



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

December 3, 2014 / KHRG #14-44-S1

Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to June 2014

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District during the period between January 2014 to June 2014, including arbitrary taxation, violent abuse, militarisation, forced labour and access to healthcare and education.

- Villagers report being subjected to arbitrary taxation by armed groups, such as the Tatmadaw and Border Guard Force (BGF), as well as the Karen National Union (KNU), when travelling by boat or car.
 - Officer Tha Beh from BGF Battalion #1014 violently abused a village head, punching and hitting him. Officer Tha Beh's soldier shot another village head in the hand after Officer Tha Beh learned they had summoned a villager on behalf of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).
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Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District (January to June 2014)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in July 2014. It was written by a community member in Hpapun 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 Hpapun District, including 11 interviews, 109 photographs and seven video clips.²

Situation Update

From January [2014] to June 30th 2014, in Bu Tho Township area, human rights abuses occurred continually. The major abuses [such as killings] were not occurring, however there was [arbitrary taxation] when travelling by boat or car. The checkpoints [set up by armed actors] always ask for money from boat and car drivers. They [boat and car

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.

drivers] have to pay at least 500 kyat (US \$0.50)³ to 1,000 kyat (US \$1.00) every time. There are many checkpoints from every armed group in Htee Tha Daw Hta [village tract] area. As for the KNU [Karen National Union] they [only] ask [for tax] at the first checkpoint and the rest [of the checkpoints] do not [ask for money again]. As for Burma [Tatmadaw] soldiers and BGF [Border Guard Force]⁴ soldiers, they set up three checkpoints along the Khoh Law Kloh river bank and every one of their checkpoints asks for money.

A villager guessed and mentioned that it [the abuse date] was in March 2014, when BGF Battalion Commander Maung Chit's soldier, Hpah Tha Beh,⁵ fought against a village head. [Officer Tha Beh's] rank is Platoon Commander from Battalion #1014, which is active in A--- village, Ta Khay Hkoh, Ta La A'Aw Hkoh areas. His [Officer Tha Beh's] soldier shot the village head [of B--- village]. [The village head], Saw N---, was hit in the hand and the hand was ruined. The villager also mentioned that his [Saw N---'s] right hand was amputated and the BGF paid 500,000 kyat (US \$500.00) to [Saw] N--- for his hand. This incident occurred because the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] went down to B--- village and summoned a villager called C--- to temporarily help guide [the KNLA] with the way. As he [C---] was on messenger duty [for the KNLA] he accompanied them [KNLA]. Hpa Tha Beh received this information and he punched, hit and injured C---. It should have occurred in March 2014, at the same time as A--- [B---] village head Saw N---'s [case].⁶

SPDC [State Peace and Development Council]⁷ situation and activity

During the six month period, from the beginning of January 2014 to June 30th [2014], there was no other SPDC military activity [besides arbitrary taxation]. There were things like them strengthening their camps [reinforcing their perimeter] since the ceasefire,⁸ but

³ All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the October 28th 2014 official market rate of 1000 kyat to the US \$1.

⁴ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and light infantry battalions are identified by two or three-digit battalion numbers. For more information, see [“DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force”](#) *Democratic Voice of Burma*, August 2010, and, [“Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District,”](#) KHRG, June 2009.

⁵ KHRG has received numerous reports involving human rights abuses committed by BGF Officer Tha Beh, including violent abuse, forced labour, explicit threats and arbitrary arrest and detention. See [“Violent abuse and forced labour in Hpapun District, November 2013 – January 2014,”](#) KHRG, September 2014; [“Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour and violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, January 2014,”](#) KHRG, August 2014; [“Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2013 to February 2014,”](#) KHRG, August 2014; and [“Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to November 2013,”](#) KHRG, December 2013.

⁶ This account of this incident varies slightly from a report received from another KHRG researcher on the same incident. For more information see [“Hpapun Incident Report: Violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, April 2014,”](#) KHRG, November 2014.

⁷ In Karen, the Burmese phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) is commonly used to refer to the Burma/Myanmar government or to Burma/Myanmar's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) continue to use that phrase, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011; see: [“Mission Accomplished as SPDC ‘dissolved’,”](#) *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011.

⁸ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace process, see the KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [“Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire,”](#) KHRG, May 2014.

they do not demand villagers do it for them. They are also strengthening [reinforcing] the interior part of the camps [with concrete]. From Hpapun town to Ka Ma Moh town, they usually travel with trucks [to send rations] and from Hpapun to Khoh Nee Hkoh they send their rations with horses and sometimes they send by their soldiers [on foot]. In Hkaw Poo area, they [Tatmadaw] try to enlarge their land area, but the KNU and KNLA have a ban on that. Currently, they are fighting [negotiating] for that. For the mountainous areas, they [Tatmadaw] use [increasing the villagers' access to] medicine and education [as a method to extend their reach in the area] as well. For those who are starving they try to provide rice [for them], because there are many villagers who do not have enough food. They [villagers] want to borrow [rice from the government] through loans, but the mother organisation, the KNU and KNLA, try their best to stop it and they know that the SPDC are cheating [the villagers] and they do not allow the villagers to take [food from the government]. The KNU mother organisation explains and suggests [this] to the civilians in love and peace so that they will find [food] in other ways. A representative villager mentioned this information [above].

