened us that if the dark scarves [KNLA] became more active in our village they'd force us to move to the relocation site. We moved here before we were forced into the relocation site. I had to walk for two days to arrive here."*

- Naw Qa--- (female, 60), Za--- village, Lu Thaw Township (September 2009)



The photo on the left, taken in December 2009, shows the temporary jungle hiding site of residents of Ta--- and Ka--- villages, shortly after they decided to leave their homes. The villagers were actively monitoring the security situation to determine whether to flee further or set up permanent shelters in the site shown here. A villager from Ka--- told KHRG they became displaced in order to avoid onerous DKBA forced labour demands and physical security risks posed by the large number of landmines placed around their villages by DKBA soldiers. The photo on the right, also taken in December 2009, shows the gravesite of Naw Fa---, an 18-year-old villager originally from Ka--- who was killed by a DKBA landmine when she returned with her grandmother to the abandoned village to collect food left behind when the family had fled.

[Photos: KHRG]

## Conclusion

This is the fourth report focusing on the situation in Papun District's southern townships that has been released during August 2010.<sup>10</sup> These four reports make clear that the practices of SPDC and DKBA forces form consistent, abusive patterns depending on the local politico-military context. In areas where military control is high, and there is low risk of evasion by civilian populations or attack by the KNLA, abuses documented in this report appear to be most commonly related to extracting support from the civilian population, including through: forced labour; demands for material or monetary support; and conscription.

In areas where control is weaker, however, and the risk of evasion by civilian populations and/or attack by the KNLA increases, abuses related to the extraction of support by SPDC and DKBA forces are augmented by abuses related to enforcing control of the population and preventing attack. Abuses most commonly reported include: restrictions on movement and trade; curfews; placing unmarked landmines in civilian areas, often without warnings; and violence related to accusations of support for the KNLA or reprisals following KNLA activity. In areas in which SPDC or DKBA control is less consolidated or non-existent, villagers report more extreme military practices, including: direct attacks on civilians, such as shooting villagers on sight or remote shelling; mining or destroying fields, food stores and civilian settlements; and restrictions on access to humanitarian support.<sup>11</sup>

In all of the contexts described above, civilians bear the brunt of what is ostensibly a conflict between state and non-state armed groups. Civilian populations appear to be viewed by dominant armed actors as inextricably linked to the conflict, as a resource and labour pool to be drawn from, and as a potential support base that opponents must be prevented from accessing. In some cases these objectives are enforced with extreme violence. In spite of considerable obstacles, villagers interviewed for these four reports described using a variety of strategies to reduce abuse or its harmful effects, including: negotiation; paying fines in lieu of compliance with demands; and discreet semi- or false compliance, or overt non-compliance or refusal to meet demands. In contexts where the threat of violence prevented the use of such strategies, or where households or entire communities felt they could no longer survive in the face of abuse, villagers interviewed by KHRG described using displacement strategically, fleeing in order to temporarily or permanently evade further abuse by armed groups.

That communities and their leaders in Papun's southern townships are sometimes able to reduce or avoid exploitative demands, despite the strong military presence near their homes and the omnipresent threat of violence to enforce compliance with orders, testifies to the bravery and creativity with which villagers respond to protect themselves against threats to their security and livelihoods. These local concerns and priorities, and the strategies employed to address them, should be acknowledged, respected and supported. Local actors are best able to assess the obstacles and threats they face, including protection concerns, and formulate appropriate responses. External actors wishing to promote human rights in eastern Burma should thus seek detailed understandings of these activities and the concerns and priorities that inform them. Such nuanced understandings are necessary for developing practical support that broadens villagers' range of feasible options for responding to abuse and the effects of abuse.

