



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Report from the Field**

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## **Landmines, Killings and Food Destruction: Civilian life in Toungoo District**

*The attacks against civilians continue as the SPDC increases its military build-up in Toungoo District. Enforcing widespread restrictions on movement backed up by a shoot-on-sight policy, the SPDC has executed at least 38 villagers in Toungoo since January 2007. On top of this, local villagers face the ever present danger of landmines, many of which were manufactured in China, which the Army has deployed around homes, churches and forest paths. Combined with the destruction of covert agricultural hill fields and rice supplies, these attacks seek to undermine food security and make life unbearable in areas outside of consolidated military control. However, as those living under SPDC rule have found, the constant stream of military demands for labour, money and other supplies undermine livelihoods, village economies and community efforts to address health, education and social needs. Civilians in Toungoo must therefore choose between a situation of impoverishment and subjugation under SPDC rule, evasion in forested hiding sites with the constant threat of military attack, or a relatively stable yet uprooted life in refugee camps away from their homeland. This report documents just some of the human rights abuses perpetrated by SPDC forces against villagers in Toungoo District up to July 2007.*

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Toungoo District (Taw Oo in Karen), situated at the northernmost tip of Karen State, is covered predominantly by forested hills and low-lying mountains. Dividing the district in two, the Toungoo - Kler La - Maw Chi vehicle road follows the border between northern Than Daung (Daw Pa Ko) and southern Tantabin (Taw Ta Tu) townships. While the SPDC maintains a regular presence along the major roadways and at scattered bases throughout Toungoo, many rural villages remain outside of full military control; where encounters with army patrols are intermittent. With the rainy season now in full swing, these patrols have nevertheless continued, but at a much constrained pace. While rainy season conditions inhibit the rapid advancement of military operations in Toungoo, it also marks the phase of the cultivation cycle when villagers must spend much of their time out in the hill fields, tending their rice crops. Having to work in the open space, this labour exposes villagers attempting to evade the military and thus increases the likelihood of their being shot.



The SPDC LIB #542 Army camp at Tha Aye Hta. The troops stationed here regularly demand *loh ah pay* (forced labour) from local villagers. [Photo: KHRG]

## Military deployment

In a January 2007 rotation of the SPDC's Toungoo-based forces, military authorities replaced Light Infantry Division (LID) #66 and Military Operation Commands (MOCs) #15 and 16, with LID #88 and MOCs #5 and 9.<sup>1</sup> These latter three units, sub-divided into Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), Infantry Battalions (IBs) and Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) are currently the primary military forces conducting operations against civilians in Toungoo District. A more detailed breakdown of the major army units operating in Toungoo is presented in the table below.

#	Head unit	Sub unit	Officer(s) in charge	Base or camp location	Notes
1	LID #88		Commander Aung Than Tun, Commander Ko Ko Nieng, Commander Aung Neing Myit, Captain Kyi Shwe, Company Commander Thein Soe Aung, Captain Neing Aung Win.	Buh Hsa Kee	
2		TOC #883	Tin Mo		
3		IB #7	Commander Aung Kyaw Mo, Zaw Mo Neing	Buh Hsa Kee	
4		IB #13	Battalion Commander Aung Win Than, Htak Aung		
5		IB #77	Major Aung Kyaw Mo, Captain Saw Win Tin		
6		IB #78	Commander Myit Neing Oo, Major Kaung Myit Soe	Po Mu Der	80 soldiers, 5 officers
7		IB #88	Colonel Keh Nyut Oo		
8		IB #301	Battalion Commander Myo Swe, Captain Kyaw Kyaw Oo		
9		LIB #103	Battalion Commander Min Zaw, Captain Tin Myo Win, Operation Commander Min Aung		
10		LIB #327	Lt.Colonel Lah Min, Major Laing Soe Min, Major Hung Zaw Htun, Major Htun Shwe, Lieutenant Aung Than Myit		
11	MOC #9		Commander Yeh Aung, Lt. Thein Hpay, Captain Thaik Zin Aung, Captain Aye Min Aung, Captain Win San Thein, Captain Than Myit Htun, Major Soe Min Htaik		
12		TOC #2	Commander Khaing Mar Myit, Second Commander Tin Soe		
13		LIB #374	Lieutenant Nyee Nyee Lay		
14		LIB #375	Battalion Commander Htun Aung Zan, Battalion Deputy Commander Htun Htun Win, Company Commander So Mya Neing	Play Sah Loh	
15		LIB #376	Lt.Colonel Khing Maung Oo		
16		LIB #377	Lt.Colonel Ko Ko Han		

<sup>1</sup> A Military Operations Command (MOC) consists of ten battalions for offensive operations, presently averaging 120-150 soldiers per battalion in the offensive area. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) of three battalions each. The majority of the columns pursuing Karen villagers consist of most or all of a TOC, or 200-300 troops.

