

# **Karen Human Rights Group**

## **News Bulletin**

An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group  
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*News Bulletin is regularly produced by KHRG in order to provide up to date information on recent developments taking place within Karen and other areas of Burma, particularly when urgent action may be required. To receive News Bulletin by email, subscribe to the mailing list by following the links on the KHRG Homepage. Topics covered in News Bulletin will generally be documented in more detail in future KHRG reports.*

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### **Attempted rapes and other abuses in northern Karen districts**

The events below were reported in recent interviews with villagers in Toungoo and Papun districts of northern Karen State.

#### **Kler Lah area, Toungoo District**

Naw L--- is from Kler Lah village in Toungoo district. She reports that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) came up and established an office in Kler Lah at the beginning of 2005, and that as a result the SPDC stopped demanding forced labour for a while. However, forced labour demands in all surrounding villages continued, and perhaps even intensified to make up for the lack of Kler Lah villagers. This situation continued until August 2005. The ICRC office was staffed by Burmese nationals, with only rare visits by expatriates. Beginning in September 2005, Naw L--- reports that the SPDC refused to allow outside ICRC staff to come up to Kler Lah any more, and immediately started ordering Kler Lah villagers to do forced labour again. Beginning in September, demands for forced labour intensified for the people of Kler Lah, Maw Pa Der, Khu Pler Der, Pay Ko Der, Der Doh, Maw Ko Der, Kaw Thay Der, Klay Soe Kee, Ler Ko, Wa Tho Ko and Kaw Soe Ko villages (see **map**). Villagers of Kler Lah were again forced to do unpaid labour every day in the village itself and in Kler Lah Army camp, where people from all surrounding villages are also forced to work for SPDC Infantry Battalion #124. Naw L--- says all SPDC camps demand labour from the surrounding villages. The labour includes cutting and delivering bamboo and timber, making camp security fences, digging drainage canals, acting as messengers, clearing the sides of the vehicle roads, and portering. Both women and men are forced to go as porters. When SPDC soldiers come to catch villagers for forced labour people run, but patrols are already posted along the pathways to catch them as they try to flee. SPDC soldiers in the area now regularly catch villagers for one-day portering. If they need large numbers, they also raid the schools and take all students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> standards (Grades 5 to 10).

On November 21<sup>st</sup> 2005, a soldier from Infantry Battalion #124 came to Naw L---'s house in Kler Lah to demand some salt, but when he saw that she was alone in the house he pushed her down, ripped off her sarong and tried to

rape her. She struggled, and just then her small son arrived home from school. She called to her son, "Grab the machete and hit this soldier!" Her son attacked the soldier with the machete, and the soldier fled. Later Naw L--- said, "It's good he came alone, if he came with many others we wouldn't have been able to hit them with the machete." However, the soldier was still alive and a group from his unit came looking for her several times, so Naw L--- did not dare stay in the village any more. She fled with her three children, and managed to reach a refugee camp in Thailand in early January 2006 where she now stays. Her husband also fled separately but has not reached the camp, and Naw L--- heard a rumour that he ended up in Rangoon. The ICRC cannot confirm any of the above events because of current restrictions on access and because they have a confidentiality policy of not releasing any information on human rights abuses where they operate.

### **Dweh Loh township, Papun District**

In mid-December 2005, a group of nine SPDC soldiers led by officer Thet Khaing from Light Infantry Battalion #349 Column 2 arrived at M--- village in Dweh Loh township, Papun District (see **map**). They stayed in the village for five nights. On the last night, December 16<sup>th</sup> 2005, Corporal San Aung went to the house of Naw M--- at midnight. Naw M--- was sleeping with her three children, and her husband was not there. The Corporal entered the house and tried to pull the blanket off Naw M---. She woke up, and when she saw the soldier she shouted at him, "What are you doing here? Get out of my house right now!" He drew a knife and pointed it at her to frighten her, but she repeated, "If you don't leave right now I will scream!" Afraid of what would happen if her screams awoke others, the Corporal left. After he left, she was afraid he might come back to kill her so she took her three children and went to stay at her Aunt's house.

The next morning, Naw M--- told some other villagers what had happened, and said, "If that soldier comes again I will chop him and kill him with my machete!" The Corporal heard news of this, got very angry and responded that "I will go to blow up her house with my mines!" Later, Naw M--- said, "I heard that SPDC soldier San Aung said he will come and blow up my house with a mine, so now this is always in my mind. Until he goes back to his place *[when his unit rotates out of the area]*, I will always be afraid of him."

Villagers in this area of Dweh Loh township say that this SPDC Army unit (Light Infantry Battalion #349 Column 2) is worse than their predecessors from Light Infantry Battalion #589. Led by Camp Commander Pee Ta, the local LIB 349 troops make constant demands of the six villages surrounding their camp, and force every village to provide daily messengers for their use. On January 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Camp Commander Pee Ta informed local village heads that every villager owning a rice-husking mill must pay two baskets of rice to his troops. One villager in the area told KHRG, "After the KNU and SPDC made their ceasefire there wasn't as much portering, torture, beatings and killing by SPDC soldiers in this area, but they continue to demand a lot of bamboo, thatch and wood and we are always having to send it to the Army camp." However, the attempted rape of Naw M--- demonstrates that

SPDC soldiers still believe they have impunity to commit violent abuses against villagers.

