



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Interview

January 19, 2016 / KHRG #15-37-A1-I1

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### Toungoo Interview: Maung A---, April 2015

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*This Interview with Maung A--- describes events occurring in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, in March 2015, including updates regarding healthcare and sanitation, education challenges, and a case of religious/ethnic discrimination.*

- Villagers in Thandaung Myo Thit Town obtain their drinking water from P'Thee River. Despite recent government restrictions on garbage disposal in the river, its water remains non-potable and villagers must boil all their water. Maung A--- also reported that various groups, including the local Burma/Myanmar government administration department, take advantage of the river by charging usage fees from visitors and not using these funds to implement sanitation projects.
  - In terms of education in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, the teachers need capacity building because they are not qualified enough and do not teach properly in their public school classes. Students have to resort to paying for private after-school lessons if they want to be able to pass their classes. This situation has created deeply unequal education outcomes, and is jeopardizing the futures of students who are unable to afford private lessons.
  - U Myo Tint, who is a self-appointed chairman of religious affairs and a USDP candidate in the 2015 Elections, has been attempting to drive Maung A--- out of Thandaung Myo Thit Town, specifically because of his status as a Muslim minority. As a result of U Myo Tint complaining about him, Maung A--- was summoned by the immigration officer on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2015 and was told to move out of Thandaung Myo Thit Town. Maung A--- informed the township administrator of this incident and asked for help but the administrator merely suggested for him to meet with the departmental superiors.
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### Interview | Maung A---, (male, 34), Thandaung Myo Thit Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (April 2015)

*The following interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Toungoo District in March 2015 and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including four interviews and 14 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in southeast 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.

<sup>2</sup> In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast 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.

**Ethnicity:** Muslim  
**Religion:** Islam  
**Marital Status:** Married  
**Occupation:** Motorcycle repair shop owner  
**Position:** Resident

**What is your name?**

My name is Maung A---.

**How old are you?**

I'm 34 years old.

**What ethnicity do you associate with?**

I associate with the religion of Islam.

**So the religion that you believe in is Islam, right?**

Yes.

**Are you married?**

Yes, I am.

**How many children do you have?**

I do not have children yet.

**Where do you live currently?**

I live in Thandaung Myo Thit [Town].<sup>3</sup>

**What do you do for a living?**

I opened a motorcycle repair shop.

**Can you tell me about the condition of your region in terms of health and education issues?**

Of course.

**What is the process for [receiving] healthcare services when people get sick and how do they access the medication [they need]?**

The main thing is [that] there is an insufficient [number of] doctors [providing] their services. Basically, if something happens [at night time], people [doctors in Thandaung Myo Thit Town] just refer their patients to Toungoo [District Hospital] for healthcare services, because even though we have doctors in our region [Thandaung Myo Thit Town], they only provide their services during the daytime. So, in a case [where something happens] at night time, we have to access the [health] service of the doctors that are in Toungoo [District Hospital]. So it seems that we are more likely to hire [use the services of] the doctors from Toungoo [District Hospital].

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<sup>3</sup> In previous reports from Thandaunggyi Township, KHRG reported the name of this town as Thandaung Myut Thit, however both transliterations are referring to the same town.

**What about the [availability of] medication, other than [the fact that] there are not enough medics?**

They [medics in Thandaung Myo Thit Town] have no medication service.

**Do you mean there is no pharmacy or no medication in hospital?**

Both in the pharmacy and the hospital there is not sufficient medication. There is only one pharmacy in this town, but the [specific] medication [people require] is [never] available when it's needed, though.

**Is there any discrimination in any aspect of [medical] treatment or service?**

I have not heard about that.

**Who charges the medication fee for the treatment? Can you tell me as much as you know?**

I have no idea about that. I went for treatment once when I stepped on an iron nail, but the service was free.

**So it was for the [tetanus] immunisation?**

Yes.

**Are there any teams such as the [Myanmar] Maternal and Child Welfare Association [MMCWA]?**

Yes.

**How is that process [of getting care from MMCWA]? Do they offer regular service, such as providing [a vaccine] injection every month?**

Yes, I heard about that and it [MMCWA] works independently, offering services to sections [of the community], such as pregnant women. [They] have access to the healthcare service a few times per month, something like that.

**What is the [most] common disease affecting your region?**

Just malaria.

**What about diarrhoea?**

I have not heard about it [being a problem].

**What about the water for use [around the house] and [for] drinking?**

We connected pipes from P'Thee River to get the water.

**Is the water supply that the community gets from P'Thee River fine, in terms of using it [around the house] or drinking it?**

We are not actually fine [in this regard] with that kind of water supply system; all the residents in town just boil the water to use and drink.