17		LIB #539			K'Law Mee Der		
18	MOC #5			Kaung Mya	Kler La		
19		TOC #2					
20		LIB #346		Battalion Commander Yan Neing, Battalion Deputy Commander Nay Myo Aung		Mo Koh Der	
						Noh Soe	
21		LIB #371	Column #1		Maw Thih Der		
			Column #2		Kaw Thih Der		
22		LIB #372	Lieutenant Pyo Zaw Lay, Company Commander Aung Myo Thein			Thu Gheh	
23		LIB #541					
24		LIB #542	Battalion Commander Thaung Htaik Soe			Thah Ay Hta	With 370 convict porters
25		LIB #543				Kuh Theh Der	
26		LIB #544	Battalion Commander Hla Htay			Kuh Theh Der	
27		LIB #566				Keh Weh	

## The situation of villagers

*"We civilians want to have peace. If there is no peace, we must go to a refugee camp. [I want] to let the world know that since our grandparents' time, until now we have had to run and the situation has become worse and worse... Since our grandparents' time we have had no peace. We pray to God to help and we hope that foreign countries will come and help us as well."*

– Saw J--- (male, 40), H--- villager, Tantabin Township (June 2007)



On June 19<sup>th</sup> 2007, this man, with his two young children on his back, fled from his home village due to the increasing numbers of SPDC soldiers operating in the area. [Photo: KHRG]

displacement in the region's forested hills. These people may nevertheless move back and forth between temporary hiding sites and their villages and fields in response to the movements of army patrols. The SPDC refers to those subjugated under military rule as *nyein chan yay* 'peace villages' and those evading military rule as *ywa bone* 'hiding villages'.

Villagers living in 'peace villages' are subject to regular demands for labour, money and supplies and kept from evading such exploitation through draconian movement and trade restrictions. These regular demands have crippled village economies, undermined crop

A rough division of civilian communities in Toungoo District would separate those living under SPDC control and those living in hiding in the forest. However, it is important to recognise that such lines are not rigid and many communities in Toungoo live on the peripheries of military control where the SPDC is able to enforce its authority, if only intermittently, dependant on villagers' flight and evasion and the often temporary locations of army camps and patrols. The SPDC nevertheless divides the civilian population more strictly between those subject to consolidated military authority and those who, avoiding the Army's efforts to relocate them, live hiding in situations of

production, and inhibited community efforts to address their own educational, health and social needs.

On July 6<sup>th</sup> 2007, for example, SPDC forces from LIB #371, MOC #9 based at Play Hsa Loh ordered eight local villagers to carry food to Klaw Klay Day army camp and ordered other villagers from Play Hsa Loh to begin cutting bamboo and delivering it to the army camp on a daily basis. On June 18<sup>th</sup> 2007, MOC #5 Commander Kaung Mya, based in Kler La, ordered 11 nearby SPDC-controlled villages as well as Kler La town to begin daily forced labour cutting bamboo and other trees and then deliver them by *set tha*<sup>2</sup> along with monetary payments to the SPDC base at Kler La town. The villages which the SPDC ordered to do this labour are as follows:

#	Village name
1	Kaw Thay Der
2	Ko Soe Koh
3	Wah Tho Koh
4	Ler Koh
5	Maw Pah Der
6	Ku Pler Der
7	Bpeh Kaw Der
8	Maw Ko Der
9	Der Doh
10	Gkah Mu Der
11	Kleh Saw Kee
12	Kler La town

Upon arrival at Kler La these goods have been loaded atop two bullock carts and then transported to the SPDC base at Toungoo town. On some occasions villagers report that injured SPDC soldiers from Kler La were also taken on these same bullock carts to Toungoo town. On top of the forced labour demanded from these communities, SPDC officers based at Kler La have restricted trade of food supplies between Kler La and nearby villages. The SPDC officers told the villagers that they would provide no assistance for local communities until the villagers had fully eliminated the KNU from the area. During the almost two months since these restrictions were implemented, durian, mangosteen and betel leaves which local villagers typically harvest during the rainy season have largely been left to rot at plantations as locals have been forbidden from selling their produce at the markets in Kler La town. The loss of cash income attributable to these restrictions, and the inability to sell produce in town, has made it difficult for local villagers to purchase rice and other staple foods. Many have therefore turned to eating watered-down rice porridge in order to stretch out their meagre food supplies.