For the [Tatmadaw] military, they always rotate quarterly or biannually. They always rotate so we cannot know exactly what the battalion numbers are. The SPDC is active in Bu Tho Township area, usually LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]⁹ #434, LIB #341, LIB #340, IB [Infantry Battalion]¹⁰ #19 and LIB #642. For the trespassing Tatmadaw military [Tatmadaw battalions from other districts], they also came into the area and were active and rotated continuously.

After the ceasefire, the SPDC are not as active [as they once were], but they let the BGF be active and the BGF are active [now]. There is no other special activity, although they have set up their camps in G--- [village] and K--- [village]. For these camps, the KNLA have a rule for them that [they must] inform [the KNLA] any time that they travel on the road. In January 2014 to June 30th 2014, in that six month period of time, I have not received any information about an attack on a civilian. For their [BGF and Tatmadaw] camps, there is no change [strengthening of camps], as the bases are as they were before. But there is a BGF camp in K--- village, Meh P'Ree village tract. On April 20th 2014, they moved to the eastern part of K--- village. The village representative [who shared this information] mentioned that he does not know what their plans are.

The civilian situation and their activity

In Bu Tho Township, the civilians are mostly earning their livelihoods through cultivation and farming. The [poorer] villagers' jobs for their livelihoods are not the same, [day to day labour or collecting vegetables from the forest]. Few people have enough food for each year. For their livelihoods, there is no special opportunity for business. A villager mentioned that from January [2014] to June 30th 2014, it is getting easier [conducting work] for the livelihoods and travelling.

Nowadays, things that violate villagers right are the insects, rats, grasshoppers, crickets and other kinds of animals [which] destroy the paddies, as well as the strange nature of climate change. Because of climate change, it [growing crops] is a problem for the farmers. The SPDC military camp is situated close to the lands that have good quality soil that is good for farming, so that the civilians have to cultivate for farming in the land that does not have good soil quality and it causes food problems for civilians.

⁹ 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.

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In Bu Tho Township area, the [price of] rice in different places is not the same. For Bwah Der village tract, Hkaw Poo village tract, Pa Heh village tract, they mostly use the Thai currency [baht] and they sell one big tin (10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb.)¹¹ of rice for 350 baht (US \$10.79).¹² The residents mentioned that for the places in Pweh Loh Toh [area], people use the Burmese currency [kyat] and people usually sell one big tin of rice for 5,000 kyat (US \$5.00) to 6,000 kyat (US \$6.00).

[For] the civilians in Bu Tho Township, there are many problems with the healthcare, but for the places that are close to the clinics, there is the Backpack [Health Workers' Team] (BHWT) which is active in the area, but that is not really complete [having enough medicine]. In the areas that are close to the clinic, [if the patient] cannot be treated [because of a lack of materials or medicine], they go to the [closest] refugee camp and some patients recover [there] and some patients die.

For the civilians that occupy the region close to Pweh Loh Kloh bridge, BHWT comes down sometimes once every six months [to help them with healthcare]. If they have a [serious] disease they could not go to KNU administration area because it is a far distance [for a sick person to travel]. The villagers mentioned that they have to rely on the Burma government's clinic and they have to pay for the medical expense they take [are charged]. A village representative said if the disease requires the patient to go to the hospital they have to spend at least 50,000 kyat (US \$50.00), not less than that amount and not more than that amount.

Children and education

In January 2014 to June 30th [2014], there were no issues concerning displaced children, or children who were not able to go to school because of [BGF] attacks. There is a school that was slightly damaged when the BGF came and stayed in G--- village in 2011 and from then on this school in G--- village was gone [no longer in use]. [I] do not know how many children [students] were there. The village head, Saw M---, said [the villagers] parted [to different places after the attack] and there has been no school [in the village since], so he cannot remember.

A village representative mentioned that to compare the current school situation and the school situation in the past, the current school situation is a little better. To review the period between 2013 and 2014, they received a lot of support from the KED [Karen Education Department].¹³ There are many schools in the place like Kyaw Pah [village tract], Meh P'Ree [village tract] and Htee Tha Daw Hta village tract. Some schools are affiliated with the government but they are not fully supported. A village representative mentioned that in 2013 to 2014, the schools that were not affiliated with the [Burma/Myanmar] government received more [financial] support [from the KED] than the government school.