**Why is that?**

Because it can cause malaria - using water [straight] from the river.<sup>4</sup>

**Was that river polluted by people?**

We have not seen it [being polluted] lately, as the relevant departments regulated sanitation [standards] and provided a proper place to dispose of garbage, but in the past people used to throw garbage into the river.

**So that river is the responsibility of the municipality, right? Therefore, how does the municipality maintain and protect the river for sustainable use?**

To speak openly, I have seen that there is no protection of the river, but it [the river] is utilised in many ways [by many actors]. Just [for example], when visitors come, such as in the water festival period, they are charged a toll by the [Burma/Myanmar government municipal administration] group for the use of the river, but only the [Burma/Myanmar government municipal administration] group that collected the toll takes all of the money that they got from the toll, and I never saw them do anything like sanitation for the river; I haven't seen any special action taken for the river.

**You have mentioned that the river is utilised in many ways [by many actors], so what are the [other] groups that you were referring to?**

Just the fire station, Red Cross, former [Burma/Myanmar government municipal] civil servants and [current] administrators. Those are [the groups] responsible for [the condition of] the river.

**Can we say they take advantage of the river?**

Absolutely right.

**So they are the [Burma/Myanmar government municipal] administration group?**

Yes, [the Burma/Myanmar government municipal] administration department, fire station, Red Cross, and former civil servants.

**What do they [Burma/Myanmar government municipal administration department] do with the river?**

They collect a toll from the visitors depending on how they come. They charge [a certain amount for those coming] by motorbike, car, or by person [on foot], and they use the money that they collect from the tax.

**How do they use the money that they receive from the tax collection?**

I have no idea about that.

**Do they use it for the town?**

I don't know that, exactly, either.

**What about the situation of education? How do children study and how are the teachers doing? Can you tell me as much as you know?**

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<sup>4</sup> Although the villager said that ingesting contaminated water causes malaria, this is incorrect, as malaria is a mosquito-borne infectious disease transmitted through mosquito bites.

If I have to talk about education, I can say that the teachers need more capacity building - they are not qualified. Because of this, the kindergarten and primary students have to pay tuition [for private after school classes].<sup>5</sup> The situation is that they will only [be able to] pass their grade if they pay the tuition. Another thing is the teachers themselves cannot read and pronounce properly; we can find those kinds of situations. Moreover, the teachers cannot explain the lessons very well, so they mostly let the students memorise the lesson.

**So, since kindergarten students' [parents have to resort to paying] tuition [fees for private classes], do they have to pay for it [themselves]?**

Absolutely.

**How much per month?**

I do not know about that.

**What about the students who do not pay the tuition [for private classes]? How do the teachers treat and teach them?**

For those children who do not pay tuition [attend after school classes], if they do not study by themselves at home, then they will just have to follow the teaching system at the school. But the students who pay the tuition may [become] more clever than others [who do not pay tuition].

**Is there any discrimination between students who pay tuition and those who do not?**

If I have to mention that, according to our community, the teachers' effort is really poor [in the public school classes].

**What about the standards,<sup>6</sup> like fourth and eighth standard, those are under the [Burma/Myanmar] government examination [system]? How is their condition?**

I would say not that bad, because they [students] suddenly face the government examination [which has been reinstated] this year,<sup>7</sup> and even though they cannot overcome [write] it very well, we can see that they have put more effort into it [their studies, to prepare for the upcoming government examination], and on the part of the teachers, they have also been [more] strict [serious in] their role [than before the government examination was reinstated]. So we have to be glad about that because the education system of Myanmar was in an inferior state for a long time; therefore, if we [make] the system of education stricter, there would definitely be improvement.

**Do students have to pay school entrance fees [for regular classes]?**

I have not heard about that.

**Are there any organisations that support education?**

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<sup>5</sup> Although the interviewee calls this fee "tuition," he is referring to a fee for private, after-school lessons, taught by the school teachers of their own volition. Since the quality of education in the day schools is very poor, it is common for parents who are able to afford after-school lessons to send their children to these properly-taught classes.

<sup>6</sup> A Standard refers to a grade in the Burmese education system. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 4, middle school is Standards 5-8 and high school is Standards 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> The Burma/Myanmar government examination is a standardised test administered to all fourth and eighth standard students, which determines whether they will be able to move on to the next standard in the following year. The interviewee mentions that for an unknown period of time, this examination was not being administered in the area, however, this year it has been reinstated.

Just United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). They support [by providing things] such as books and bags.

**What else?**

I have not heard anything else that they [UNICEF] support.

**What about community development? Is there anything like road construction, bridge construction, and infrastructure?**

Yes, there is road and bridge construction as part of the community development.

**Who constructs it and where is the budget from?**

I do not know where the budget is from, but the person who processes the road and bridge construction is [immigration officer and chairman of religious affairs] U Myo Tint.

**Is U Myo Tint [part of] a company or agency?**

I do not know what his company is.

**What is his position?**

He is just an ordinary person.