On June 21<sup>st</sup> 2007, LIB #375, MOC #9 based at Play Hsa Loh, forced the villagers living in Play Hsa Loh relocation site to cut down and deliver 50 bamboo poles each. On the following day LIB #375 again forced these villagers to cut down bamboo; this time 100 bamboo poles each. The soldiers then used these poles to rebuild structures at their army camp.

By contrast, those villagers able to evade the Army's efforts to subjugate them – choosing instead to live displaced in SPDC-defined 'hiding villages' – undermine military authority and the strength of Army units that remain dependant on the exploitation of civilians for their day-to-day operations. Nonetheless, villagers managing to flee into situations of displacement

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<sup>2</sup> 'Set tha' is forced labour as messengers and errand runners for the Army. In Toungoo District, villages are normally forced to provide one or two villagers every day or two to each army camp in their area for a 24-hour shift of *set tha*. This labour also involves other menial tasks such as cooking, cleaning and building repair around the army camp when no messages are in need of delivery.

face their own set of economic, humanitarian and social challenges. This is especially so as military patrols have been hunting down displaced communities, destroying covert hillside rice fields, food stores and food storage containers, and sought to block all travel and trade between those in hiding and those living under SPDC control.

The objective of military attacks on civilian communities – which comprises the overwhelming bulk of the SPDC's military operations in northern Karen State – thus presents itself as a persistent effort to turn 'hiding villages' into 'peace villages' and thereby maximise the exploitable pool of civilians on which the Army depends and furthermore ensure that the entire population is subsumed within the junta's 'nation-building' goal of a hierarchically-structured and military-dominated society. To these ends the military has applied a sweeping shoot-on-sight policy where anyone attempting to live outside of military control is deemed an enemy of the State and therefore a legitimate target for military aggression.



Villagers from Toungoo District having decided to relocate to a refugee camp in neighbouring Thailand are shown here in June 2007 making their way to the border. [Photo: KHRG]

On July 5<sup>th</sup> 2007, SPDC soldiers from LIB #346, MOC #5 came upon Hsaw Wah Der villagers hiding at H---. Upon seeing the villagers, the soldiers opened fire, but on this occasion the villagers were able to flee into the forest and none were killed. On July 14<sup>th</sup> 2007 MOC #5, LIB #566 soldiers active in the area of Kaw Thay Der arrested 29-year-old Saw Neh Neh, a local Kaw Thay Der villager, while he was working on his plantation. As Saw Neh Neh could speak no Burmese the SPDC soldiers said that he must be connected to the KNLA. The soldiers subsequently beat him until blood ran from his ears. Although Saw Neh Neh survived the initial assault, he has since been unable to hear properly. On the same day of the attack against Saw Neh Neh, MOC #5 Commander Kaung Mya issued sweeping travel restrictions on all civilians living in Kler La and the surrounding area.

With the intensification of SPDC military operations against civilians in Toungoo, the situation for villagers, both those living in hiding and under SPDC control, has become much more precarious. For those in hiding the expansion of active military units has meant an increased risk of crop destruction as well as constant threats to their physical security which obstruct their ability to effectively tend their crops. The loss of time and labour on crop cultivation and restrictions on trade between displaced communities and those under SPDC-control has, in turn, undermined food and financial security, and thus worsened the overall humanitarian situation for Internally Displaced Person (IDP) communities. Many therefore see life as refugees in Thailand-based camps as the safest option in response to the military's persistent attacks on their lives and livelihoods. Other villagers, however, nevertheless decide to remain in hiding close to their home villages in an effort to claim their rights, retain their dignity and maintain possession of the land of their birth. While groups such as the Karen Office for Relief and Development (KORD), the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and the Backpack Health Worker Teams (BPHWT) all seek to provide assistance, mostly medical, to these IDP communities, such aid remains too infrequent, sometimes arriving only once a year. The current insufficiency of such aid means that displaced communities depend primarily on their own initiatives to mitigate abuse, stay alive and manage their varied health and social needs.