¹¹ A big tin is a unit of volume used to measure paddy. One big tin is equivalent to 10.45 kg. or 23.04 lb. of paddy.

¹² All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the October 28th 2014 official market rate of 32.43 baht to the US \$1.

¹³ The Karen National Union's Education Department. The main goals of the KED are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture. During the civil war in Burma/Myanmar the KED became the main organisation providing educational services in the KNU controlled areas in Southeast Burma/Myanmar. The KED also previously oversaw the educational system in the seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, however in 2009 these activities were restructured under the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE). See "[Conflict Erupts over Govt teachers deployed to KNU areas](#)," Karen News, August 20th 2013 and the KRCEE website: "[Who Are We](#)," accessed February 6th 2014.

According to a representative in Bu Tho Township area, there are students who are not going to school and it is because the distance from their house to the school is far; there are few houses [located] in the village. Some [children] cannot go to school as their parents cannot afford to send them to school because the parents work and live hand to mouth. The children who are able to go to school, their ambitions are not the same. Some children's ambition is to be a doctor, some [children] have an ambition to be a school teacher.

The student representative mentioned that some students, after they complete [middle school] and to go to high school [in other places], have to stay far from their parents and the school expense is high so some student quit school [after completing middle school]. In Bu Tho Township area, the schools are mostly primary schools.

Conclusion

In this Situation Update, there are still human rights violations that occur, mostly because of armed groups like BGF Battalions #1014 and #1013¹⁴ that are based in K--- [village]. Always, everyday a villager has to go [for sentry duty] and stay there and they are ordered [to do things] when they [BGF] want and they do not provide money for that [their labour].

Another thing is that the BGF soldiers stay at the checkpoints on the river, land and roadways collecting money from people who travel by boat or car in order to [financially] support [their battalion]. [The villagers] do not know where that money goes [after it is collected]. As for the mother organisation, the KNU and KNLA, they set up their checkpoints and [the money] that comes from the [KNU/KNLA] checkpoints is sent to [their] superior and [their] superior sends money [back to them so] they get money [for a part of their salary].

In January 2014, in Bu Tho Township, there were no [incidents] occurring like attacking or killing. Because the mother organisation, KNU, and the Burma government had a meeting and talked about the ceasefire, we see, and the civilians also mentioned, that the armed groups are trying to avoid attacking as much as they can.

To compare [the past] with the period after the ceasefire, the Burma government is trying to increase its members in hill tribe areas by setting up an independent organisation and giving money to the farmers. They pay [loan] 100,000 kyat (US \$100.00) for each farmer who has one acre of farm land and they [farmers] have to pay 7,500 kyat (US \$7.50) for six months as interest. But the farmers in the area do not accept their [Burma/Myanmar government] money. They [the Burma/Myanmar government] tried to supply water and electricity to the people who live close to the main road but the supply is not enough [for everyone to use]. The civilians representative mentioned that, nowadays, the Burma government has meetings and also invites the village heads in the hill tribe areas and they show their support, but the support is not really helpful for the civilians.

Nowadays, there is no prosperity for the civilians and they need help and the Burma government knows the civilian's problems and [the Burma/Myanmar government] tries to provide, but the mother organisation [KNU] tries to prohibit [villagers from taking loans from the government] and tries to find ways for the civilians [to increase their income]. For the civilians who live far from the road, they do not accept the way of [the

¹⁴ KHRG continues to receive reports discussing abuses involving BGF Battalion #1013 and #1014, including: "[BGF Battalion #1014 forced labour and forced recruitment, April to May 2012](#)," KHRG, June 2013; "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2011 to July 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013; "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013 and "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, July to October 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013. Further reports detailing abuses involving these battalions are also available on the KHRG website.

Burma/Myanmar government] administration. For the civilians who live in the [Burma/Myanmar] government controlled areas, some do not want to accept [their aid], but some want to accept it. Personally, I think this is a problem for the civilians, [as it divides them].

A representative mentioned that in Bu Tho Township, in the Hpapun District area, the Burma government invites many organisations to help the civilians in hill tribe areas, but the civilians do not care and do not want the support so they [the Burma/Myanmar government] tries to help indirectly. A villager mentioned that the civilians need the support, but if the support from the [Burma/Myanmar] government comes, someday the Burma government will persuade them and they will become Burma government followers. They [civilians] do not want to be Burma government followers. So, they do not accept the support [from the Burma/Myanmar government].

For this Situation Update report, we cannot make sure the date and times. And the civilians also cannot remember every accident [abuse] that happened at different times so that [the researcher] can mention only this much [information].

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, March to May 2014,” (November 2014)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Violent abuse in Bu Tho Township, April 2014,” (November 2014)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, February and March 2014,” (November 2014)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, November 2013,” (October 2014)
- “Hpapun Interview: Ma A---, October 2013,” (October 2014)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)