



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Report from the Field

February 19th 2007 / KHRG #2007-F1

Bullets and Bulldozers: The SPDC offensive continues in Toungoo District

The first two months of 2007 have done nothing to lessen the intensity of attacks against the villagers of Toungoo District. SPDC forces continue to send in more troops and supplies, build new camps and upgrade older ones using forced village labour, convict porters and heavy machinery brought in for this purpose. Local villagers have been the ones to suffer from the increased military build-up and infrastructure 'development' as such programmes have put the SPDC in a stronger position to enforce their authority over civilians in rural areas and undermine the efforts of local peoples to evade military forces and maintain their livelihoods. Employing the new roadways and camps to shuttle troops and supplies deeper into areas beyond military control, SPDC forces continue to expand their reach in terms of extortion of funds, food and supplies; extraction of forced labour; and restriction of all civilian movement, travel and trade. These abuses have combined to exacerbate poverty, worsen the humanitarian situation and restrict the options of villagers living in these areas.

As part of the SPDC's military expansion in Toungoo District, troops under the authority of Southern Regional Command have continued into 2007 with armed attacks and road construction in combination with Light Infantry Division (LID) #66, and Military Operations Commands (MOCs) #15 and 16. The activities of these units have focused on upgrading the Kler La to Mawchi and Kler La to Buh Hsa Kee roadways in eastern and southeastern Tantabin township respectively. The SPDC has been upgrading the durability and capacity of these roadways in order to accommodate the transfer of supplies from army camps at Th'Aye Htah and Yoo Doh Koh to frontline troops based at Buh Hsa Kee in southeastern Tantabin township. In order to carry out this project the SPDC has been utilising the forced labour of thousands of convicts sent in from prisons across Burma. The army has furthermore brought in six bulldozers to work on these roads as well as supporting vehicles loaded with petrol, and local villagers have been forced to ride on these bulldozers and walk alongside, in front of and behind them as human shields against attack. In an effort to defend these vehicles and the ongoing construction, SPDC forces have also fired mortars into nearby villages during the course of the road work apparently to scare off potential KNLA attacks.



The remains of homes at Gk'Lay Htah village burned by troops from SPDC Infantry Battalion (IB) #35 led by Commander Soe Htun on November 1st 2006. During the attack 57-year-old Saw Danger, who was ill, could not get away and was consequently burned alive within his home.
[Photo: KHRG]

Since January 2007, SPDC forces have been intensifying efforts to secure the area around Kler La town where many civilians remain living outside of military control. The army has therefore built a new camp at the site of Wah Thoe Koh village using the forced labour of villagers from Gkaw Soe Koh, Wah Thoe Koh, Ler Koh and Maw Pah Der villages. From this camp, soldiers under the control of Light Infantry Divisions (LID) #66 and 55 have been making sorties into the surrounding hills, threatening the precarious situation of villagers seeking to evade military patrols. In response, these communities have been discussing amongst themselves the possibility of flight into refugee camps in neighbouring Thailand. KHRG has received reports that LID 66 troops are now being rotated out of the region and replaced by LID 55. According to normal SPDC practice, LID 66 was supposed to rotate out in August 2006, but already had their stay extended in order to continue attacking villages through the rainy season and the subsequent harvest. As of mid-February 2007, attacks on villages have briefly subsided while this rotation occurs, but troops continue to machine-gun and mortar forest areas where villagers are suspected to be hiding. The influx of LID 55 troops indicates that the SPDC plans to continue the attacks through the coming months and the rainy season beginning in June.

Attacks on villages

"Many years ago when the Burmese military conducted its 'Four Cuts' policy we ran away in the forest and dared not stay in the village for many years. After that we went back and built our houses in our former village again. We had been staying there until now and then on November 1st 2006 the Burmese soldiers came to burn our village again. On this occasion we had no time to bring our materials or food or anything with us because we heard the gun shots and we ran away. Everything which we left was burned with all the houses."

- Naw M--- (female, 54), K--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)



Buildings in Gk'Lay Htah village which IB #35 burned down on November 1st 2006. [Photo: KHRG]

Following the end of the rains last November and the start of the rice harvest SPDC commanders pushed their troops to conduct attacks against agricultural fields in an attempt to disrupt the harvest. By burning rice fields, farm field huts and rice storage bins and attacking farmers and those found near covert hill fields, the military has sought to reduce the harvest and thus undermine the ability of civilians to sustain themselves while evading SPDC control in forest hiding sites. To that end, soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #35 Column #1 under the command of

Soe Htun and his deputy commander Zaw Nay Myo attacked Hsaw Wah Der villagers while they were harvesting rice at Yaw Hsa Kee on November 3rd 2006. The local community, having previously fled their village to elude soldiers in the forest, had at this moment returned to harvest their crops because they were running out of rice. Coming across the farming villagers, the soldiers opened fire, killing 47-year-old Saw John and 19-year-old Saw P'Ree Sein and wounding 44-year-old Naw Muh Htoo and 25-year-old Saw B'Hla Gyi. The soldiers then went on to burn 150 big tins of rice (totalling over 200 kg.) belonging to Saw John as well as several nearby farm field huts.

