



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

January 29, 2015/ KHRG #13-65-A2-I1

Dooطلا Interview: Ma A---, May 2013

This Interview with Ma A--- describes events occurring in Kawkaเรက Township, Dooطلا District, from 2011 to 2013.

- *Ma A--- describes the confiscation of her land by the Burma/Myanmar government after fleeing from her village in 2011 due to conflict between armed groups.*
 - *Upon her return in 2013, Ma A--- discovered that all of her plants and trees used for her livelihood had been destroyed and that many buildings had been built on her land. Ma A--- currently has only a small portion of land left to live on.*
 - *Ma A--- has not received compensation for the loss of her land, but has spoken with the vice village head to explain her situation.*
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Interview | Ma A---, (Female, 44), B--- village, Kawkaเรက Township, Dooطلا District (May 2013)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Kawkaเรက Township in May 2013 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Dooطلا District, including one other interview and eight photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Marital Status: Married

Position: Villager

What is your name?

My name is Ma A---.

How old are you?

¹ KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, community members are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma/Myanmar, 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 categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

I am 44 years old.

How many family members do you have?

I have four family members.

Do you live in B--- village?

Yes.

Is it in Kawkareik Township?

Yes.

Are there any challenges that you have to face in your occupation or your life in this village? Can you tell me about that?

I have only one thing: that people [Burma/Myanmar government] have taken my land and I do not feel good [about this]. At first [in 2011], they [Burma/Myanmar government] told me for sure that they were going to do [measure] my land [in order for me to obtain a land title]. I bought some food and we [Ma A--- and government workers] went up to the hill [to measure my land]. People [Burma/Myanmar government] had noted how many palm trees and plants there were on my land. [At that time in 2011, fighting happened and] we fled from the village for two years. I came back this year [2013] and I see that they have destroyed all of my land. I paid them [Burma/Myanmar government] money to measure my land and they said that they were going to do it for me. However, we do not see anything [to do with our land being measured]. The village head should have reported [to the government] about it [the Burma/Myanmar government building on her land] and arranged [compensation] for me, but he has not done it. I have only one part of my land left and I do not let them [Burma/Myanmar government] work on my land. The village head told me that they [Burma/Myanmar government] were not going to conduct [a well building project] on that part. After a while, they came and conducted [the well building project] on my land and I went to ask a female government worker to ask [the village head] for me [whether he allowed the government workers to use my land]. She said that the village head promised her [that the government would not dig a well on my land]. I told her, "*The village head has promised not to conduct [the well] on my land and if you conduct [the project] on it, you have to pay me money [for my destroyed land]*". She said, "*I cannot pay you money [for your land]*." She said to me, "*If you do not give me permission [to dig the well], I am going to conduct [the project] up on the hill [away from your land]*." And I said "*Yes, just go and conduct it [in another area]*". She said, "*I am digging the well for the villagers to drink*." I tell her, "*I do not drink the water from your well. I have my own well. I drink from my well*." Then she moved to another place to dig the well which is on my friend's land. That place was also our land in the past, but my father gave it to my friend to build her house [on]. We mark the boundary [of my land and my friend's land] with the [single] jack fruit tree between our lands. My land is wider and the place where they [Burma/Myanmar government] built the school is on our land. Another side is Naw C---'s land [which is next to my land]. This side³ is my land and we have marked the boundary [between our lands]. The land is wide enough for three houses and they destroyed all of our land. If they did not destroy my land, I could plant a lot of vegetables on it. However, they are taking all of our land and we cannot do [plant] anything. I feel sad because they said that they have given me money for taking my land, but I did not get anything. They [Burma/Myanmar government] give money to those [villagers] whose lands have been taken by them which are smaller than mine. They even gave 5,000 kyat (US \$4.84)⁴ to one of my nephews as they have taken his land

³ This interview was conducted in sight of the interviewee's fields. Here she is pointing towards her land.

⁴ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the December 19, 2014 official market rate of 1031.60 kyat to the US \$1.

which is very small land and they also gave Saw D--- 4,000 kyat (US \$3.88) [for his land] which is the other land [close to my plot]. This is a very small [amount] of land and they even gave [him] 4,000 kyat [as compensation for it]. They should have also paid me [money] but they have not. If we compare my land with the market price of the land in Thailand, my land [in Burma/Myanmar] is worth around 100,000 [kyat] (US \$3,045.49).⁵ With 100,000 kyat in Thailand, we would get a smaller size of land [than in Burma/Myanmar for the same price]. So, it does not make me feel good [that they take my land without at least compensating me for 100,000 kyat]. Later, I was waiting for the village head [to arrange compensation for me] and the village head came to meet with me and he said he was going to mark [the boundary of] my land for me and I also agreed with him. He came and put the stones [at the boundary of my land] but I did not go and look at him [while he did it]. I have only a small part of my land left and I am worried that it will also be confiscated. My children are going to school and I think I am going to build a hut on my land. We also think that we are going to build our house [on our land]. The house that we are living in right now is another person's house. It is not our house and people let us live here. Our land is in that place and if possible we think that we are going to build our own house.

What kind of plants did they [Burma/Myanmar government] destroy on your land?

