

# **Karen Human Rights Group**

## **Report from the Field**

*Reports from the Field are drawn from situation reports submitted by KHRG researchers in the field. They are regularly published by KHRG to provide timely reporting of developments in particular regions or regarding thematic topics of concern, particularly when urgent action may be required. Reports from the Field are intended primarily for quick release via Internet, though hard copies are also available. Topics covered will generally be reported in more detail, with supporting testimonies, documents, and photos, in upcoming KHRG reports.*

---

### **SPDC Operations in Kler Lweh Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District**

**An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group  
April 30, 2006 / KHRG #2006-F4**

Nyaunglebin District (Kler Lweh Htoo in Karen) lies northeast of Rangoon, straddling the border of Pegu (Bago) Division and Karen State (see **map**). It includes the plains east of the Sittaung River and extends eastward into forested hills which continue into Papun District further east. The plains area is controlled by the State Peace & Development Council (SPDC) military junta and is heavily militarised, but in the hills this control is tenuous and Karen resistance forces are active. SPDC military forces mainly patrol the plain areas and up the main river valleys into the hills in the three townships of Nyaunglebin District – Mone (Mu) in the north, Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) in the centre, and Shwegyin (Hsaw Tee) in the south.

Since November 2005, SPDC forces have increased their activities in all three townships of the district. This has included detention and killing of villagers, destruction of villages and forced relocations both in strongly SPDC-controlled areas of the western plains and in the hills to the east. More troops have been sent in since February 2006 to depopulate the hills and force the villagers down to SPDC-controlled plains areas, and as this is written in April more columns are still being sent out to destroy villages, force villagers to SPDC-controlled sites, and kill any who disobey. Medical relief teams of the Free Burma Rangers in the area estimate that since February over 8,000 villagers have been forcibly displaced in Nyaunglebin district – 4,000 in Mone township, and more than another 4,000 in Kyauk Kyi and Shwegyin townships.

#### **Mone (Mu) township**

Most of Mone township is made up of hills, with the exception of a plains area in the west. In the hills, most people grow rice on the hillsides, but they cannot grow betelnut or other cash crops so they have very little monetary income. Many of them carry food to the edge of the plains and sell it to the plains villagers in temporary markets set up for the purpose. In some of the highest areas the soil is not good for rice and the villagers survive almost entirely by carrying and selling things to the plains villagers at these markets. Along the way they

must pass SPDC military posts, which sometimes block their way or steal their goods or money, making it difficult to survive.

Since January, SPDC columns have also been sent into the hills to destroy villages and force their occupants to move to SPDC-controlled areas. On January 14<sup>th</sup> 2006, a column set out made up of SPDC soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #599 of Light Infantry Division #33. On January 15<sup>th</sup> at 3:30 p.m. they stopped at Po Mu Hta (not a village but just the mouth of a stream) and fired a mortar at Mi Yeh Hta village. The people of Mi Yeh Hta and the other surrounding villages in Ler Klah village tract<sup>1</sup> fled into the forest and remained hidden there. Some of them fell ill from diarrhoea, and the two year old daughter of villager Saw Eh Ler Ghay died.

On February 5<sup>th</sup> 2006, a column from LIB #567 came up to deliver rations to their post at Po Khay Ko, causing villagers to scatter to avoid capture as porters. Then on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2006, a combined column of SPDC Light Infantry Battalions #366, 368, and 364 under the command of Military Operations Command #10 went to Saw Ka Der village tract and opened fire indiscriminately on the villagers at 5 p.m. Yeh Ka Ko villager Saw Du Kaw, age 53, and his son Saw Eh Lah Hser, 12 years old, were both shot dead. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the same column arrived at Klaw Kee village and shot and killed 28 year old villager Saw Maung Thingyan on sight. Sixteen year old Saw Heh Nay Htoo was also shot and seriously injured but managed to escape. The column then burned down twelve houses in Klaw Kee. They also burned down Saw Maung Thingyan's rice storage barn, and the farmfield huts of Saw Pah Mu Ghay and Saw Pah Yu Po outside the village. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, they proceeded to Dta Ghaw Pu village.

The destruction of villages has not been confined to the hills of Mone township. In the SPDC-controlled plains to the west, villagers are also facing abuses and fleeing. Villagers in the plains say that whenever they encounter SPDC soldiers they are forced to give them money. On November 28<sup>th</sup> 2005, SPDC LIB #599 Commander Min Thant Lwin, who is also the Kyun Bin Seik Camp Commander, demanded a basket of rice from Kyaw Plah villagers Saw Ko and Saw Ka Po Kwa. On November 29<sup>th</sup>, LIB #590 came to provide security for rations being sent along the vehicle road from Kyauk Kyi up to Mu Theh. They forced people to work on improving the road, and prohibited people from working in their gardens and plantations near the road.