"SPDC IB# 35, Column #1 commander Soe Htun and his soldiers burned my village. IB# 35 is based at Naw Soh and it takes two hours walking from my village to get there. Previously we built a school in our village but now the school is already ruined."

- Naw M--- (female, 54), K--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

On November 15th, a patrol of SPDC troops operating out of Htee Hsa Bper village arrived at Ber Ka Lay Koh village north of the Kler La to Mawchi motor road at 8:00 in the morning. An hour later, a second group of SPDC soldiers arrived from a base at Maw Koo Der. Operating in tandem, these two groups burned 22 homes in Ber Ka Lay Koh village. Remaining in the village overnight, the soldiers went on to raze a further 17 homes in the lower part of Ber Ka Lay Koh the following morning. After having destroyed the homes inside the village, these troops then fired mortars into the forest in the direction of the



Rice storage baskets at Gk'Lay Htah village which SPDC soldiers from IB #35 destroyed on November 1st. [Photo: KHRG]

villagers' flight. The villagers, however, were able to avoid the shelling and escape injury. Nonetheless, this assault has made the situation for the villagers even more precarious as soldiers destroyed their homes, food stores and other supplies in the course of the attack. Continuing on, these troops marched on to reach Oo Per village by noon where they destroyed the homes of Saw Dta Paw Muh and Saw Dta Nee Nih. The troops then returned to Htee Hsa Bper village, where they burned down 15 homes, and then left for Thay Khee Der village where they razed a further 17 homes. This succession of attacks pushed many villagers to flee into the forest. Despite the cold season the large numbers of displaced villagers were not willing to light any fires for fear of attracting the soldiers and facing further mortar shelling. A partial list of villages attacked, including those mentioned above along with the date of assault, is as follows:

	Village name	Date of attack	Troops involved	Details
1.	Gk'Lay Htah	November 1 st	IB #35 Column #1 led by Soe Htun	In the process of razing the village, burned alive 57-year-old Saw Danger
2.	Yaw Hsa	November 3 rd	IB #35 Column #1 led by Soe Htun	Shot 2 villagers and burned huts
3.	Ber Ka Lay Koh	November 15 th -16 th	Combined troops patrolling out of Htee Per and Maw Koo Der villages	Burned 39 homes
4.	Oo Per	November 16 th		Burned 2 homes
5.	Htee Hsa Bper			Burned 15 homes
6.	Thay Kee Der			Burned 17 homes
7.	Sho Htah	November 22 nd	Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #6	Shelled the villages with over 30 mortars
8.	Yaw Thoh Bper			
9.	Hsaw Wah Der	December 6 th	Combined troops from Kaw Thay Der, P'Na Wah Soh and Ku Ler Der camps	Shelled the village with mortars
10.	Daw Pah Koh		IB #1, TOC ¹ #662 under the command of Aung Min	Burned 10 homes
11.	Htee Loh	December 7 th	IB #439 under the command of Zaw Htun and LID #55	Burned down all homes
12.	Gk'Ser Doh		LID #55	Razed the village

¹ Tactical Operations Command, a command unit comprising three battalions under a Light Infantry Division – in this case, TOC #2 of LID #66, or TOC #662.

"The SPDC battalions came to my village and burned it on November 1st 2006. One of my younger brothers was burned in the house because he was sick and could not run away and people had no time to carry him. When the SPDC soldiers were burning his house he was lying on his back in his house. When the soldiers saw him, those soldiers shot him again."

- Saw H--- (male, 56), H--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

Killing

"When we were harvesting and collecting our rice in the hill fields, at that time the Burmese soldiers came to attack us. They shot at us and we ran away. My father and a boy name P' Ree Sein, 16 years old, died in the hill field at that time. My father was left in the hill field but we couldn't do anything."