**So he is just a contractor?**

Yes.

**Does he demand volunteer workers?**

I have not heard [of anything] like that.

**As part of the road and bridge construction, is there any harm to the local land, and if so, is there any compensation?**

I have not heard about it.

**Is there any construction of new roads?**

No, just [repair of] the old roads.

**In this region there is [Burma/Myanmar] government military [Tatmadaw], so are there any Karen National Union (KNU) [troops] that travel around?**

Yes.

**What is your perspective on the KNU [troops] that are traveling around? Do you see any negative signs?**

No, I do not see any negative signs because they all live in their own delimited area.

**As you have mentioned that you are Muslim, how many Muslim families are there in this region?**

We have only [censored for security] Muslim families [in this region].

**As a minority, being the only [censored for security] Muslim families; do you face any difficulties living among others?**

Sure, there are many difficulties.<sup>8</sup> The [new Burma/Myanmar government] immigration officer had transferred from Rakhine State<sup>9</sup> and he discriminates against people based on their ethnic identity. He is also an elder of the community in this town. He is U Myo Tint, and he appointed himself as chairman of religious affairs. At first, he tried to get me in trouble with many relevant departments, but U Myo Tint was not successful at getting me into trouble. So then, he tried in another way to create problems for me. The way he became a chairman of religious affairs was not [through being] elected by the people, he appointed himself to be chairman of religious affairs in Kayin State.

**Can you please tell me the name of the immigration officer who transferred from Rakhine State?**

His name is U Myo Tint.

**How was he appointed as a chairman of religious affairs?**

Actually he was not appointed by anybody, he just announced himself as chairman of religious affairs.

**So was he recognised by others?**

No.

**So what are the common religions in the region that are involved in these religious affairs?**

In Thandaung Myo Thit [Town], we have Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Gurkha.<sup>10</sup>

**Do other religions accept the fact that there is a [chairman] of religious affairs in the community?**

As I know from the outside [from rumours around the community], there are people who do not know about that, and the people who know about the chairman of religious affairs claim that he is not elected by the people's desire. Another thing is in Kayin State, if there is a chairman of

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<sup>8</sup> KHRG has recently published two other reports regarding anti-Muslim discrimination in Thandaunggyi Township, including a case of an ethnic Rakhine police officer discriminating against his Muslim staff, as well as another case where anti-Muslim literature was distributed in the township. For more information see, "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, January to February 2015](#)," KHRG, October 2015, as well as, "[Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, July to November 2014](#)," KHRG, April 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Currently there is ongoing tension and violence in Rakhine State, which erupted in June 2012 primarily between Rakhine Buddhist and Rohingya Muslim communities. See "[All You Can Do is Pray](#)," *Human Rights Watch*, April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013. Later in 2012 and in 2013, further waves of unrest and violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims have occurred across other areas in Burma/Myanmar, including notably in Meiktila, see "[State of emergency imposed in Meiktila](#)" *BBC News*, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013 and in Okkan, see "[Anti-Muslim Violence Tears Apart Communities Near Rangoon](#)," *The Irrawaddy Magazine*, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. In 2012 and 2013, KHRG received several reports of discrimination against Muslims occurring in Karen State districts, see "[Incident Report: Religious discrimination and restrictions in Papun District, September 2012](#)," KHRG, March 2013, "[Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, September to December 2012](#)," KHRG, March 2013.

<sup>10</sup> The term Gurkha may refer to soldiers from Nepal, but has also been historically used as a synonym for Nepali. Although Gurkha is not a religion, the interviewee could be referring to immigrants from Nepal, who typically subscribe to Hinduism or Buddhism.

religious affairs, the chairman should be Karen, since Buddhists [like U Myo Tint] are just the minority.<sup>11</sup> However, he ignored all of those things and appointed himself as chairman.

**What is his background story that he can appoint himself and what did he do to be able to become a chairman when he was in the position of elder of the community?**

There is no organisation that stands behind him, and to be frank, he was fired from his position with the police and then he got married here in Thandaung Myo Thit [Town] and settled down here. He also understands the law and has connections with it [lawmakers in government], so based on that he arbitrarily does whatever he wants to do.

