



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

October 18, 2016 / KHRG #16-45-A3-I1

Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, May 2016

This Interview with Naw A--- describes events occurring in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo [Toungoo] District, in May 2016, including landmines, healthcare and education.

- *Naw A--- describes the situation in the transition period after the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement, covering military activities, livelihood problems, and access to healthcare and education in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) areas.*
 - *The interview with Naw A--- by a KHRG researcher also covered the supplies that her village and her surrounding villages have received, such as rice sacks and solar panels from an Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that comes from the Hkler La Town.*
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Interview | Naw A---, (female, 31), B--- village, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo [Toungoo] District (May 2016)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was conducted in Toungoo District on May 18th 2016 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 Toungoo District, including two other Interviews, one Situation Update and nine photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Agriculture

Position: Villager

¹ 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.

² 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.

What is your name?

I am Naw A---

How old are you?

31 years old.

How about your nationality?

I am Karen.

How about your religion?

I am a Christian.

Baptist or Catholic?

Baptist.

How about your livelihood?

[I work on a] Betel nut plantation.

How about other things [that you do for a living]?

Nothing else.

How about cardamom, durian or mangosteen [farming]?

[I have] A small cardamom [plantation].

Where do you live?

B--- village.

How about the District?

It is in Taw Oo District.

How about the Township?

It is in Htaw Ta Htoo [Htantabin] Township.

Do you have family?

Yes, I do.

How many children do you have?

Four children.

How old is your oldest child?

Four years old.

How about the youngest?

Over one year old.

Is there a Tatmadaw military camp [near where you live]?

No.

Now [at the present time], do you live in your farm or in your village?

I live in my farm.

Why don't you stay in your village?

We do not know the exact situation so we don't go back there yet.

Do your villagers feel OK to go back [to stay in the village]?

Some people have returned [to their village] but I don't know about other people.

In the past, how many houses were there in your village?

There were twenty I think.

How about the population of the village? Do you know it?

[No answer]

In your village, have the Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers ever been there?

Yes, they have.

When was that? Which year? Before or after the [2012] ceasefire?

In 2006. They used to come often in the past. I can't remember [how many times they came].

Do they still come to the area since the 2012 [ceasefire]?

No, they don't.

When you live in your village, where do you go to buy things?

In C--- [village].

Are your village and C--- [village] far apart? What is the distance between them?

I don't know the distance but it takes three hours to get there.

On foot or by motorbike?

On foot in the past. Nowadays, people go by motorbike as well.

Is there a road for motorbikes that goes there?

Yes there is.

Is there a Tatmadaw military camp between your village and C--- village?

No, there isn't.

Where do you go to buy and sell things? In C--- village?

Yes.

Have you ever encountered the Tatmadaw on the way when you travel there [C--- village]?

I have never encountered them. We only go if we have heard that the situation is good [safe from military activity]. If not, we do not go.

Since the [2012] ceasefire, when you go to C--- [village] or Hkler La [Town] to buy [things], have you ever seen the Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers?

In the village?

Either in the village or on the way there.

I have seen them sometimes.

How do you feel when you see them? Are you worried?

[I have] Never had fear.

Why?

It is like now [I feel like] we have freedom.

Do they question you?

No, they don't.

How do they travel? Do they travel with weapons or just like civilians?

With weapons and uniforms. We have seen them travelling like that.

What about the number of them?

Not too many. There are normally no more than 50.

Have you seen them going away somewhere or coming back [to your area]?

Sometimes going away and sometimes coming back.

How about further away from these places [Hkler La Town and C--- village], do they have military there?

Where?

Further away from C--- and other places? When you saw them, were they transporting rations? Or rotating troops?

Transporting rations as well as rotating [troops].

To where?

To D--- village.

Do they have their military camps at D--- village?

Yes, they do.

Are D--- [village] and your village close?

I don't think they are close.

[Someone beside her said:] They are close.

Is that the only one or are there more [military camps] in further away places?

Yes, there are more.

Where?

It is called Bu Hsah Hkee.

Do they travel on the road or do they travel off the main road?

They go on the vehicle road.

Since the [2012] ceasefire, have you heard any gunfire sounds from them [Tatmadaw]?

No, I haven't.

How about landmine explosions?

Sometimes. Last year I heard one once.

When was that?

In 2014.

Was it a Tatmadaw landmine or a KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] landmine?

I don't know.

Was it far away from where you live?

Yes, far away.

How many times have you heard them [landmine explosions]?

From here where I live, I have only heard one once.

In your village, are there people who have moved to the refugee camps [in Thailand]?

Yes.

Since the [2012] ceasefire, have any people come back [from the refugee camps]?

Yes, a few people who have.

Have all of them [returned] or are some still [in the refugee camps]?

Yes, there are some [villagers] who are still [in the refugee camps].

They come back and stay where?

They stay in our village.

Do they come back and work [in your village]?

Yes.

Do they stay in their farms or in the village?

They stay in their farms.