- Naw S--- (female, 22), S--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

While the killing with impunity of Karen civilians has been a consistent practice of the SPDC military, such attacks have become more regular in Toungoo District since the start of the current northern Karen State offensive in November 2005. On August 8th 2006, for example, soldiers from LID #66 killed 75-year-old Pu Dt'Gkeh, a villager from Th'Dah Muh Der, while he was working in his field. On September 5th soldiers from IB #73 under the command of Aung Kah entered Zee Hpyoo Kohn village where they conducted searches of three separate homes. In the course of these searches they encountered Saw Htoo Per and his family while they were in the midst of worshipping. At this point the soldiers grabbed everyone they saw for detention and arrest. While they subsequently released Saw Htoo Per's wife and children the soldiers took Saw Htoo Per and his son Saw Baw Baw Htoo away from the house and executed them. On October 25th, these same troops arrived at the hill-side rice fields of Ma La Kohn village while the farmers were in the process of harvesting their crops. Upon spotting the villagers in their fields the troops opened fire, killing 40-year-old Saw Maung Maung, 16-year-old Saw Chit Chit and 15-year-old Saw Ah Cho, while another villager, 15-year-old Saw Kwa Lah, was seriously injured. At 5:30 in the evening of November 13th about 100 troops from SPDC LID #66 and IBs #14 and 11 based in Ghah Muh Der arrived at Naw Thay Der village and attempted to capture a group of 12 villagers who had come from Ber Ka Lay Koh village and 4 others from Oo Per village. Although some of these individuals were able to escape capture, the SPDC soldiers still managed to kill 23-year-old Saw Kri Htoo, the son of Saw Doh Doh from Ber Ka Lay Koh village. Following this incident, the soldiers moved on to Htee Hsa Bper where they encountered and shot dead 23-year-old Saw Tha Pwee, son of Saw Dta Kyaw Dtaw of Oo Per village, after he returned from selling his cardamom seeds.



The body of 45-year-old Kyaw Thoo, a displaced villager from Htee Baw Kee shot by SPDC soldiers from Bp'Leh Koh camp in the afternoon of November 14th while he was at a hill field hut of Htee Daw Hta village. [Photo: KHRG]

"If the SPDC soldiers enter the village they destroy everything they find such as rice, clothing and utensils and eat livestock and such. Previously the Burmese army killed some villagers and some villagers were wounded by landmines. The villagers who were killed by the Burmese army were Dta Bee's father, Naw Gay Nay's father and Naw Law Thay's father. The villagers who were wounded were Htay Pah's father, Dta Cheh, Dta Paw, Naw Kwah and Yan Hu."

- Saw M--- (male, 42), T--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)



The corpses of 37-year-old Saw Kwah Hla and 42-year-old Saw Heh Dtu killed by SPDC soldiers from LIB #6 under Column Commander Aung Soe Win on November 20th. The soldiers killed these villagers in the forests between Gkaw Thay Der and Hsaw Wah Der as they were coming back from purchasing food supplies. The soldiers subsequently looted their belongings. [Photo: KHRG]

On November 20th 2006, soldiers from SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #6 led by Column Commander Aung Soe Win and Second Column Commander Aye Lwin fired on Hsaw Wah Der villagers Saw Kwah Hla and Saw Heh Dtu as they were returning along the road from Gkaw Thay Der after having bought food supplies. These shots killed both villagers from whose corpses (show in the two photos above) the soldiers looted money and other belongings.

"The Burmese soldiers arrived at the village two times during 2006. The first time they arrived they burned some houses. The next time the Burmese soldiers shot dead two villagers and two villagers were injured in the hill field while they were harvesting their rice. People don't know whether those Burmese soldiers have gone back or not. Those soldiers burned three houses and barns. The villagers who are dead are Saw John and P'Ree Sein... The Burmese soldiers who shot the villagers were from IB #35 Columns #1 and #2 of Commander Soe Htun and Deputy Commander Zaw Nay Myo who arrived with their soldiers on November 3rd 2006."

- Saw M--- (male, 60), S--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

This pattern of army killings of civilians has continued unabated into 2007. On January 19th 2007, troops from LIB #75 based at Shah See Bo army camp and operating under SPDC Southern Regional Command arrested Saw Poe and Saw Ah Lu, residents of Yin Shah village, and Saw Kyaw Nay Win, Saw Paw Hsu, Saw Hta Kya and Saw Dt' Ro Roh, residents of Zee Hpyoo Kohn village. At this time the troops confiscated 620,000 kyat from the detained men and sent them to Shah See Bo camp where they were all executed. On January 29th, following the forced relocation of villagers out of the Klay Loh river area to Yin Shah village, Saw Hta Lu Gu, one of the relocated villagers, returned to his former village where soldiers spotted him and shot him dead.