**As he is chairman of religious affairs and his religion is different from yours, does he get along with you guys [Muslims]?**

No, he does not, and he has held a grudge against us since six years ago [in 2009], before the religious conflict happened. At first, [in 2009], he tried to attack us by [interfering with our] businesses, and after he failed [to make us move out of town], [in 2015] he turned to [attacking us in a] racial way. After he failed to [make me move out of town with his first] attack on my business, he conspired with departmental people, such as the [Burma/Myanmar government] immigration department, and then tried to cast me out of the town to never return. On March 16<sup>th</sup> 2015, a superior from the immigration department phoned me at 2 pm and said, *"Hey, you have to follow me,"* and then I replied, *"Where do I have to follow you, sir?"* and he said, *"Follow me to the lawyer's house,"* and I told him that I do not know where the lawyer's house is and then he said to me, *"Just come to that lawyer's house."*<sup>12</sup> Therefore I didn't know what to do so I tried to contact the [Burma/Myanmar government] township administrator and explain my case: that they [immigration department] called me, so what should I do? The administrator replied to me, *"They are going to get you in trouble. However, as a superior summoned you, you should go and meet them."* So I replied, *"Yes, then I will go."*

When I reached him [the lawyer who was asked by the immigration department to consult on Maung A---'s case], he said that there will be a problem [for me], and [that] U Myo Tint has already distributed a letter to the community, and, *"He will also send it to the [Burma/Myanmar government] ministers, therefore you have to stay away and out of this town at once."* Then I replied, *"I have been here over ten years and it is impossible for me to comply [with this order], so if possible, please help me as much as you can."* Then he replied to me, *"Well, one thing that I can help you with is after you close your shop in the evening, just go back [out of town] and come back in the morning and open your shop,"* and then I replied, *"Okay, I will do it that way, but please sign one thing [an agreement] for me - that when I am not here [you would] please take care of my shop. If you sign that agreement, I will do what you suggested."* When I said that, he raised one fist in anger and said, *"Why should I do something like that?"* Then he talked to me impolitely. So I told him, *"If you cannot do this for me, I also cannot do anything for you,"* and then he said, *"If you cannot - there will be problems [for you] when we conduct spot checks for unregistered residents,"* and I replied that I live [here legally] by regularly informing [the people in charge] of the spot checks for unregistered residents [of my residency here], and he said, *"No, even [if] you do that, you cannot live in the town anymore because you are of a different religion."*

At that point he was extremely angry and he pulled me by the arm and he just wanted me to move [out of town] at once, so he strongly demanded that of me. Therefore I said, *"Well, then do whatever you want, I have no option now and I will follow you wherever you want to [go to] deal*

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<sup>11</sup> Although Maung A--- implies that Christians are a majority in Kayin State, the exact religious makeup of the state is not known.

<sup>12</sup> Although here Maung A--- refers to the location of the meeting as the "lawyer's house," KHRG was able to later clarify that the meeting with the lawyer who has been working with the immigration department took place in the immigration department office.



*with this, because it is already complicated and if you want it to be more complicated then I will follow you.*" I also lost my patience at this point, so I said to him, *"I have already been living here for ten years and I did not make any mistake or do anything illegal; you can ask anyone you want about me. I'm just doing the good thing for the community and although I cannot lead the improvements [development] for the community, I do participate and take part in the improvements."* So I appealed to him, [saying], *"Please do not conspire with U Myo Tint to give me trouble."* U Myo Tint had already got me in trouble [in 2009] and I have lost 7,500,000 kyat (US \$6,724.65)<sup>13</sup> within a day. I rented the space [for my electronics shop]<sup>14</sup> from the government [people in charge of renting it out] and I get along with the people in charge, and have already constructed the shop, but he [U Myo Tint] complained about me and I had to tear down my shop within a day. The building already had a complete foundation, walls and a roof, but I had to lose all of those. I explained to him that I am faced with that sort of situation.

### **In which year was that?**

That was in 2009.

### **So which U Myo Tint are you speaking of?<sup>15</sup>**

He is the one who was named the elder of [his] community and is a [self-appointed] chairman of religious affairs. So I told him not to do that [to me], that I cannot resist anymore and I have to struggle hard to make a living. I explained my condition to [the lawyer] like that and then I went back home. And one man came and gave me a letter that they [U Myo Tint] distributed and said, *"They are now starting to take action, so I think for you to be able to protect yourself, [you need to] prepare yourself in advance - [so] I let you read the letter."* When I read through the letter, I found out that what they had written in the document was about [how] Buddhists and Christians have been living together in the same community, [and now a] mass of Muslims were entering into the community and they have to worry, for they [the Muslims] are going to build a mosque. Then I started responding to that immediately and wrote down that I have been living here for over ten years and I have to work so hard for my livelihood, so to be honest, a person like me cannot do anything and I do not have any desire to [build a mosque]. I simply believe in Islam and I am not an extremist. Another thing is I was born in this country and grew up in this country and studied in this country and my father was a civil servant, so if something such as a conflict were to happen with any other country, I would stand on my country's side. I am that kind of person, but when he [U Myo Tint] says things like that - it is [actually] impossible for me to make it happen [build the mosque] like they are worried and concerned about, therefore I submitted the petition letter to the ministers and I copied the document of my ID and Form No. 10 [household document]<sup>16</sup> because he [U Myo Tint] accused me of not having those. I rent the apartment [motorcycle repair shop] from the Union Solidarity Development Party [USDP]<sup>17</sup> and

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<sup>13</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the June 19<sup>th</sup> 2015 official market rate of 1,115.30 kyat to the US \$1.