When military patrols arrive at non-SPDC-controlled villages local residents grab young children, the elderly and whatever possessions they can carry before fleeing into the forest.



Often this flight is assisted by advanced warnings about the imminent arrival of soldiers and the advanced preparation of covert food stores and huts at nearby hiding sites. Despite any preparation these people still confront severe constraints; often lacking blankets, warm clothing and sufficient food and medicine. While those fleeing in this manner are often able to return to their homes when army patrols depart, the military build-up concurrent with the intensification of operations over the last year and a half has meant that those IDP communities determined to remain near to their abandoned villages, must attempt to eke out a living in the forest amidst the ever present threat of being shot-on-sight or setting off landmines.

At 11:35 am on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2007, Commander Thaung Htaik Soe of LIB #542, MOC #5 and Battalion Commander Hla Htay of LIB #544 along with over 400 soldiers arrived at the area of Klay Wah in Than Daung township. Upon arrival they arrested two residents of Maw Ku Daw village and six others from Bper Kha Lay Koh village. Local villagers reported that one of those arrested was an unnamed girl, whom soldiers subsequently raped and killed. The reason behind the arrests was the villagers' violation of SPDC-imposed movement restrictions; some soldiers had apparently seen the villagers out tending their hill-side rice fields. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, soldiers from LIB #543, MOC #5 entered Saw Wah Der village and killed the buffalo of a local villager named Saw Dtar Dteh Ner. The buffalo had a reported value of 300,000 kyat, about 235 US dollars.

Civilians living in SPDC-controlled villages in Toungoo District face constant demands for labour, money and supplies. Such demands are especially frequent for those villages nearby to the more permanent SPDC camps and bases. Common forced labour demands include *loh ah pay*<sup>3</sup>, portering, *set tha* and the fabrication and delivery of building supplies such as thatch roofing shingles and bamboo poles. On top of forced labour, military units impose arbitrary 'taxes' on these communities and steal livestock either through official order documents or general looting by groups or individual soldiers. A further military imposition enforced on civilian communities living in SPDC-controlled villages in Toungoo is the completion of a household register. This document includes the names, ages and other personal details of all those residing in a given home and must be posted on the front wall of every house. Military personnel enforcing this requirement have been charging villagers in Toungoo District 1,000 baht for the form. On top of this villagers are frequently told that they must buy plastic coverings to protect the document from the weather. This register allows the Army to issue demands for forced labour proportionate to the village population and ascertain whether anyone has fled, and thus violated restrictions on movement. Any visitors are likewise easily identified using such documents. Non-residents found inside a given village are typically deemed KNU/KNLA members and have been arrested and executed as a consequence (see section on 'Killing and execution' below). Violations of movement restrictions, an executable offence according to the SPDC, typically arise as part of civilian efforts to access agricultural fields at abandoned villages and conduct trade between communities.

## Killing and Execution

SPDC personnel continue to regularly shoot at and kill villagers in Toungoo District. KHRG previously reported that at least 19 villagers had been killed and another 8 injured by SPDC personnel in Toungoo District in the first five months of 2007.<sup>4</sup> At present, the KHRG-documented number of local civilians killed by SPDC personnel has increased to 38 with an

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<sup>3</sup> 'Loh Ah Pay' is a Burmese term originally meaning voluntary service in the construction of temples and other community buildings. The SPDC uses the term when demanding uncompensated labour. For villagers the term has come to mean most forms of forced labour.

<sup>4</sup> See [Provoking Displacement in Toungoo District: Forced labour, restrictions and attacks](#), KHRG, May 2007.

additional 14 who have managed to escape from direct SPDC attempts on their lives. For many of those killed, the reason behind their execution was violation of SPDC movement restrictions. This is equally the case for those living in hiding and those temporarily absconding from SPDC-controlled villages. The necessity of tending rice fields, trading food supplies and accessing medicine and medical treatment means that such movement restrictions cannot realistically be adhered to. Under such conditions, the choice for villagers is thus between the gradual asphyxiation of their livelihoods and health under persistent movement restrictions and military demands or the risk of execution in order to pursue covert agriculture and trade so as to address the many prevalent humanitarian and social needs. The fact that villagers continue to risk being shot and killed by SPDC forces in order to tend agricultural fields is indicative of the severity of impoverishment, maltreatment, ill health and indignity of life under SPDC control.