Displacement

"We started running away from our village at five o'clock in the evening. One of my sons is missing now because his leg was in pain. Later he followed us but now I don't know where he is. SPDC IB# 35 Column #1 Commander Soe Htun and his company burned my village. This SPDC battalion has not yet withdrawn and they are making activities around our village now. I heard that SPDC soldiers shot dead two villagers at Hsaw Wah Der. I am now displaced at T---. I came to stay here three days ago. I started to run away on November 1st 2006."

- Saw H--- (male, 56), K--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

Continued military expansion, attacks on villages and the killing of civilians have all combined to restrict the options of villagers seeking to evade the army and thus their means of resisting abuse. Increased SPDC construction and control of roadways have effectively blocked the travel routes of displaced villagers living in hiding while soldiers continue to operate under a shoot-on-sight policy, planting landmines in abandoned villages and along forest paths and destroying covert hill fields and food stores upon detection.

In response to military attempts to block access to food and medicine, displaced communities have utilised covert trading networks linking them with those villages living under SPDC control which may have somewhat more access to food and supplies. In this way, these communities can continue to survive in their forest hiding sites. However, the wide strips of barren land which SPDC units force villagers to clear along the sides of roadways (see below under Forced Labour) make it much more difficult for displaced families and communities to cross these roads without being spotted and fired upon. Instead of connecting people to trade and communication networks and facilitating movement, roads in Toungoo district thus become obstacles to movement and instruments of military control. The development of the Kler La to Buh Hsa Kee roadway has had this result for the communities of Hsaw Wah Der, which has been evading the military, and that of Gkaw Thay Der which already lives under SPDC control. Local army units have been seeking to obstruct small scale trade between these two communities which remain a distance of two hours apart, travelling on foot.



Displaced villagers from Dtru Kee as they evade SPDC soldiers on November 4th 2006. [Photo: KHRG]

"Our villagers are displaced in the forest and we are facing problems because we cannot carry our food and clothing. Our children have no clothes to wear and all of our clothes were burned with our houses. In my village there are twelve households and there are 46 villagers. Our villagers do hill field farming for their livelihoods but now we cannot get enough food to eat because the SPDC army has come to disturb us. Those Burmese soldiers burned our houses, destroyed our rice, our hill-fields and our livestock. At that time we hadn't finished harvesting the rice in the hill fields. When we ran away we couldn't carry our materials such as clothing, pots, plates, cups, livestock and such. Everything which we left in the house was burned together."

- Saw H--- (male, 56), K--- area, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)



A displaced community from Gk'Lay Htah village after fleeing SPDC forces on November 2nd. [Photo:KHRG]

To make matters worse, the ongoing travel necessary to continue evading military patrols means these displaced communities are unable to carry sufficient supplies of food, medicine and clothing. Many thus confront illness, disease and injury which they are ill-equipped to address. Natural remedies available in the forest are typically insufficient to meet their medical needs and access to clinics, beyond the prohibitive costs of the limited medicine available for sale, is also obstructed by the likelihood of military arrest should they be detected. While displaced

communities share their limited rice supplies between themselves, there are insufficient quantities to go around. These restrictions on food and medicine make cross-border assistance to these communities brought in from Thailand all the more crucial, as the SPDC appears set on starving displaced villagers out of the hills and into military-controlled villages and relocation sites.

"I want to go back to my village but if I go back, I will not find my house because my house was burned by the Burmese soldiers. I must stay under the trees and then build a house again."

- Naw M--- (female, 54) K--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

Restrictions on movement

In rural areas the SPDC monitors and restricts all civilian movements as a means of maintaining military control, and in SPDC-controlled areas west of the mountains and in the valleys of Toungoo district this policy is being rigidly implemented by the troops of Southern Regional Command by arbitrarily arresting and killing local villagers found outside their designated village of residence. These soldiers have restricted residents to their home villages and forbidden external travel without written permission forms. Even in order to tend their nearby hillside rice fields, villagers have to purchase permission documents from local SDPC officials. The cost of one such document is 500 kyat and its validity lasts only one week. Once this pass expires, villagers must apply for a new document and pay again the requisite fees. Even with a permission document officials nonetheless prohibit villagers from remaining in their fields overnight – a practice necessary to protect crops from animals and maximise time engaged in tending crops. Instead, farmers cannot leave their villages until seven in the morning and must return no later than four in the afternoon. Soldiers who have caught villagers travelling beyond their fields to visit neighbouring communities, even those possessing valid permission documents, have interrogated, threatened and tortured them regarding their movements and forced them to serve as military porters.

