



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Ongoing forced recruitment into the People's Militia in Kyeikto Township, Thaton District

This News Bulletin describes an incident where villagers from Kyaikto Township, Thaton District are demanded by Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion #8 to continue service in the pyithu sit (people's militia). This News Bulletin reports on the desire of villagers to stop serving in the pyithu sit, their strategies to end such service and the difficulties they face while trying to do so. The villagers from the Kyeikto area have been serving in the pyithu sit since 1988, but since the January 2012 ceasefire, people in the area no longer want to be part of the people's militia as it prevents them from sustaining their livelihood. However, when the villagers tried to return their guns to the Tatmadaw in order to demonstrate their resignation from service, the Tatmadaw only accepted half of their guns. The villagers paid 25,000 kyat (US \$25.69) for each gun that the Tatmadaw did accept.¹

On September 21st 2013, *pyithu sit* (people's militia)² member Maung B--- reported to a KHRG community member about the villagers' situation serving in the *pyithu sit* in K'Per Hkee (Kyauk Lon Kyi) village tract, Kyeikto Township. On September 20th 2013, people from Kyeikto Township had to turn in their people's militia membership cards to the Tatmadaw for renewal, which would extend their service time in *pyithu sit*. The people's militia member from Kyeikto Township mentioned that they have served in the *pyithu sit* since 1988. After the ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burma government,³ villagers

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Thaton District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It summarizes information from three incident reports, one situation update and one interview received by KHRG in October 2013. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's redesigned Website.

² *Pyithu sit* translates to "people's militia," which is a militia structure into which local civilians are conscripted to serve in village or town militia groups. For further reading on the *pyithu sit*, see "*Enduring Hunger and Repression; Food Scarcity, Internal Displacement, and the Continued Use of Forced Labour in Toungoo District*," KHRG, September 2004, pg. 18.

³ On January 12th 2012, the KNU and Burma government officials signed a ceasefire agreement in Hpa-an, capital of Karen State. The preliminary agreement was based on '11 key points.' In 2013, the ceasefire process expanded to become a nationwide effort. On November 2nd 2013, representatives from 17 ethnic armed groups (EAGs) unified

have explained to the KHRG community member that they no longer want to serve in the *pyithu sit* as service prevents them from sustaining their livelihoods.

People from Kyauk Lon Kyi village tract, which includes L---, M---, N--- and P--- villages, were given a total of 16 guns in order to serve in the *pyithu sit* when they were originally recruited in 1988. They tried to give the guns back in September 2013 to the Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #8, but the Tatmadaw did not accept all of the guns. The villagers believe that this means there will always be *pyithu sit* in the area. Villagers paid the Tatmadaw IB #8 25,000 kyat (US \$25.69)⁴ for each gun in order to return the guns.⁵ The IB #8 only accepted eight guns. Villagers are trying to think of ways to give back the other eight guns, but even when they offered to pay 50,000 kyat (US \$51.39) for each gun, the Tatmadaw did not accept them.

In Kyeikto area, not only the people from K'Per Hkee village tract, but people from every village tract, including Naw Lah Hkee and Meh Lay Hkee village tracts, also have to serve in the *pyithu sit*.

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

- "Thaton Situation Update: Kyeh Htoh and Bilin Townships, November to December 2012," (October 2013)
- "Persistent forced labour demands stop in six villages in Bilin Township as of September 2012," (July, 2013)
- "Thaton Photo Set: Gold mining in Bilin Township, January 2013," (June 2013)
- "BGF Battalion #1014 forced labour and forced recruitment," April to May 2012, (May 2013)

their position and signed an accord in the Kachin State capital, and headquarters of the KIO, Laiza. See ["Burma's armed ethnic groups sign nation-wide ceasefire pledge in Laiza,"](#) *Kachin News*, November 5th 2013. At a subsequent meeting on November 4th in Myitkyina, the ethnic armed groups met with a Burma government delegation, but were unable to reach an agreement due to significant differences between the groups' proposals. See ["Myanmar Peace Talks Fail to Nail Down Cease-Fire Agreement,"](#) *Radio Free Asia*, November 5th 2013. Most recently, on January 25th 2014, the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (comprised of 17 EAGs), agreed to an updated version of the 11-point proposal at the 2nd Ethnic Armed Organisations Conference in Law Khee Lar, the headquarters of the KNU. This 11-point pact will be presented to the Burma government Peace-Making Work Committee in Hpa-an in February 2014. See ["Ethnic armed groups sign 11-point nationwide ceasefire draft,"](#) *Myanmar Freedom Daily*, January 26th 2014. For more information on the ceasefire and how it has affected local villagers, see ["Safeguarding human rights in a post-ceasefire eastern Burma,"](#) KHRG, January 2012 and ["Steps towards peace: Local participation in the Karen ceasefire process,"](#) KHRG, November 2012.

⁴ As of October 15th 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 972.99 Kyat to the US \$1.

⁵ According to the understanding of the villagers, the act of turning in their guns signifies ending their term of service in the people's militia.

- “Thaton Situation Update: Hpa-an Township, January to June 2012,” (May 2013)
“Incident Report: Forced recruitment in Thaton District #2,” May 2012, (May 2012)

Thaton (Doo Tha Htoo) District



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