<sup>14</sup> The KHRG community member who interviewed Maung A--- later clarified that Maung A--- was planning to open an electronics shop back in 2009, which he had to tear down as a result of U Myo Tint's attacks against him, as per his testimony above. Later, he opened a motorcycle repair shop, which is the shop that he is being told to tear down in 2015. As Maung A--- is still in the process of resolving this situation, he is trying to rebuild his motorcycle repair shop elsewhere, yet his attempt to rebuild it in his own house compound in Thandaung Myo Thit Town have been thwarted by members of the USDP, as well, as he relates later in the interview.

<sup>15</sup> There are two prominent individuals in Thandaung Myo Thit Town by the name of U Myo Tint. The first U Myo Tint is the former police officer, who is now an immigration officer and a self-appointed chairman of religious affairs. The second U Myo Tint is the head of the town.

<sup>16</sup> Form No. 10 or "Household document" refers to a Burma/Myanmar government administrative form which all households must submit to their village heads or local authorities. This document includes the name, age, religion, and other demographic information of all the members of the household.

<sup>17</sup> The Union Solidarity and Development Party (*Pyi Khaing Pyo* in Burmese, *Pa Ka Hpa* in Karen) is the successor of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It was officially registered as a political party on June 2<sup>nd</sup>

they [USDP] told me to move my shop because I am Muslim and my religion is different from others'. Another thing that they [USDP members] mentioned to me is that the first time they [USDP] tried to campaign for the election they were not successful because one of their members was Chinese. Therefore in this election they just try to remove anything that could be a barrier for them. They told me like that and gave me the time to find a place for [me] to [re]build my motorcycle repair shop [outside of Thandaung Myo Thit Town].

**What is their party name?**

Union Solidarity Development Party.

**Who is the chairman of USDP?**

The [township-level] chairman is Hay Tha Yee.

**Who is the secretary?**

I do not know the secretary.

**When you were summoned [to meet with the USDP], who was involved in the meeting?**

When I was summoned the [USDP] chairman was not included, there were U Maung Maung [Burma/Myanmar state civil servant] and campaign officers U Kyaw Naing and U Htoo Pleh.

**Who told you the information?**

Campaign officers U Kyaw Naing and U Htoo Pleh, but they are not going to be in the group [USDP] anymore because they are of a different religious [background]. And as a [Muslim person], the USDP does not want me to be their barrier to [winning] the election, [either].

**When they lost the election, were you in this town?**

Yes, I was.

**What is their concern with you? You have not given a vote to them or what is that [all about]?**

Not like that, U Maung Maung is a mixed-race Chinese [half Chinese and half Burmese] and he tried to compete in the [previous 2010] election, but he was not successful [in winning the election]. At that time, the reason he failed was because he was Chinese. Now, I rent a space in his [U Myo Tint's] area and if I, [a Muslim], am affiliated with him [U Myo Tint], and if somebody complains about that - it could be a barrier for them [USDP]. But I do not see [it that way], as it is their fault, because they just try to win the election [and do not actually care about the people]. And another thing is the person who is the self-appointed chairman of religious affairs and an immigration officer [U Myo Tint]; he is only [important] in name [by using a title he created without the approval of the people] so I can understand them [the people, for not recognising his authority]. But now my situation is so risky that I am disappointed because a person who calls himself an elder of the community comes to my house by motorbike or car very often and threatens me, [saying,] *"This Muslim will know about me very well, just wait and see within a few days."* Therefore, I cannot work freely during the day or sleep very well at night; I have to [always] be aware of the risk he [poses]. He would come into my house and insult me, shouting at me and then go back and come back again and keep complaining about me.

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2010 and is headed by Thein Sein. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) ousted the USDP in a landslide election, winning a majority of seats in parliament.

### **Does Myo Tint then supervise the USDP?**

In the USDP, U Kyaw Naing and U Htoo Pleh are the newly [hired] immigration officers and they are people who like to drink alcohol, so they drink alcohol together all day. Then they talk about whatever they want to say and want to be. In their area, there is a man named *Ko*<sup>18</sup> Si Thu, who sells alcohol to the whole town and he is also a stooge of U Myo Tint and he will do him any favour, whatever U Myo Tint may ask him for. Once they used to be such special enemies to each other, but now they totally made peace [with each other], therefore the two of them gossip about Muslims and then complain about them to their superiors. What I see at this point is they cannot [make me move out of town by] attacking me through my business - that is why they try to attack me in this [racist] way. But on my part, I treat him respectfully and I regard him as my superior or 'parent'; however, the way he reacts to me is really making me upset and ashamed of myself.

### **Was it only the USDP that was included [in this behaviour]?**

No.