Soldiers from SPDC LIB #371, MOC #5 arrested 24-year-old Saw Dtar Hlar Loo, tortured and finally executed him on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2007. [Photo: KHRG]



19-year-old Saw Pyweh Kloh Htoo had been attending 9<sup>th</sup> standard at a school in Mah Ra Moo refugee camp. When the school closed for the hot season Saw Pyweh Kloh Htoo returned to his home village in Toungoo District. Having been back just six days SPDC soldiers arrested him and jabbed a knife into his eyes and mouth before executing him on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2007. [Photo: KHRG]

Saw Gkya Doh, the father of Saw Dtar Hlar Loo, shown in the photo above-left describes how the SPDC soldiers killed his son:

*"I had six children. The oldest child is 28 years old and the youngest is 11 years old. But now I have five children because one died. The one who died was shot dead by SPDC soldiers. The SPDC shot him dead together with one of my nephews. My son's name was Dtar Hlar Loo and was 24 years old. The other one was my nephew and was 19 years old and his name was Saw Pyweh Kloh Htoo. My son who died was doing hill field cultivation. Saw Pyweh Kloh Htoo, didn't do anything. He went to attend school at a Mae Ra Moo [refugee camp] boarding house. The SPDC shot them dead on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2007. The SPDC Battalions that shot and killed my son and my nephew were #371 and #372 of LID #88. The SPDC soldiers came three times. The first time when they came they killed two people and the second time they killed two people and the third time they came and killed two people. When they arrested my nephew before they killed him they stabbed my nephew in the eyes and blinded him with a knife and they jabbed the knife into his mouth and dragged him".*

– Saw Gkya Doh (male, 54), H--- village, Tantabin Township (April 2007)

Tragically, following the execution of his son and nephew, Saw Gkya Doh, was also arrested and killed by SPDC soldiers from MOC #5 on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2007. A list of villagers which SPDC personnel have killed in Toungoo District since January 2007 is included below.

#	Date killed	Name	Age	Village	Responsible SPDC personnel
1	January 19 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Boh Sha	47	Yeh Sha	LIB#75, Battalion Commander Thaung Sih
2	January 19 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Aah Loo	46		
3	January 19 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Kyaw Neh Win	45	Sih Pyu Gone	
4	January 19 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Maung Sha	48		
5	January 19 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hta Kyah	15		
6	January 19 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hta Roo Roh	30		
7	January 29 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Taw Loo Koo	26	Dtoo Mu Der	
8	April 5 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Eh Doh	19	Shah See Bo	
9	April 5 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Ah Po	24	Yay Sha	
10	April 5 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Ah Po's daughter	2 months	Yay Sha	
11	April 15 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Dtar Hlar Loo	24	Hsaw Wah Der	MOC#5
12	April 15 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Bpya Klor Mu	19		LIB #371; #372
13	April 18 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Dtay Dtay	28	Bpeh Kaw Der	LIB#346
14	May 1 <sup>st</sup>	Saw Htoo Rah	45	Klaw Mee Der	LIB #539
15	May 1 <sup>st</sup>	Saw Kay Kay	24	Beh Lah Lay Koh	LIB #542 Batallion Commander Thaung Htaik Soe; LIB# 544 Batallion Commander Hla Htay
16	May 4 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Gkya Doh	51	Saw Wah Der	MOC #5, Thaung Mya
17	May 4 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Ka Lay	50		
18	May 11 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hta Nay Nah	29	Oo Bper	LIB #542; #544
19	May 11 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Koo May	40	Oo Bper	LIB#542,Thaung Htaik Soe; LIB #544, Hla Htay
20	May 11 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hta Kwah	48	OoBper	
21	May 11 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Der Hler Moh	44	Wah Soe	
22	May 11 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Blu Bpeh	27	Wah Soe	
23	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hta Wah	34	Beh Kah Lay Koh	LIB#542, Thaung Htaik Soe
24	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Pu Doh	40		LIB#544, Hla Htay
25	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Maw Pu	60		
26	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Ka Ma Taw	55		
27	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Mee Maw	34		
28	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Ah Day	28		
29	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Naw --- (female)			
30	May 15 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hta Kwah Kwah	20	Pkweh Kee (son of Saw Hsar Mee)	LIB #542,Thaung Htaik Soe
31	May 15 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Hsar Mee	55	Pkweh Kee (father of Saw Hta Kwah Kwah )	
32	May 15 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Mu Dee	36	Pkweh Kee	
33	May 16 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Beh Ka Hlay	28	Klaw Mee Der	LIB#539 [killed by SPDC landmine]
34	May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Lee Kyeh	36	She Dah Koh	IB #88, LIB# 78