Forced Labour

"Villages in the area of Gkaw Thay Der, Kler La, Ghah Muh Der and Kler Thay Kee have to do forced labour for the SPDC army. They usually do labour such as fixing camp fences, constructing roads and carrying army rations and such. The Burmese army never gives any wages to the villagers."

- Saw M--- (male, 42), T--- village, Tantabin township (Nov 2006)

As part of the SPDC's programme of road construction military units have been regularly forcing civilians to do labour without compensation. Prior to the arrival of the six bulldozers for work on the Kler La to Buh Hsa Kee roadway, Light Infantry Division (LID) #66 commander Maung Maung Aye forced villagers living along the way to cut back vegetation and clear landmines flanking both sides of the route. Eliminating all forest plant growth in wide swaths along roadways in Karen areas serves as both a defensive measure against KNLA ambush as well as a means of hindering the movement of civilians seeking to evade military forces. On November 22nd, Maung Maung Aye ordered villages to provide a quota of workers for forced labour along sections of the Kler La – Mawchi road that lay near to their communities. Maung Maung Aye forced the villagers to do this work twice in December 2006 and once again in January 2007. After having cleared the specified areas, he then forced these villagers to twice porter army loads further down the road. The village names, number of villagers forced to labour and the area of the road on which they had to work are as follows:

	Village name	# of villagers	Area of the road where villagers laboured
1.	Maw Pah Der	20	Ser Lu Chaw area [3rd mile]
2.	Gkaw Soh Koh	30	Ser Lu Chaw area [3rd mile]
3.	Der Doh	20	Ser Lu Chaw area [3rd mile]
4.	Kler La	30	Ser Lu Chaw to P'Na Koh Soh [6 th mile]
5.	Der Doh	20	Ser Lu Chaw to P'Na Koh Soh [6 th mile]
6.	Gkaw Thay Der	35	P'Na Koh Soh to Aung Myin camp [8 th mile]
7.	Gk'Lay Soh Kee	25	P'Na Koh Soh to Aung Myin camp [8 th mile]
8.	Ghah Muh Der	10	P'Na Koh Soh to Aung Myin camp [8 th mile]
9.	Bpeh Gkaw Der	30	Th'Aye Hta village area [12 th mile]
10.	Maw Gkoh Der	15	Th'Aye Hta village area [12 th mile]
11.	Ler Koh	14	Th'Aye Hta village area [12 th mile]
12.	Koo Bpler Der	15	Th'Aye Hta village area [12 th mile]
13.	Wah Thoh Der	20	Th'Aye Hta village area [12 th mile]

Commander Maung Maung Aye of LID #66 has been particularly aggressive in his use of forced labour. On September 26th, for example, he forced five truckloads of villagers to porter army supplies from Kler La to Gkaw Thay Der. Not only has he been forcing villagers to clear roads and porter army supplies but he has also forced them to serve as human shields, protecting bulldozers from potential KNLA attacks. He ordered villagers from Maw Pah Der village to provide one person per household to serve in this capacity alongside bulldozers working on road construction in the Wah Thoh Koh area where the SPDC is currently constructing a new camp. In this case soldiers forced three villagers to ride on the outside of the chassis and five villagers to march along each side while the rest of the villagers were corralled in front and behind the moving vehicle. Prior to the development of this camp soldiers confiscated the designated land, so far totalling five acres, from local villagers. In order to prepare the site for the new camp, soldiers destroyed villagers' durian, mango, cardamom, dog fruit and betel nut trees that had been growing there and provided no compensation to the owners in return. Other SPDC officers, such as IB #6 Commander Aung Soe Win along with Deputy Commander Aung Lwin Oh, have also been forcing large numbers of villagers in the Kler La area to porter army supplies between Kler La town, Naw Soh, and Gkaw Thay Der. In the plains area around Maw Nay Bpwah village SPDC forces arrived with two bulldozers for which soldiers from LID #66 forced villagers from Bplay Hsah Loh to 'take security'. In this case as well, soldiers ordered villagers to march alongside the bulldozers so as to shield the machines from any possible KNLA fire. All of this labour is demanded with no compensation provided for their labour and time lost from working their own fields, which suffer as a result. In some cases the soldiers have provided the villagers forced to labour with a single meal for their whole day of work.