### **Further Background**

Additional background on the situation in Toungoo District can be found in ***“Toungoo District: Civilians displaced by dams, roads, and military control”*** (KHRG #2005-F7, 19/8/05), ***“‘Peace’, or Control? The SPDC’s use of the Karen ceasefire to expand its control and repression of villagers in Toungoo District, Northern Karen State”*** (KHRG #2005-F3, 22/3/05), and ***“Enduring Hunger and Repression: Food Scarcity, Internal Displacement, and the Continued use of Forced Labour in Toungoo District”*** (KHRG #2004-01, September 2004).

For further background on the situation in Papun District, see ***SPDC road construction plans creating problems for civilians*** (KHRG #2006-B1, January 2006), ***Papun District: Forced labour, looting and road construction in SPDC-controlled areas*** (KHRG Report from the Field #2005-F5, May 2005), and ***Flight, Hunger and Survival: Repression and Displacement in the Villages of Papun and Nyaunglebin Districts*** (October 2001).

Photos from both districts are available in KHRG ***Photo Set 2005A*** (May 2005) and an additional set of ***Photos from 2005*** soon to be released. These and other reports on the district are available on the KHRG web site at [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

**Map by Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)**

Shan  
State

- Village
- Town/Large Village
- ★ SPDC Army Camp
- Existing Road
- Road under construction
- Railway
- River
- Township boundary
- District boundary

(not all shown on map)

Than Daung  
(Daw Pa Ko)  
Township

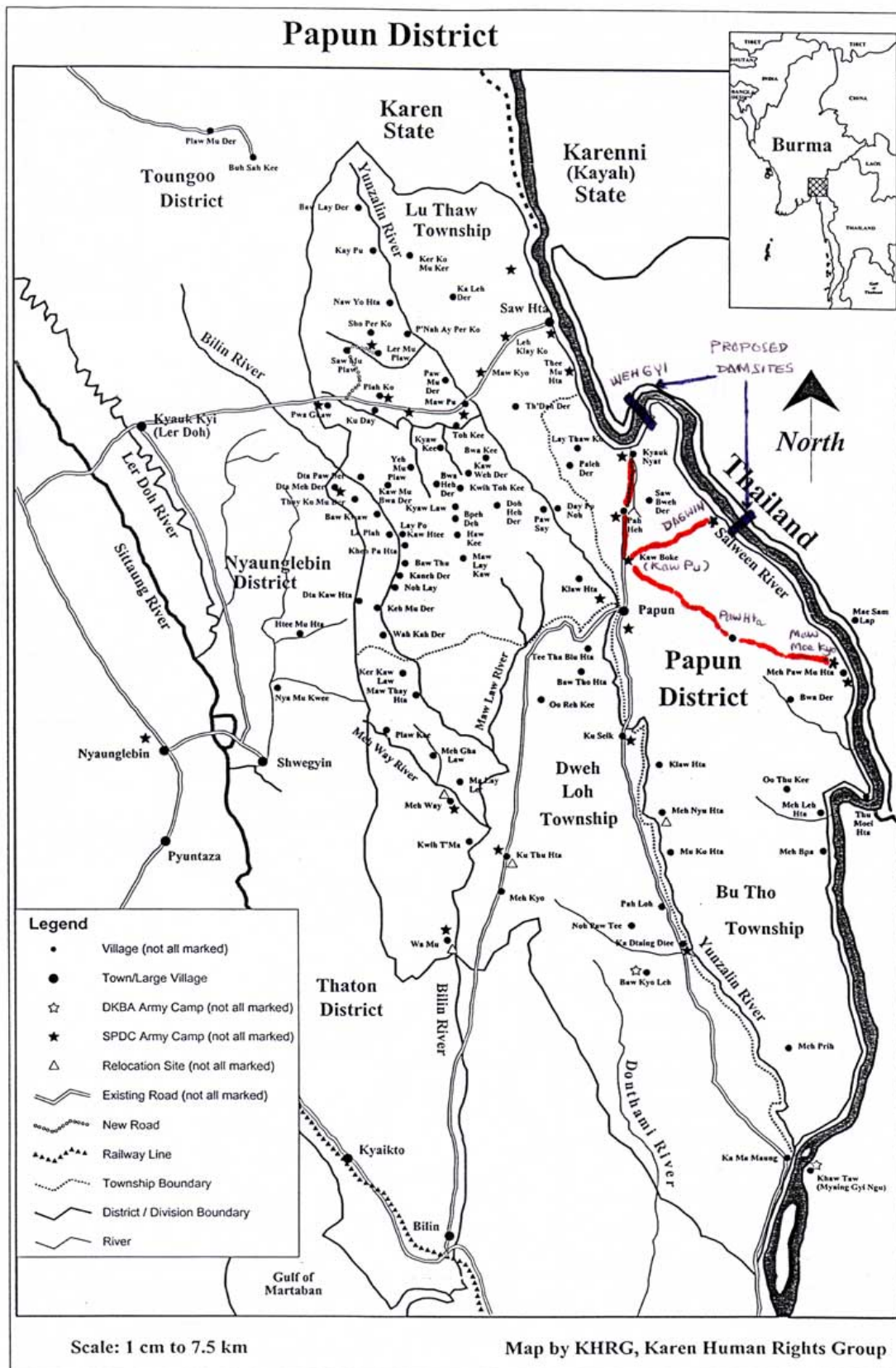
Than Daung  
Gyi

Karenni  
(Kayah)  
State

**Tantabin  
(Taw Ta Tu)  
Township**

**Kler Lweh Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District**

**Pegu  
(Bago)  
Division**





# Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km  
1 in. to 35 miles