35	May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Gay Gay	18		
36	May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Dtar Koo Noo	7		
37	May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Gkoh Gkoh	25	Myee Loh	MOC #9
38	May 25 <sup>th</sup>	Saw Mah Heh	38	Shah See Bo	

## Food insecurity and the destruction of rice supplies

*"When the SPDC came and destroyed our work place, we became homeless and jobless and we have had to work for one day and eat for one day [live from hand to mouth]. Some of the villagers have enough rice and some don't. Some of those who don't have, they just borrow from others. For some it is very difficult for them to live. We can find that the root of these problems is the SPDC's oppression and torturing of civilians."*

– Saw G--- (male, 54), H--- villager, Tantabin Township (April 2007)

The destruction of food supplies, a widespread and systematic strategy employed by SPDC forces in Karen State, serves to undermine civilian efforts to survive outside of military control. Given the Army's efforts to relocate all civilians from this area into consolidated population centres alongside roadways and close to military camps and bases, the pursuit of subsistence by displaced communities in hiding directly challenges military authority. Such resistance undermines SPDC rule in Karen State and weakens military power, as the regime's armed forces rely on a controlled civilian population to sustain militarisation. For this reason, the SPDC military units operating in those areas where it lacks a consolidated hold on the civilian population – including much of Toungoo District and other areas of northern Karen State – target covert hill fields, food stores and food storage containers in an effort to starve the civilian population out of the hills and force them into military-controlled villages and relocation sites where they can be more easily exploited.

In one instance, soldiers from MOC #5 under the command of Major Saing Than while patrolling in eastern Than Daung township during the period of May 4<sup>th</sup> to June 4<sup>th</sup> 2007 ransacked food stores at villages including Mah Shoh Gkoh, Pyee Kee, Koh Hah Der and Maw Pway Koh.

*"When we live we need food. If we don't have food, we can't live. Now we have no way to get an income and the villagers are unable to fully work. The one who disturbs them is the SPDC Army. When they come, they destroy everything that the villagers own and if they see us, they shoot to kill. None of the villagers have enough rice and this has happened because of the SPDC Army, because we can't do our work. One option for those who don't have enough rice is to go to a refugee camp."*

– Saw J--- (male, 40), H--- villager, Tantabin township (June 2007)



On April 15<sup>th</sup> 2006, four columns of troops from LIB #371 and #372 of MOC #5 under the command of Major Kaung Mya entered in Saw Wah Der village, killed two villagers, destroyed rice stores and other property and looted villagers' belongings. The photos above show rice strewn on the ground (left) and a tipped over tin of unhusked paddy (right) after SPDC soldiers departed from Saw Wah Der. [Photo: KHRG]

From May 12<sup>th</sup> to June 4<sup>th</sup> 2007, SPDC soldiers from MOC #5, led by Major Saing Than were hunting down villagers in the area of eastern Klay Wah to the east of the Day Loh river. As a consequence of this intensified military activity, local civilians from villages including Gko Haw Der, Sho Koh, Pweh Kee, Bper Ka Hlay Koh, Maw Htu Der, Haw Loo Der, Maw Bpwe Koh and Blah Kee fled to nearby hiding sites where they could monitor the Army activity around their homes. While some villagers had completed the initial planting of this year's rice crop, they were unable to tend their crops during this period due to the threat of military attack. Agricultural fields therefore became overgrown with weeds and shrubbery, damaging their rice crops and threatening this year's harvest. The soldiers furthermore looted some of the food stores which they encountered and destroyed others. A partial list of villagers from whom soldiers looted rice and paddy, also including the area of hillside rice fields which were damaged by overgrowth, is included below.