Soldiers have also been demanding that villagers provide bullock carts to transport army rations along the roads to SPDC camps further afield. On November 22nd commander Zaw Htun of LIB #439 based at Shah See Bo village ordered neighbouring villages to provide

designated quotas of bullock carts to transport rations to the camp and Shah See Bo. The village names and the numbers of bullock carts demanded are as follows:

	Village/area name	# of carts
1.	Shah See Bo village	15
2.	Yay Shah village	10
3.	Zee Hpyoo village	12
4.	Dtaw Gkoo village	10
5.	Lay Dtee area	100
6.	Pyin Gkin area	100

To obtain more forced labourers, SPDC authorities have also been tricking or coercing townspeople from Toungoo town to Army posts in the hills. In August 2006 KHRG interviewed Saw P---, 35, and Naw H---, 28, who came from Toungoo town but were living in hiding in the hills along with displaced villagers from Hsaw Wah Der village. They said they were among a group of people in Toungoo town who were tricked into joining an SPDC 'development' scheme in mid-2006. They were told that a new village was being established in the hills to the east on the outskirts of the large village of Kler La (Bawgali Gyi) and that families settling there would receive 20,000 kyat per month and rations from the Army to help build this new village, plus they would have the opportunity to earn added income in the nearby durian and mangosteen plantations. But they were not taken to Kler La or to any 'new village'. Instead, on July 18th they were transported to Kler La and the next day to Maung Daing Gyi SPDC Army camp, near Naw Soh village on the Kler La – Buh Hsa Kee road, where they were put to work cutting bamboo and building perimeter fences around the army camp. They were given no money nor any place to build a house, and only received two milk-tins of rice per person per day (only enough for one meal), plus cooking oil and yellow beans. When they asked to be taken back to Toungoo town they were refused. After over a month doing forced labour at the Army camp, two families totalling nine people escaped into the surrounding hills, where they joined villagers in hiding from SPDC forces. They told KHRG there were still 15 people from Toungoo being held at the army camp as forced labourers.

Convict porters

"Four among us were killed by SPDC soldiers. They were Aung Toe, Kyaw Soe Oo, Ko Ko Hla and Law Shan. They were killed on the full moon night of Th'Din Kyo [October 6th 2006]. The SPDC soldiers shot them dead along with 42 porters at the same time. Those were porters who couldn't walk and couldn't carry loads and so those soldiers killed them... I saw SPDC soldiers kill many convict porters and I saw some of the dead bodies of porters that were buried beside the road. Their bodies were not all covered. Their legs and heads were visible out of the ground beside the road. The soldiers had killed some of them with knives and some had been shot dead with guns. The battalion commander ordered his soldiers that if any porter tried to run away to shoot them all dead and also to kill porters who couldn't walk or carry loads. Some porters couldn't walk and carry loads so they gave up and allowed the soldiers to kill them."

- M--- (male, 30), convict porter, Myitkyina, Kachin state (Oct 2006)

Although SPDC forces attempt to get local civilians to serve as porters for military patrols, in most cases the villagers flee before approaching troops are able to catch them. As a consequence, and in order to support the large-scale deployment of troops in Toungoo District, the SPDC has been sending in large numbers of convicts from prisons across the country to carry loads alongside military patrols. Convoys carrying hundreds of convicts

have delivered their human cargo to Toungoo town where military officers divide them up between the various battalions.²

I came by truck to P'Leh Wa. From there I had to walk here; a six-day journey. I had to carry rations from Yin Tho to Maung Daing [Maung Daing Gyi, an SPDC Army camp near Naw Soh on the Kler La – Buh Hsa Kee road]. I had to carry twice. There were five porters in each group to carry rations with two SPDC soldiers guarding us. While we were carrying loads the SPDC soldiers tied us as well. I saw SPDC soldiers torture and kill porters. I was so scared and I ran away when they were not being careful with me. There were maybe 800 convict porters. As far as I know those convict porters came from prisons in Pyi, Toungoo, Myitkyina, Bhamo, Mandalay and Myaung Mya. All of the convict porters were brought together at Toungoo. I followed with LID #66.”

- N--- (male, 29), convict porter, Mandalay (Oct 2006)

Soldiers treat these men worse than pack animals, forcing them to labour under extreme burdens of 35- 45 kilograms (77 - 100 lbs), on insufficient food, with no medical care and wearing nothing but rubber flip-flops or, having lost these, going barefoot along mountain paths where illness, disease and injury are rife. As a consequence, these porters are typically unable to sustain the effort needed to continue apace with soldiers who threaten, harass, torture and kill them en masse in order to keep the Column moving.