### **What about the Forest Department?**

Yes, forestry is included [in the group of people who discriminate against Muslims].

### **Who was included from the Forest Department?**

From the Forest Department *Ko* Thein Min and Min Thu were included. They are the same group, and if you cannot find them [U Myo Tint and his colleagues] in the alcohol shop that is near the USDP area, then you can find them at the alcohol shop on the outskirts of town.

### **When were you told to move your [motorcycle repair] shop?**

I do not remember the exact date, I [just] remember that the day when my brother in law and I were looking for a place to build a toilet, I saw them having a conversation about that and finally what I heard from *Ko* Si Thu was that he said, "*You guys try first [to get the Muslim to move out of town], and then if you cannot make it [happen] then I will handle it.*" [I know] that *Ko* Si Thu saw us listening to their conversation, so I consider that my life [here] has become high risk.

### **What organisation does that *Ko* Si Thu belong to?**

He does not belong to any organisation, [he's] just a partner of U Myo Tint. He just assists Myo Tint with his plans. They campaigned [for the 2015 election] last Friday and he had to help with whatever U Myo Tint asked him to do.<sup>19</sup>

### **How do they conduct the campaign?**

I do not know that because I did not attend the campaigning.

### **Do they station security [guards] while conducting the campaign, because as you mentioned there can be barriers and challenges for them?**

No, I did not see it.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ko* is a Burmese title used for men, literally meaning "older brother."

<sup>19</sup> The National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide election in the 2015 polls, securing the seats for Thandaung Myo Thit Town, as well. According to the KHRG community member who submitted this interview, U Myo Tint has been known to cooperate with whichever party is in power in order to further his business interests, hence following the USDP loss in the 2015 election he became a member of the NLD.

**What I am not clear [about] is - when the USDP summoned you, did they meet you at the [USDP] office?**

Yes, they summoned me to the [USDP] office.

**How many people rent a space [from USDP]?**

There are five people who rent a space.

**Did they summon all of them?**

Yes, they summoned all of them and they told me to move out in front of everybody.

**Do the rest of the people also have to move?**

No.

**Is that because you are Muslim?**

Yes, it is.

**Who said that word?**

Ko Kyaw Naing.

**Is he a campaign officer?**

Yes, he is.

**Is it [for the] township or state [level]?**

For the township.

**So he is a township campaign officer?**

Yes.

**So out of the five people, how do you solve your situation, [now that the time] when you were told to move [is approaching in the near] future?**

I have not met with the [USDP] chairman yet, and I realised that I cannot ask for help from the other four people [who rent the space]. And I do not have the proper opportunity to meet with the [USDP] chairman to discuss my case. However, I still have my own society in this town [the other Muslim families] and I already got the permit to rent out a space [somewhere outside Thandaung Myo Thit Town], but these people do not allow me to build my building [a new motorcycle repair shop inside the town limits].

**Do you mean the USDP people?**

Yes, but the main person who is making all the trouble is U Myo Tint who calls himself a chairman of religious affairs.

**So this party has disappointed the people a bit, right?**

Yes, of course.

**It means that it is a party that tricks the people in order to win the election?**

That is right.

**Due to the way they [USDP] requested you to move, urgently, and did not give you enough time...So it is not easy for you to solve the problem that has suddenly arisen?**

Yes, that is right.

**So how do you approach them in order to be able to solve your problem?**

At first they gave me a time [period] of three months; they told me to move out within three months.

**Alright, they gave you three months to move out, so is it enough time for you?**

No way.

**Did you ask for additional time, like six months?**

No, I did not because at that time they were very mad at me and very serious so I will ask for that when they calm down.<sup>20</sup>

**How is the situation after they summoned you? Is it still as usual?**

Yes, still as usual.

**Based on the hardship that you faced, with the way they requested you to move, so in this situation, is there any group or any organisation that stands up for you or that you can ask for help?**

Yes.

**What is it?**

It is the town pastor, Saw B---, who always gives me advice whenever I face a problem.

**Is he Christian?**

Yes, he is Christian, Pastor Saw B---, Pastor Saw C---, these men are the people who stand for the truth in this situation. They encourage me to not be depressed and not let this case get to me; they just told me like that. However, I still face this disappointment everyday so I still worry about myself.

**Can you please explain to me about the group or organisation that stands up for you? Are they people of authority?**

They told me to not make the problem bigger, just keep acting normally and calm down. I also sent the information about how I was summoned by the immigration department to the departmental superiors. They also asked me, *"Aren't you a citizen, don't you have the documents and ID?"* and I replied that I have all of those. *"Then why are you so depressed? Even though they keep going on and making trouble for you, there is the police chief and the*

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<sup>20</sup> As of November 2015, Maung A--- is still living in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, after speaking to a Karen People's Party (KPP) Member of Parliament about his situation.