After an armed skirmish at Tha Pyay Nyunt with KNLA forces, SPDC troops from LIB #599 commanded by Aung Kyi Soe went to Ter Kweh Lay Ko village in the plains of Mone township on the evening of November 29<sup>th</sup> 2005 and burned down 14 of the 21 houses. Those villagers who were in their houses managed to bring out some of their belongings before they were burned, but those who were away from the village at the time had all their possessions burned along with their houses. The village had nothing to do with the fighting and there were no KNLA soldiers there. Saw M---, 45, is a villager in Ter Kweh Lay Ko; he told KHRG,

“When the Burmese soldiers arrived in the village they didn’t say anything, except that they had to burn down the houses according to their orders from above. They burned down the houses but not all the houses. They burned down 14 houses, and we were able to save some of our possessions but some we couldn’t.”

---

<sup>1</sup> A village tract is a group of villages in a local area. In this region, most village tracts have 5-10 villages, though in more populated areas they can have as many as 20 villages.

The villagers are now living in small huts. They say they are facing difficulties from losing their homes and possessions.

On December 11<sup>th</sup> 2005, SPDC soldiers demanded 10,000 Kyat for shopping, 17,180 Kyat for Aung Laung Say army camp, and other amounts totalling 100,828 Kyat from the people of Way Sweh village tract. Then on December 21<sup>st</sup>, they demanded from the same villagers 23,928 Kyat to buy a motorbike, 18,400 Kyat to buy wood, 11,800 Kyat for recruiting new soldiers, 5,220 Kyat for their patrolling activities and 3,710 Kyat for Aung Laung Say army camp, totalling 63,058 Kyat. On December 13<sup>th</sup> 2005, LIB #351 Camp Commander Sergeant Kyaw Shwe demanded a *viss* [1.6 kg / 3.5 lb] of chicken from Po Thaung Su village. On December 21<sup>st</sup>, LIB #590 Company Commander Htun Oo and Deputy Column Commander San Kyaw Thu arrested Myeh Yeh villagers Saw Tah Neh, Saw Kwa Ker and Saw Po Kyu, accused them of being 'resisters' and sent them to Kyauk Kyi police station. Their village head had to go and pay a ransom of 400,000 Kyat for each of the three men to get them released.

On February 6<sup>th</sup> 2006, a column of 150 troops from SPDC LIB #599 (under Light Infantry Division #33) came and opened fire on Mi Yah Hta village, near Htee Day Mu Hta in the Mone township plains area. Three villagers were injured: Saw Oo Lu Noh, Saw Ka Tah and Saw Lah Kee. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, SPDC troops arrested and detained Saw K'Paw Htoo, 42, Saw Lat Mu, 25, and Saw Nyi Heh, 40, all villagers from Khoh Pu village tract. They immediately shot and killed Saw K'Paw Htoo on the spot. On February 17<sup>th</sup>, LIB #590 officer Chit Ko arrested Ko Meh and Kyaw Ngwe, chairman and secretary of Thit Cha Seik village, and sent them to Kyauk Kyi strategic operations headquarters where they were detained. Ten days later on February 27<sup>th</sup>, Chit Ko led a column of LIB #590 troops to Thit Cha Seik village and burned down all 31 houses in the village.

The above abuses have all occurred in the plains of western Mone township, which is controlled by the SPDC and not an active conflict zone. They are only likely to get worse, because more troops are now being sent into the township to inflict even stronger control on the civilians. According to the Free Burma Rangers, an additional 100 SPDC troops arrived on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in Ma La Daw camp in northern Mone township.

### **Kyauk Kyi (Ler Doh) township**

In the SPDC-controlled plains of western Kyauk Kyi township, in January 2006 SPDC LIB #351 ordered everyone in Bpa Dta Lah, Noh Ghaw, Eh Net, Weh La Daw and Thu K'Bee village tracts to cut and clear the scrub along both sides of the road from Kyauk Kyi to Klaw Maw (Payah Gyi), a distance of about 20 kilometres. Most of these villagers had already been forced to do this work only two months before in November (see ***KHRG Report from the Field #2005-F8***). LIB #351 also arrested P'Nah Ger villagers Naw Thay Yah, Naw K'Paw Htoo, Naw Tha May Htoo, Saw Tha Htoh, Saw Maung Kweh, and Saw T'Roh (the first three listed are women, and the last three are men). They were sent to the police station on January 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 and then on to Toungoo Prison. They were accused of having contact with the KNU.