“I saw a porter named Aung Aung shot dead by SPDC soldiers between Bawgali [Kler La] and Yay Tho Gyi. We had been resting there one hour and then we started to carry the soldiers’ rations from there to Maw Dtaw [Maung Daing Gyi army camp near Naw Soh]. On the way from there to Maw Dtaw many porters couldn’t carry their loads as the SPDC soldiers had ordered them. Many porters were tortured by the soldiers such as by hitting, punching and kicking. I saw seven or eight porters killed by SPDC soldiers along the way between Bawgali [Kler La] and Maw Dtaw camp. I saw many corpses that had fallen down beside the road. By the time we arrived at Maw Dtaw camp 95 convict porters had been lost. A porter was killed between Yay Thoo Gyi and Bawgali [Kler La] when this porter untied the ropes from his hands and tried to run away. At that time a soldier saw him and shot him. I saw his waist bend when he was hit by the bullet and then he fell down into the gorge beside the road.”

- M--- (male, 42), P--- town, Pegu Division (Nov 2006)

Extortion

Villagers living under SPDC control face regular extortion of money, food and other supplies which soldiers enforce under threat of violence. As part of road construction work LID #66 commander Maung Maung Aye, having forced large numbers of villagers to labour on road construction, threatened local communities that should the KNLA attack the bulldozers or general construction work, he would fine them an arbitrary sum in retaliation. In order to construct a new SPDC camp at Wah Thoh Koh, Commander Hin Tun of IB #3 Column #4 ordered local villagers to provide 400 large bamboo poles each 10 cubits (15 feet) long and 200 wooden poles 3 cubits (5 feet) in circumference and 18 cubits (24 feet) long. He furthermore ordered each household to provide one person to labour in the construction of the camp each day. On January 17th 2007, SPDC officers from IB #10 arrived at a monastery in Kler La with the intention of celebrating the Buddhist festival of *Ga Htein Bwe*. For this occasion the officers invited 10 monks to receive donations in a merit making ceremony. In order to collect the funds for the donation however, these officers had their

² For more information on the SPDC’s use of convict porters see *Less Than Human: Convict Porters in the 2005-2006 Northern Karen State Offensive* (KHRG #2006-03, August 2006).

soldiers demand money from local villagers from whom they collected 150,000 kyat which the officers then offered to the monks.

Arbitrary detention

SPDC soldiers have utilised the arbitrary arrest of villagers in Karen areas as a means of enforcing compliance with restrictions, extorting funds and extracting information about resistance activity and KNU/KNLA operations. On December 2nd 2006, soldiers from IB #48 arrested 47-year-old Saw May Htoo and his son Saw Thaw Thi Htoo; both of whom resided in Kheh Der village but were at the time staying in Dtaw Gkoo village. On the same day, soldiers also arrested 50-year-old Saw Ba Sein, village head of Zee Hpyoo Kohn; 50-year-old U Shwe Maung, village head of Dtaw Gkoo and the village head of Ray Hla. While they were detained the soldiers tortured and interrogated these village heads demanding a list of relatives of KNU members from their villages. Although they subsequently released the Ray Hla village head, as yet KHRG has received no information regarding the release of the others.

In October 2006, soldiers from SPDC LID #66 operating in areas of Kler La town were conducting search and destroy missions targeting displaced villagers covertly harvesting their rice. At this time, coming across one group of farmers the soldiers opened fire. All of the villagers fled the SPDC patrol but soldiers were able to capture 16-year old Saw Bpin K'Nay whom they brought back to the camp at Kler La. At this location they kept him detained in a small hole dug into the group. Although the soldiers were reportedly intending to execute Saw Bpin K'Nay after two weeks, he was able to flee before this time. Following his escape, Saw Bpin K'Nay said that during the period of his internment, soldiers regularly tortured him and never provided him with sufficient rations.

Conclusion

As the SPDC continues its expansion of roadways and army camps in pursuance of overall military control and the 'pacification' of Toungoo District, it is the local civilians whom soldiers and officers target in armed attacks on villages, killings and arbitrary detention. The extension of military networks deeper into the Toungoo hinterland furthermore obstructs the travel of displaced communities attempting to evade army patrols, effectively cutting them off from access to food, medicine and other supplies. The SPDC's attempts to starve civilians out of the rural areas of Toungoo District make the cross border delivery of food and medical aid all the more crucial. Thus far many villagers have managed to effectively resist abuses and evade military control to claim their rights, but they need material help to continue doing so.

