



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

September 10, 2014 / KHRG #14-28-S7

Hpa-an Situation Update: Hti Lon Township, March 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Hti Lon Township, Hpa-an District in March 2014, including dam construction and the subsequent destruction of villagers' land due to flooding, forced relocation, and land confiscation.

- *Soldiers from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #203 constructed two dams in Hti Lon Township, causing flooding which destroyed paddy fields & plantations in two villages. The villagers attempted to negotiate with the Tatmadaw and request compensation, but were ignored.*
 - *In A--- village, which was affected by flooding, the Tatmadaw also confiscated land owned by 12 villagers. The Tatmadaw confiscated the land and forced the villagers to move their homes to the periphery of the land, or off of it entirely. These villagers also described further suffering from discrimination and oppression due to their identification as kaw la thu, a S'gaw Karen term used to describe those perceived to have dark skin.*
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Situation Update | Hti Lon Township, Hpa-an District (March 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in April 2014. It was written by a community member in Hpa-an District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Hpa-an District, including seven other situation updates, 1080 photographs and two video clips.²

I would like to report that the Tatmadaw have constructed a dam near A--- village, Hti Lon village tract, Hti Lon Township [Township #5], Hpa-an District.³ Due to the dam, water has flooded the villagers' paddy fields and plantations, which has impacted their livelihoods. The

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 writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

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.

³ The dam the researcher is referring to is the Yay Boat Dam (also called the Hti Lon Dam), which has affected a number of villages in the area. For more information on this dam, see "[Hpa-an Short Update: Hti Lon Township, March 2014](#)," KHRG, August 2014.

Tatmadaw soldiers that are situated in A--- village are from LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #203.⁴ The Tatmadaw also constructed a dam in Maw Ko village, impacting the village and the villagers' paddy fields.

The names of the farmers [in Maw Ko village] whose paddy fields have flooded are:

- 1) U X---
- 2) Saw Y---
- 3) Naw Z---
- 4) Saw Ba---
- 5) Saw De---
- 6) Saw Ju---
- 7) Saw Mg---
- 8) Naw Ma---
- 9) Saw Jo---
- 10) Saw Li---
- 11) Saw Mi---
- 12) Saw Ko---
- 13) Saw Ta---
- 14) Saw Ya---
- 15) Naw Su---
- 16) Saw La---
- 17) Saw Pe--- and
- 18) Saw He---

The names which I have listed above are the individuals whose land, paddy fields and plantations have been flooded after the Tatmadaw constructed the dam. The names that I have listed here are only those from Maw Ko village. As the water began flooding their land, they tried to speak with the Tatmadaw, but the Tatmadaw did not do anything for them.

The Tatmadaw also constructed a dam in A---village, and these are the names of the villagers whose land was flooded and their paddy fields were destroyed:

⁴ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties.

- 1) N---
- 2) O---
- 3) P---
- 4) Q---
- 5) R---
- 6) S---
- 7) T---
- 8) U---
- 9) V---
- 10) W---

These villagers are kaw la thu,⁵ and they are those whose lands were flooded due to the dam constructed by the Tatmadaw. Although they asked for compensation from the Tatmadaw, the Tatmadaw did not listen to them.

Another issue, in A--- village, is that the Tatmadaw confiscated the homes of kaw la thu, and asked them to move to another area. The Tatmadaw battalion who confiscated the land is LIB #203. After they confiscated these lands, they installed a sign [on the land] which stated, "This land belongs to the Tatmadaw. Do not trespass." The kaw la thu who live near these places had to move, and now live at the corner of their lands and beside the road. The names of the kaw la thu whose paddy fields were confiscated are:

- 1) B---
- 2) C---
- 3) D---
- 4) E---
- 5) F---
- 6) G---
- 7) H---
- 8) I---
- 9) J---
- 10) K---

⁵ *Kaw La Thu*, "thu" meaning black, is a S'gaw Karen term which is sometimes used to refer to individuals in Burma/Myanmar who are perceived to have a darker skin colour. In Kayin state, it is often associated specifically with followers of Islam (Muslims), although this association is sometimes erroneous, and Muslim individuals do not typically self-identify with this term.

11) L---

12) M---

[Later, I found out that] these kaw la thu are not Muslim, but are actually Buddhist.⁶ When I went to meet with them, they told me, “We are kaw la thu, but we are not Muslim. However, as our skin is black, the Buddhists and the Burmese discriminate against us. For this reason [our skin color], we, the kaw la thu who live here, have been oppressed in many different ways [by the Tatmadaw]. We cannot go anywhere else; our parents and grandparents were born here, our original birth place is also here, and we are living here now. If you look at the places that we live, you will see and know the situation [of oppression] that we live in. We do not need to explain anything further to you. Although we try to explain [the situation] to you, we also need to look out for our lives in the future [be aware of our safety]. We are fearful [of the Tatmadaw]. They are taking all of our land and we are being forced to move [to other places]; we are forced to live in the corners [of our fields and beside the road].”

The two villages have to suffer [from the same issue]. One area is in the upper [Eastern] side of Maw Ko village where Karen people live and another area is in A--- village where the kaw la thu people live.



These photos were taken by a KHRG researcher on March 8th 2014 in A--- village, Hti Lon Township, Hpa-an District. The photo on the left shows is the Hti Lon Dam, constructed by Tatmadaw LIB #203. Many of the villagers’ paddy fields were confiscated and others were flooded due to construction of the dam. The photo on the right shows a sign installed by Tatmadaw LIB #203 on confiscated land which states, “*This land belongs to the Tatmadaw. Do not trespass.*” [Photos: KHRG]

Further background reading on the situation in Hpa-an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “*Human rights violations by BGF Cantonment Area Commander Kya Aye in Paingkyon Township, Hpa-an District, February 2013 to July 2014,*” (September 2014)
- “*Hpa-an Incident Report: Stone mining damages villagers’ fields in Paingkyon Township, March 2013,*” (August 2014)

⁶ In this case, the villagers self-identified as *kaw la thu*, and our researcher subsequently assumed they were Muslim. However, upon interviewing them he discovered that while they self-identified as *kaw la thu*, they were in fact, Buddhist. This example highlights the complexity around ethnicity and religion as markers of identity in Kayin state, and as the villager describes, those who are identified as *kaw la thu* face discrimination due to their perceived skin colour, regardless of religious orientation.

- *“Hpa-an Short Update: Hti Lon Township, March 2014,” (August 2014)*
- *“Hpa-an Short Update: Don Yin Township, March 2014,” (July 2014)*
- *“Hpa-an Situation Update: Hlaingbwe, Don Yin and Hti Lon townships, April 2014,” (July 2014)*

Hpa-an District



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