Currently, are there villagers who live in their old village?

No, people do not live there.

Is there a church in the village?

There is only one school. There is no church.

Who established the school in the past? The villagers, the KNU [Karen National Union] or the Burma/Myanmar government?

It was established by the villagers. They are Naw³ E--- and Saw⁴ F---. I do not know them.

Now, is the school still there or has it been damaged?

They stopped running it last year because there were no students.

So where do the students go to study?

They go to C--- village, Hkler La [Town] and G--- [village].

You said there is no church [in the village]?

Yes.

Have there been any development projects supporting the villagers, such as [providing] school materials, rice or other food after the ceasefire from 2012 to 2016?

What is an NGO?

A non-government organisation.

Yes there have been.

When was that?

It was last year [2015] and the year before [2014].

In 2014 and 2015?

Yes.

³ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

⁴ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

What support did they provide?

They provided rice and solar panels so we could have electric lights.

What organisation was that? Do you know the name of the organisation?

I don't know.

Where did they come from?

From Hkler La [Town].

How many villagers did they distribute [supplies] to?

All of the villagers in this area.

Could you tell us the names of the villages?

H---, I---, J---, K---, L---, and M--- [villages]. That is all I know.

Have you named L--- [village] already?

Yes, I have.

How about M--- [village]?

Yes, I mentioned it already.

[Is the amount of support that] They provide based on the number of individuals or the number of households?

Base on the [number of] households.

In B---, your village, how much rice did you get?

Two sacks of rice for each household.

So you have got two sacks of rice?

Yes.

For solar panels and lights, how many did you get?

[In contrast to this year when we did receive them,] We did not get them last year because my children have not moved away from home.

Is there any other support [that you have received]?

No.

How about healthcare? Do you know the name [of the organisation that has provided support]?

I don't know the name [of that organisation].

When did they come?

It was in January.

January 2016?

Yes, a healthcare group came.

Where were they from? From the KNU or the Burma/Myanmar government?

From the KNU.

What things did they provide?

They provided medicine.

What medicine did they provide?

They provided medicine for all kinds of disease.

Did they do medical checkups before they started providing medical treatment? And what medicine did they give after [the checkups]?

They did checkups and then they gave vitamins and medicine for people who were sick.

Where did they do that? B--- [village] or where?

It was in I--- [village].

How many days did they do that [the medical treatment] for?

They did it for one day and stayed overnight and then left in the morning.

Do you know the name of their department?

No, I don't.

Where did they come from?

From N---.

Female medics?

Male medics [as well].

What illnesses do villagers face?

Fever and there are a few [other illnesses] but I can't remember them.

Are there clinics here?

No, there aren't.

If you are sick, where do you go for medical treatment?

If we are sick, we go and call [medics].

Are there midwives [in the village]?

Yes, there are.

How many of them are there?

There is only one medic and the other one [who assists her].

If you get a serious illness, where do you [usually] go?

Hkler La hospital.

How long does it take to get there? Do you go by motorbike or car?

These days, people usually go by motorbike.

In your village, have you ever asked for anything from the local authority? Such as needing a clinic, school or something else.

Not at the moment.

Based on your needs I mean, have you ever mentioned this to the [KNU or Burma/Myanmar government] leaders?

No, we haven't.

Are there any problems that you have faced related to your livelihood activities?

There are problems with the unusual weather like when it is too hot.

What happens after that?

The plants, like the cardamom plants, all dry up.

How about other things?

Durian plants do not produce fruit either.

With these problems that you have mentioned, how have you dealt with them in the last few years? Like if your cardamom plants are not productive, how do you get money to buy rice. How does this relate to your livelihood problems? And how do you deal with these problems? Do you ask for help from the local leaders or do you just leave it like that?

If we do not make enough [food or money], we have to ask for help from the local leaders.

Since the [2012] ceasefire, have you been able to work more freely?

Yes, [we are] able to travel more freely.

Since the [2015] ceasefire was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government, are you able to work more freely? Are you happy with the [current] situation? Do you have any concerns?

I don't know if there is stability or not but I personally still don't trust the situation. It [the current situation] is because of the [2015] ceasefire and otherwise, we would not be able to live peacefully.

Are there still some concerns?

Yes, there are sometimes.

In your personal opinion, is there really peace?

I personally don't think the peace [that we have is] completely real. I don't really know.

Is there anything else that you want to mention finally that I have missed from my questions about your feelings or needs?

I don't think so.

Ok, thanks.

Thanks.

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

- [“Collision between Tatmadaw military truck and a villager’s motorbike In Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District, May 2016,”](#) (September 2016)
- [“Toungoo Photo Set: Militarisation and land confiscation in Htantabin and Thandaunggyi townships, November 2013 To March 2015,”](#) (August 2016)
- [“Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles: Women’s testimonies from southeast Myanmar,”](#) (August 2016)
- [“Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, November 2015 to January 2016,”](#) (July 2016)

- [“Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, July to September 2015,”](#) (July 2016)

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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