It included coconut trees, palm trees, banana trees, jack fruit trees, mango trees and marian trees. They [trees] were going to fruit soon, [maybe] in one or two years, but they [the Burma/Myanmar government] destroyed all of them. We also planted orange trees and they were going to grow. At first, we grew everything on our land as we planned to work on our land [for the rest of our lives]. My husband planted a lot of palm trees, but they destroyed all of them.

How large is your land if you plant paddy?

If we plant paddy on our land, we can approximately plant [and produce] three (31.35 kg. or 69.12 lb.) or four (41.80 kg. or 92.16 lb.) big tins⁶ of paddy.⁷

Was your land filled with plants?

Yes, it was filled with our plants and they destroyed all of them. The fruit of banana [trees] grows very plentiful. Our land was full of plants that we planted. They were growing very big and we almost got their fruits. There were also some jack fruit trees and mango trees which we could get their fruits from. As well, the fruit of marian trees were almost maturing . They destroyed all of them and there were no more trees left. We planted everything on our land.

Did they not tell [consult] you [about] anything before they were going to destroy all of your trees?

They did not tell us anything before they destroyed the trees.

Did they also say to you that they are going to give you some compensation?

No, they did not tell us anything. At first, the village head said that they were going to help us, but we have not seen anything [compensation] yet. I have heard from people that they [the Burma/Myanmar government] said that they bought the land for 100,000 kyat (US \$96.93). I said "*They said that they bought the land for 100,000 kyat? But I did*

⁵ All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the December 19, 2014 official market rate of 32.83 baht to the US \$1.

⁶ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy, milled rice and seeds. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb. of paddy.

⁷ Paddy is rice grain that is still in the husk.

not get any money. When did they give it to me? I did not know." This point makes me very unhappy. I am also not satisfied with my palm trees. If they had not destroyed my palm trees, they would have been very big by now. I had planted 50 palm trees and 40 of them grew, but the Burmese [government] have ploughed and destroyed all of them. If they had not destroyed them, they would be very big at this time, like the ones which are in front of my house [where I am staying] that you can see right now. I could have also gotten enough leaves [from them] to roof my house, but the Burmese [government] have ploughed and destroyed all of them. I heard that the village head said that he will help me with 100,000 kyat. It does not matter if I do not get 100,000 kyat and it is fine even if I get 20,000 kyat (US \$19.38) or 30,000 kyat (US \$29.08) or 40,000 kyat (US \$38.77), I will be satisfied.

They took your land and it is very wide?

Yes, they took my land which is very wide and they are building buildings [on it].

What kind of buildings did they build [on your land]?

I do not know exactly. I think they built the hospital or the school. They said that they built a school and it is very big. They also built the house for the teachers, a hospital and their [hospital] office, and the police station. They built a lot of buildings; I cannot name them all.

Are all of these buildings that they built on your land?

Yes. They all are on my land.

So there is no more land left for you to live [on]?

Yes, [there no land left to live on, except] there is only one small plot of the land left where I can build only a house.

Is there anyone [in the Burma/Myanmar government] who will come and say "Oh! Yes, we have destroyed your land and we will give you some compensation?"

No, there is no one.

Who is working on your land?

The Burmese [government].

How long has it been [since they built on your land]?

It was two years ago that they built their buildings.

Have you ever said to a [Burma/Myanmar government] leader: You are doing [building] or ploughing on my land and you need to give me some compensation?

We have not met with any of them [Burma/Myanmar government leaders yet]. We do not know the name of the [Burma/Myanmar government] leader who is working on our land. The village head instructed them [to build on] the land and they were working on our land. We did meet with the village head in person [when they constructed buildings on our land]. When we came back to the village [in 2013], we asked the Burmese [government builders] "*Why are you ploughing on my land?*" They said "*The village head instructed us to plough on this land.*" As the village head instructed [them to build on] the land, the Burmese ploughed. Nevertheless, we did not get any compensation.

So the village head is very much trying to solve the problem for you [to get compensation] but the Burmese do not listen to him?

I do not know about the village head [trying to arrange compensation for us].

Did the village head arrange for you to meet with the people [Burma/Myanmar government leaders] who were ploughing on your land at any time?

No, we did not meet with them at any time. The village head asked the vice village head to meet with me; I cannot recall his name. He is the one who worked together with the government and he gives speeches in the [village] meeting [sometimes]. He can speak Karen a little bit.

I am going to give all of the information that you are telling me now to the responsible persons [KHRG and Non-governmental organisations] step by step. That is OK right? Can I take a picture of you?

Yes.

Do you want to say anything else?

I do not have any special thing to talk about. I want some support if I can get.

[You want that] the people [KHRG staff or any organisation] will help you in talking about the issue for you?

Yes.

Your hope is that the people [KHRG staff or any organisation] will help you and arrange for you to get the support that you need?

Yes, I need to get some support. In the past, people said in the [village] meetings that if someone destroyed anything about the land, they are responsible to give compensation and we can report about the issue. However, people [Burmese/Myanmar government] are taking our land and we cannot get any compensation. Therefore, I do not feel good about that.

So, thank you very much for your answers.

Thanks.

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

- "Dooplaya Field Report: January to December 2012," (December 2014)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, September 2014," (November 2014)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, July 2013," (October 2014)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Win Yay townships, December 2013 to February 2014," (September 2014)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedoe Township, September to December 2013," (September 2014)

Dooطلا District



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