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, LIB #593 officer Khin Lin Kyaw demanded 30 baskets of rice from Ma Oo Bin village, 20 baskets from Shwe Hta village, and 40 baskets each from Gko Gkah and Aw Pa Lah villages, and demanded that they deliver it to Toh Thay Pu army camp without

payment. Also in January, Deputy Battalion Commander Chit Than Oo from LIB #351 fined every village in Bpa Dta Lah, Weh La Daw and Noh Ghaw village tracts 300,000 Kyat per village for not reporting enough intelligence to him. On March 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, a column led by Deputy Battalion Commander Aung Thein Win and Company Commander Ha Win Aung from LIB #439 went to Na Peh Pa Nay Cheh. All of the adults fled when they were coming and they saw only children, so they hit several children on their heads with an M79 grenade launcher. When they hit the children the grenade fell out of the launcher, so they fined the village 9,000 Kyat.

Since March 9<sup>th</sup> 2006, troops from Light Infantry Battalions #362 and 363 have patrolled the hills of Kyauk Kyi township under the command of Military Operations Command #10. Some of them came southward from Mu Theh army camp, while others came from Ka Baw Tu army camp in the western plain. In Yeh Der village tract, most of the villagers fled into the jungle to avoid them. They have not yet been able to prepare their hill fields, so they are afraid they may not be able to sow a rice crop this year if the situation doesn't improve. At present the situation appears more likely to deteriorate; Free Burma Rangers medical teams operating in the area report that on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006, 850 SPDC soldiers from Military Operations Command #16 set out in three columns from Mu Theh army camp into the hills of Kyauk Kyi township to destroy villages and clear the hills of villagers.

### **Shwegyin (Hsaw Tee) township**

In Shwegyin township, SPDC troops have been increasing their activities along the Shwegyin – Ko Sghaw vehicle road which penetrates the hills across the southern half of the township, and in the Bweh Ko area. On February 8<sup>th</sup> 2006 in Bweh Ko area, SPDC troops based at Mi Tin Gone camp commanded by non-commissioned officer Hla Win burned down all 82 farmfield huts near Aye Mya Pyi Su. On February 13<sup>th</sup>, Sergeant Soe Tin from Mi Tin Gone Camp came upon people working in their fields, beat them brutally and ordered all of them to return to their village, saying that no one was allowed to stay in their fields. People in the area say that they have to face so many abuses like this that it could kill them eventually.

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, an SPDC column from Light Infantry Division #99 attacked villages in the Ler Wah area along the Shwegyin River, displacing over 400 villagers into the hills to the east. These villagers had already been attacked and displaced once in April 2005 and again in September-October 2005 (see *Section 2 of KHRG Photo Gallery 2005*), and the latest reports are that they remain displaced once again.

### **Conclusion and further reading**

Agence France-Presse has reported that people leaving their villages in northern Karen State are “fleeing fighting”,<sup>2</sup> while Reuters has labelled all of the villages being burned as “ethnic rebel villages”.<sup>3</sup> Both reports are false, written by news agencies which have never sent a journalist to any of the districts affected. The attacks are unprovoked, and the villages are seldom defended by resistance forces; in fact, the SPDC troops prefer to avoid KNLA forces when possible and attack undefended villages. The events described above show that village destruction, displacement and abuses are not just features of the SPDC's ‘counter-insurgency’ activities but are carried out against villagers regardless of the presence or absence of

---

<sup>2</sup> “Thousands flee Myanmar fighting: rebels”, AFP, March 25 2006.