#	Name	Rice (tins) <sup>5</sup>	Rice (kg. / lb.)	Paddy (tins)	Paddy (kg. / lb.)	Hill fields (acres)
1	Saw Htoo Rah	13	208 / 457.6			6
2	Saw Nay Blu	6	96 / 211.2			3
3	Saw Thee Htoo	10	160 / 352			5
4	Saw Kaw	16	256 / 563.2	4	64 / 140.8	
5	Saw Teh Bu	12	192 / 422.4			4
6	Saw Kah Po	6	96 / 211.2			2
7	Saw Soe Neh	16	256 / 563.2			5
8	Saw Kaw Ploh	10	160 / 352			4
9	Saw Po Myah	6	96 / 211.2			2
10	Saw Kweh Gay	8	128 / 281.6			3
11	Saw Hter Mu	9	144 / 316.8			4
12	Naw Po Loo	12	192 / 422.4			5
13	Saw Po Dteh	12	192 / 422.4			5
14	Saw Pah Roh Meh	20	320 / 704			8
15	Saw Bay Hsay	18	288 / 633.6			7
16	Saw Hser Wah	8	128 / 281.6			4
17	Saw Pah Kyah	18	288 / 633.6			6
18	Saw Heh Hser	10	160 / 352			4
19	Saw Kah Po	15	240 / 528			6
20	Saw Ka Doh	8	128 / 281.6			3
22	Saw Way Doh	6	96 / 211.2			2

<sup>5</sup> One big tin of rice, a standard unit of measure in Karen State, equals 16 kilograms / 35.2 pounds.

*"We have no other way to get an income because we have to live in this dangerous situation with unstable conditions. We have to buy one big tin of rice for 15,000 kyat now. If we have two or three people in the family, one tin of rice runs out within one or two months and we have no money to buy more. Even if we had money to buy [rice], there isn't anyone to sell us rice. And if there was a lot of rice, we have no money to buy [it]. One viss of pork costs 3,000 kyat and one viss of chicken costs 5,000 kyat and one viss of fish paste costs 2,500 kyat. It is very expensive. We can't afford to buy and eat. We have to worry about our security all the time. It is very hard to find a way to get an income."*

– Saw G--- (male, 54), H--- villager, Tantabin Township (April 2007)

The issue of food security and the direct targeting of food supplies by SPDC military forces is a central problem for villagers in Toungoo. Independent access to food supplies allows civilians in this area to live outside of military control. The Army has therefore pursued a consistent strategy of eliminating such supplies using military means. This practice is common not only in Toungoo but throughout much of Karen State where the SPDC lacks a consolidated hold over the civilian population. Such military-induced food insecurity has, in turn, been a major factor within villagers' choices to flee to Thailand-based refugee camps. Nonetheless, many displaced villagers have tenaciously worked to cultivate covert hill fields, protect their food supplies and thereby remain close to their land and homes.

*"There were over 200 people [at the village]. When we ran here [to the IDP site], we couldn't do anything; we just stayed like jobless hands, because we dared not go to our farms and work. We don't have enough rice and it is very hard to look for rice. Now it is not yet mid year, but we already have to look for rice. I don't know what will happen to us. Because of food scarcity, we can't eat our fill. We just eat a little so as to carry on our lives. If we eat our fill, we will run out of our rice. We don't know where to find more."*

– Saw G--- (male, 54), H--- villager, Tantabin Township (April 2007)

## **Landmines**

Landmines continue to regularly kill and maim civilians, livestock and wild animals throughout Karen State. In Toungoo District both the SPDC and KNLA deploy landmines. However, differences exist in the types of mines, manner of deployment and practice of demining.

*"Here there are some landmines planted by both the SPDC and the KNU [KNLA]. But if the KNU plants landmines, they let us know and they only plant landmines on the route that the SPDC comes and if the SPDC goes back, they remove the landmines. But the SPDC doesn't remove the landmines after they are planted. And if people travel, people step on the landmines and are wounded or die."*

– Saw J--- (male, 40), H--- villager, Tantabin Township (June 2007)

### **1. SPDC landmines**

With both imported and domestically produced landmines, the SPDC has deployed a range of models in Karen State. The regime has previously made use of landmines manufactured in China, India, Italy, the Soviet Union, and the United States. During 2007 the SPDC has deployed Type-69 anti-personal bounding fragmentation landmines as part of its operations in Toungoo District. While Myanmar Defence Products Industries, a State company, produces the MM1 and MM2 – copies of the Chinese Type-59 and Type-58 respectively – as

well as a Claymore-type directional fragmentation mine, there is so far no evidence that it is producing a Type-69 mine.<sup>6</sup> The Type-69 anti-personal landmines which the SPDC is deploying in Karen State, such as that shown in the photo to the right are therefore likely constructed within China and delivered to the SPDC as part of the larger package of military aid which China has been providing to the regime.