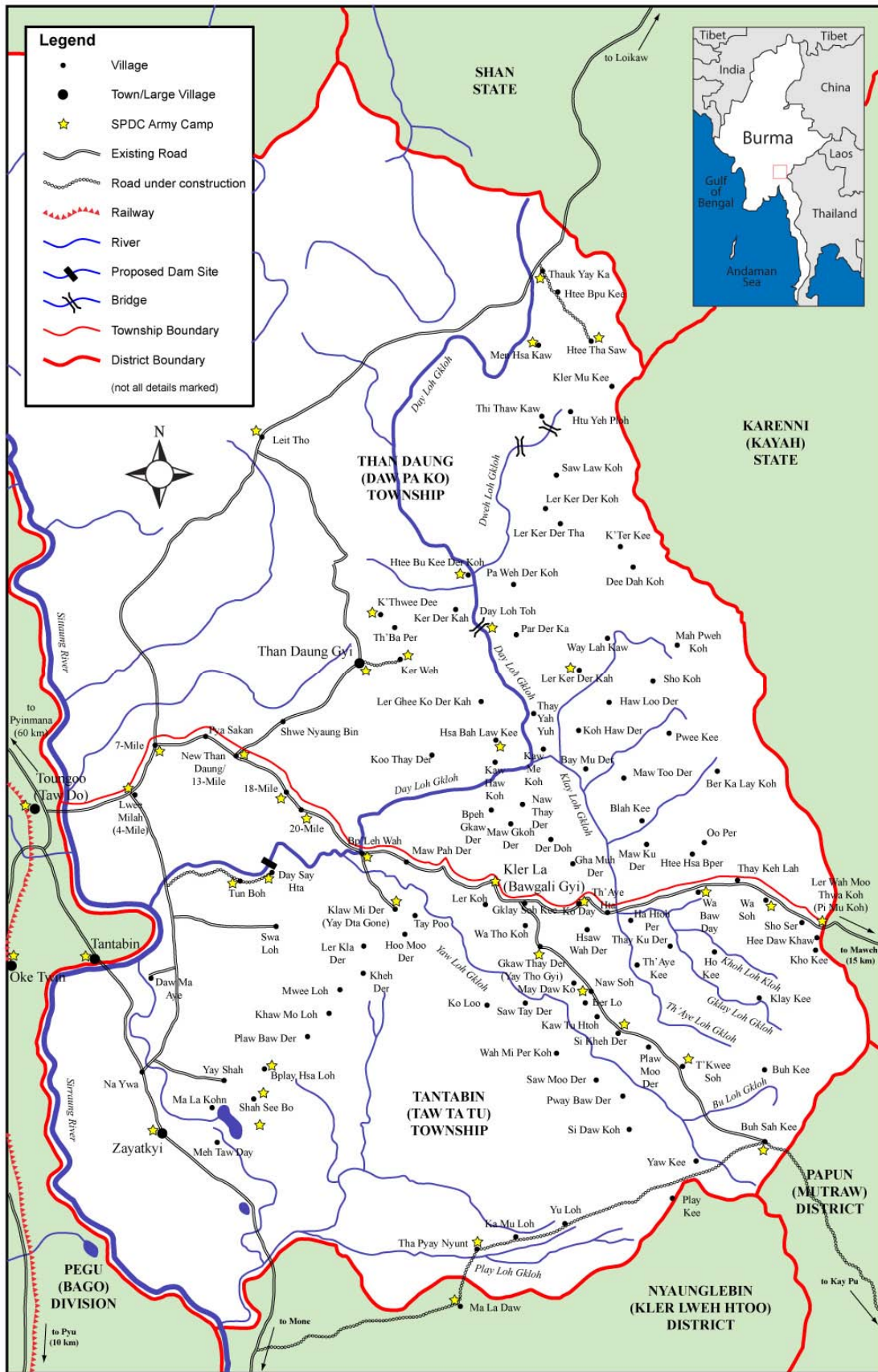
Additional background information regarding the human rights situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *One Year On: Continuing Abuses in Toungoo District* (KHRG #2006-06, November 2006)
- *Toungoo District: The civilian response to human rights violations* (KHRG #2006-F8, August 2006)
- *New SPDC military moves force more villagers to flee* (KHRG #2006-B9, July 2006)
- *Without Respite: Renewed Attacks on Villages and Internal Displacement in Toungoo District* (KHRG #2006-02, June 2006)
- *Offensive columns shell and burn villages, round up villagers in northern Papun and Toungoo districts* (KHRG #2006-B7, June 2006)

- *Recent Attacks on Villages in Southeastern Toungoo District Send Thousands Fleeing into the Forests and to Thailand* (KHRG #2006-B3, March 2006)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2006* (KHRG #2006-P1, November 2006). These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



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Karen Districts



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