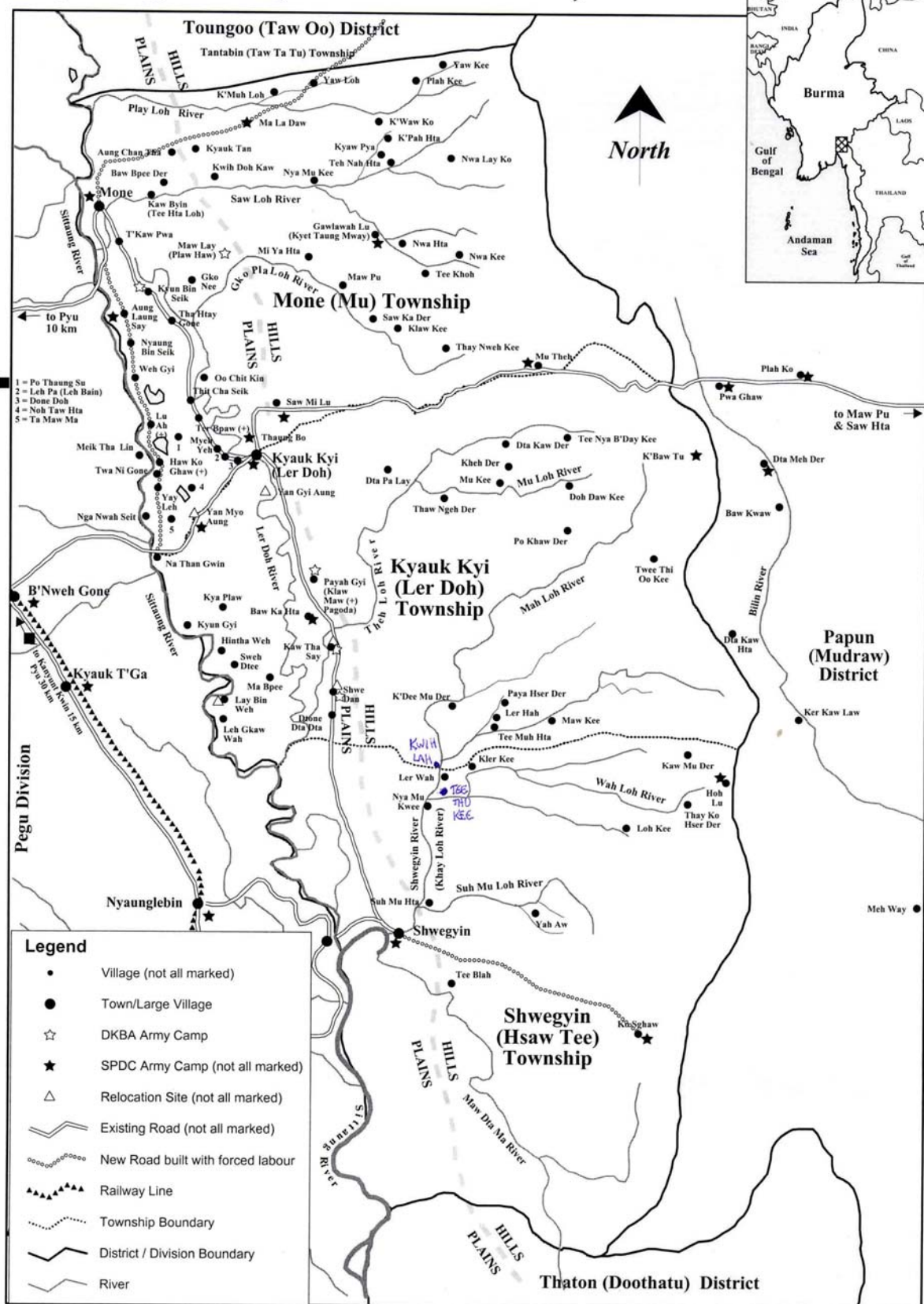
<sup>3</sup> “Myanmar troops attack rebel villages, thousands flee”, Reuters, April 26 2006.

opposition forces, and in areas strongly under SPDC control as well as those beyond their easy reach. The reason is that these abuses are not primarily intended to eradicate armed resistance, but to eradicate the unarmed resistance of villagers who do whatever they can to retain control of their own lives and lands. The SPDC is determined to bring them all under direct and daily control, dictating every aspect of people's social and economic lives. The villagers resist through noncompliance with orders, fleeing into the hills to remain close to their land, giving information to resistance forces while withholding it from the SPDC, and myriad other means.

The SPDC is now responding as it has in the past, by sending huge military columns into Nyaunglebin district with orders to either bring villagers under control or kill them and destroy all traces of them. The villagers continue to survive and resist, but every new column sent after them only makes life more difficult. KHRG will continue to monitor this situation closely in the coming months.

For further background see *Nyaunglebin District: SPDC operations along the Shwegyin River, and the villagers' response* (KHRG #2005-F8, December 2005); *Nyaunglebin/Toungoo Districts: Re-emergence of irregular SPDC Army soldiers and Karen splinter groups in northern Karen State* (KHRG #2005-B6, October 2005); *Proliferation of SPDC Army camps in Nyaunglebin District leads to torture, killings and landmine casualties* (KHRG #2005-B5, July 2005); and *Nyaunglebin District: Food supplies destroyed, villagers forcibly displaced, and region-wide forced labour as SPDC forces seek control over civilians* (KHRG #2005-F4, May 2005). Photos of SPDC attacks on villages and other abuses in the district are included in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2005*, particularly **Section 2**, and in *KHRG Photo Set 2005A*, particularly **Section 1**. See also the comprehensive report *Flight, Hunger and Survival: Repression and Displacement in the Villages of Papun and Nyaunglebin Districts* (KHRG #2001-03, October 2001). These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site (<http://www.khrg.org>).

# Nyaunglebin (Kler Lweh Htoo) District



# Karen Districts



©Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 2005

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