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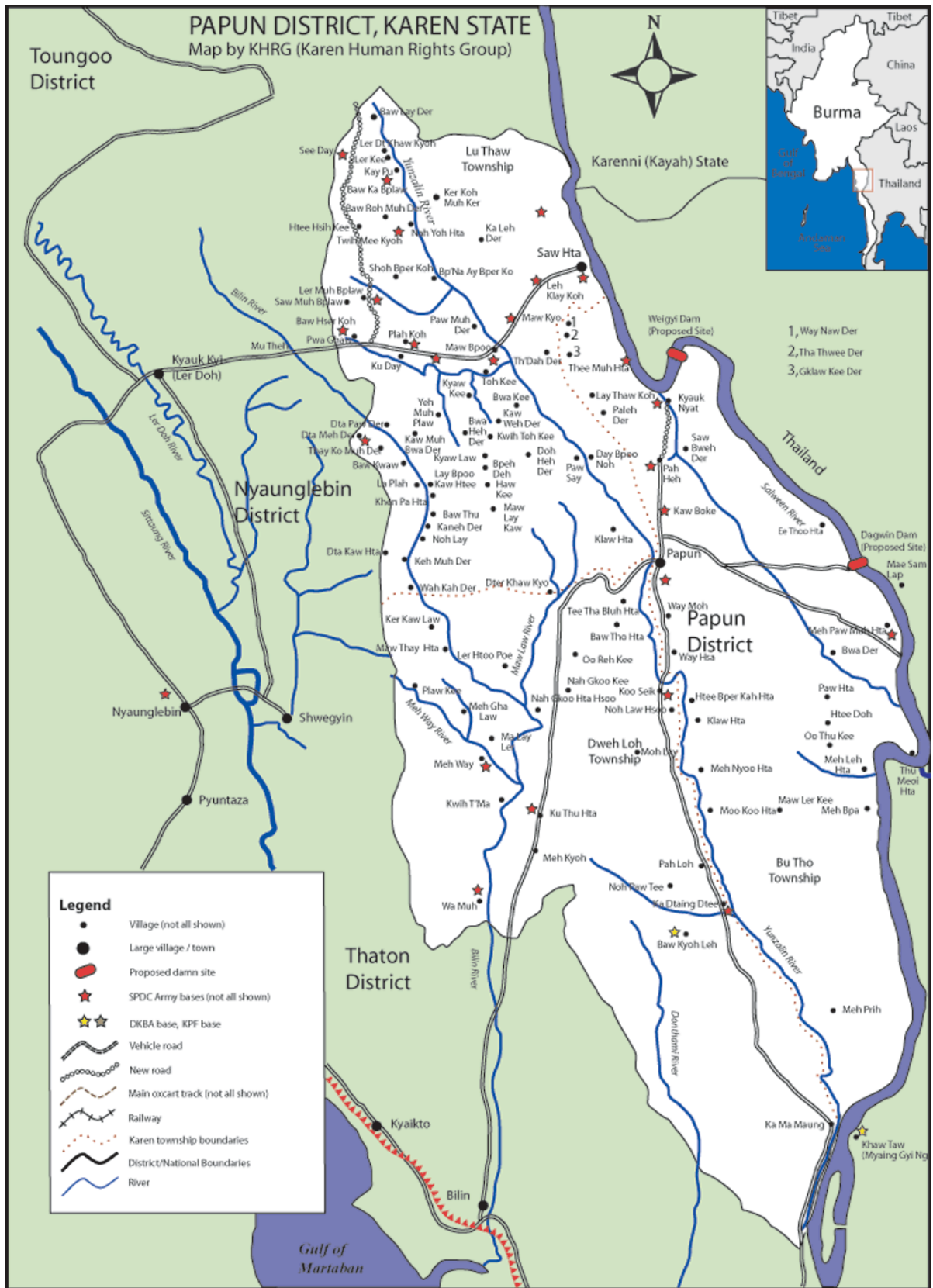
<sup>10</sup> See also, "Central Papun District: Village-level decision making and strategic displacement," KHRG, August 2010; "Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of Military Control," KHRG, August 2010; "Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River," KHRG, August 2010.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on deliberate attacks on civilians by SPDC Army forces in areas of Papun where control is at its lowest ebb, see: *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses*, KHRG, August 2010.

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

- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses (August 2010)*
- *Central Papun District: Village-level decision making and strategic displacement (August 2010)*
- *Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of Military Control (August 2010)*
- *Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River (August 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)*
- *SPDC and DKBA road construction, forced labour and looting in Papun District (March 2009)*

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.khrq.org](http://www.khrq.org).



# Karen Districts



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