*decision will go to the higher superior in the end.*" They told me like that. In terms of the [civil service] staff, from the old staff, only the police station officer remains.

**Does the police station officer get along with you?**

I do not have a close relationship with the police station officer because he lives in his own way and I live in my own way [our paths do not cross much], and I do not have more conversations with him than needed so I get along with him.

**Do you mean the person in charge of the police station?**

Yes.

**When you were asked to move out within three months without return, was that just [you, the] person, or [your] shop?**

Both person and shop have to move out [relocate] without return.

**Let's say you were to move now, would they provide a place for you?**

No, they would not provide a place for me.

**Well you are not allowed to live in the town, but can't you live on the outskirts of town?**

They did not tell me about that, they just simply told me to find another place, as I am not allowed to stay in their society, and also there is no other place out of town.

**Are you asked to move from the downtown [where you live] or from this place [that you rent for your shop]?**

I was asked to move [my motorcycle repair shop] from this place where the USDP area is.

**What about U Myo Tint, where does he live?**

He lives in this town and he asked me to move out of this town.

**What I am not clear about is, there are two parts to what he asked of you; to move is one part and asking [you] to move your shop is another part. So did he just ask you to move out of this town or are you not allowed to be seen in this area at all?**

To speak openly, the way that U Myo Tint and the immigration department are doing it, they do not want to see me here at all and based on that they will sue me with many points [charges]. They talk to me impolitely, and moreover, they insult my parents. My father is over 70 years old and he is a former civil servant and what they wrote about my father in the letter [that U Myo Tint submitted to the court] is that he married many women and let them stay in the same house. Another thing is [that they] accused him of being an officer [missionary] in charge of spreading Islam in this area. But I do not even know about that and have never seen that.

**So you guys are not affiliated with that?**

Of course not, we just worship at home and go to the mosque on Friday.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A KHRG community member clarified that there is no official mosque building in Thandaung Myo Thit Town. Maung A--- likely refers to a residential home where the few Muslim families in the town gather to worship, as is common practice elsewhere in the country where Muslim minorities reside.

**So do you still have their complaint letter?**

Yes.

**Can you give me a copy of it?**

Sure.

**In the future, for this not to happen again and to be able to live peacefully, what are your expectations from them, or how would you like the administration mechanism to function?**

It is a little bit awkward to say because he [U Myo Tint] is fine when he is not drunk, but when he gets drunk I suppose that in his mind I am the only person that he wants to make trouble for. Although I tried to be friendly with him very often when I saw him, when I was going by motorbike or car, I stopped and said hi to him just to have a good social relation with him. I [also] went to his home and tried to make conversation, like how are you doing, how is everything, but whenever I tried to talk with him in a flexible [polite and respectful] way he always reacted to me in a negative way. The last time I saw him at the tea shop, I stopped my motorbike and said, *"How are you doing?"* and offered him a cup of tea to drink, but he shouted at me in front of other people and said, *"It's none of your business and it is not your concern,"* but I just talked to him respectfully and politely as he is an elder in the community and a superior officer. Therefore, when he responded to me like that people were staring at me and I got embarrassed by that. Then I did not say anything more and left quietly.

So, I have this kind of situation where he rejects my friendship because he used to borrow money from me [in 2009] when his daughter had to go study abroad and when he borrowed money from me he said, *"Hey, Muslim man, I need money, my daughter has to study abroad so I will pawn my car to you,"* he just talked to me offensively but I replied that I do not have that much money and I am not that rich; however, I said to him, *"You do not need to pawn your car and no need to pay the loan [right away] and I will help you as much as I can and just pay me back when you are able to,"* I replied to him like that. The investment for the whole of my shop did not even cost that amount of money that he needed so how could I pay him? However, even though I told him I will pay him as much as I can, he did not accept it, so based on that he resents me.

Another thing is when I was appointed as a secretary in the Road Transport Administration Department, there was a rule that people who have a driver's license have to pay a monthly fee of 2,500 kyat (US \$2.24). If anyone cannot pay, it is better to not apply for the driver's license or to not drive a car. Based on that fact, I pointed out [to my superiors], *"Please do not forcefully charge people with the minimum amount of the fee and let the people pay as much as they are able to,"* while discussing about the motor vehicle issue in the annual meeting. Then he [U Myo Tint] got embarrassed in front of people and got angry at me because ever since that time [that he asked for a loan] he kept a grudge against me. In the past, before the religious conflict in Meiktila happened, he was not so bad, but after that he became more and more unruly towards me and he makes me [increasingly] more depressed. And when the religious conflict in Meiktila was happening I had to stay at night to stand guard for my shop, and one of my friends came and told me that, *"Myo Tint has a plan to burn down your shop,"* then I was extremely worried for my shop because I earn income for my livelihood through this [shop], so if he burns down my shop then my life is going to be ruined.

**Which Myo Tint do you mean that was going to burn your shop?**

The Myo Tint who has self-appointed himself as chairman of religious affairs. Since I heard about that [plan of his], I stayed up at night to guard my shop for three days. But later on the situation calmed down a little bit; however, he is still bad to me to this day.

**Is it that he threatens you or tries to attack you?**

He tried to [non-physically] attack me, but he was not successful [in making me move out of town, yet].

**What will be the scale of his [future] attack, and will he come with a team?**

It is not in that position yet [it has not come to that], but from what I know there are U Myo Tint, Maung Si Thu<sup>22</sup> and just the people they can convince to attack me. And to be honest, I have faced much oppression by my superiors and I was extremely depressed because of that. Currently, I rent a space from the government and have opened a motorcycle repair shop [which the USDP are asking me to tear down] and I have to pay 80,000 kyat (US \$71.73) for the rent.

**Which government department do you have to pay it to?**

To USDP, I have to pay 80,000 kyat (US \$71.73) per month. He [U Myo Tint] is threatening me in various ways, but except for this place [Thandaung Myo Thit Town] I have nowhere to flee. He also does not allow me to work on my own garden [house compound].<sup>23</sup>

**Do you also have your own garden?**

Yes, I do.

**He does not allow you to build the shop in your own garden?**

No, he got me into a lot of trouble for that.

**So he impedes you in many ways from being able to build the shop in your own garden?**

Yes.

**How about the departmental superior?**

This case was already handled with departmental superiors at their office, where I was present, and he [U Myo Tint] reacted to the departmental superior very rudely.

**Is it that he tries to defeat you so you are not able to build your shop?**

Right, and the section leader, [former USDP member] U Kyaw Thu,<sup>24</sup> also talked to the people who were hired to clear the [garden where I wanted the] building for my [new motorcycle repair] shop [to be built], and said, *"You guys do not need to do this for that Muslim. If you do so he will put up the building [motorcycle repair shop]."*

**Which section does that U Kyaw Thu belong to?**

He is the Section #2 leader [of Thandaung Myo Thit Town]. So, obviously they [the USDP and their former member U Kyaw Thu] do not want to give me a place [to build my shop in the town].

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<sup>22</sup> *Maung* is a Burmese title, used before a man's name. The names Maung Si Thu and Ko Si Thu both refer to the same individual.

<sup>23</sup> In Burma/Myanmar, a "yard," "garden," or "house compound" refers to an urban or rural residential plot, which can be bought privately. These plots differ from plots of farmland, which are owned by the government and can only be leased from the Burma/Myanmar government for the purposes of agricultural production.

<sup>24</sup> This information about U Kyaw Thu was obtained through following up with the KHRG community member.



**What ethnicity does U Kyaw Thu associate with?**

From what I know, he is also a mixed-race Chinese.

**Does he get along with U Myo Tint, the chairman of religious affairs?**

Yes, because in terms of their gambling [activities], he [U Kyaw Thu] is the biggest dealer.

**Did he also use to have problems with U Myo Tint like you?**

I have not heard about it.

**So it is only you who has problems with U Myo Tint?**

Yes, only me.

**What else would you like to say that I have not asked?**

I have eight workers who depend on me, and I also do not have my own ability [sphere of influence], and now I have to move out of my place that I rent from USDP but I have my own land [garden] and if I have to move my own garden then my life is going to be ruined. I have all the relevant documents with which I can apply for the land title and I want to build the building [motorbike shop] so I want someone who can stand up for me and I also pray for this to God, as I am going through hardship and my situation is that I am in trouble because he declared that he will [keep] making [problems] until I flee from this town.

**Do you mean U Myo Tint?**

Yes, due to my current situation, it is a great opportunity for him to cast me out. However, as a gentleman, I want him to stand strongly [express his opinions] in the right way and I am very upset that he does not stand in the right way while I regard him as a gentleman and respect him. This is what I have faced by myself and this is just me and we cannot guarantee that he won't do this to others the way he did to me. So what I want to happen is just to appoint and empower a leader who does the right thing and stands on the [side of the] truth and such a person [as U Myo Tint], who is drunk all the time, should not be appointed as a leader. As for me, there is no possibility to build a mosque, and even so, I already knew that we are not allowed to build a mosque. Whoever is appointed as a leader it is fine by me, as long as I can work peacefully for my livelihood. Therefore, I want both departmental superiors and armed groups to consider this case and stand by the truth.

**Do you have anything else to say?**

No.

**Well thank you so much for telling me this. Are you allowing us to use your information in Karen Human Rights Group?**

Yes, I do.

**Okay, thank you much.**

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

- "Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, January 2015," (October 2015)

- “Toungoo Photo Set: Militarisation in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2014 to February 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, January to February 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, January 2015,” (August 2015)
- “Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2014 to February 2015,” (July 2015)

## Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)