The Type-69 anti-personal bounding fragmentation landmine shown here, deployed by SPDC forces in Toungoo District, is of Chinese origin. *[Photo: KHRG]*



Surgeons operate on 27-year-old Saw Wah Hsay Hler from Ha Htoh Bper village, Toungoo District shown here on June 11<sup>th</sup> 2007, who lost his lower leg after stepping on an SPDC-deployed landmine. *[Photo: KHRG]*

According to KHRG researchers working in Toungoo District, the SPDC has been using three models of victim-detonated landmines and three models of assailant-detonated landmines. Furthermore, being factory made, the SPDC's landmines can remain active for decades following their deployment. In Toungoo District, the SPDC has laid landmines around the perimeter of army camps and bases; on forest trails used by villagers; throughout villagers' betelnut, durian, mangosteen and cardamom plantations; below steps leading into homes, in outdoor kitchens and other areas around the home; below churches and in various other hill areas while conducting patrols.

Not only does the SPDC provide no information to villagers regarding the locations of deployed landmines, the types of deployment locations listed above indicate that it is the villagers who are being primarily targeted with these weapons. Where displaced villagers survive initial landmine explosions, they are in the precarious position of being unable to seek medical treatment in SPDC-controlled towns due to military movement restrictions and the high cost of such facilities. Typically, displaced landmine survivors seek assistance at KNLA facilities or alternatively cross into neighbouring Thailand to obtain medical treatment there. Beyond the individual landmine survivor, the impact of landmines touches whole families, especially where the injured person is a major income generator.

## 2. KNLA landmines

In contrast to the SPDC's factory made landmines, those built and deployed by KNLA soldiers are typically hade-made out of locally available materials. The most common model is fabricated from a small bamboo tube packed with petrol, gunpowder and a battery. Being bamboo, these mines have a much shorter lifespan, especially when set in the earth; usually no more than six months. On top of these hand-made models, landmines obtained from raiding SPDC stockpiles are also used. Regardless of precautions, there can be no

<sup>6</sup> "Landmine Monitor: Burma/Myanmar." 2006. Accessed online at [www.icbl.org/lm/2006/burma.html](http://www.icbl.org/lm/2006/burma.html) on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2007.



guaranteed prevention against civilians triggering landmines deployed by any party and even KNLA soldiers have been injured and maimed by KNLA-deployed landmines.

Nevertheless, KNLA soldiers typically limit the deployment of landmines to areas in and around SPDC army camps, along routes where SPDC soldiers are patrolling, and as a defensive measure around larger and more established IDP hiding sites. In many cases, civilians see the deployment of a defensive perimeter around IDP camps as crucial to their survival. When deployed along patrol routes, the KNLA seeks to remove landmines following the departure of SPDC troops.

*"For me landmines are not good. But it is good for us when the KNU [KNLA] plants landmines to protect us and if the SPDC comes and steps on a landmine, we can hear the landmine explode, so we can run away."*

– Saw J--- (male, 40), H--- villager, Tantabin Township (June 2007)

On June 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, soldiers from LIB #566, MOC #5 forced six villagers from Kaw Thay Der village and forty villagers from Klay Soe Kee village to carry food to Paw Bpaw Soe military camp. The soldiers ordered the villagers to walk ahead of the patrol. This is a standard practice known as 'human minesweeping' or 'atrocities de-mining' whereby civilians are sent ahead of soldiers to trigger any potential landmines. In this incident, 36-year-old Saw Bo Mya and 35-year-old Saw Oh Htoo of Kaw Thay Der village were both severely injured when they set off a landmine as they walked ahead of the SPDC troops.

## Conclusion

*"I have run since I was a child until now. I just grew up in the jungle. I had no chance to grow up in a village. We have no houses or villagers in our old village. Now our old village has already become a forest. The SPDC often burnt our old and new villages. When we left our village, we could carry some of our materials but some we couldn't carry. When we live in the jungle, if we can cut a hill field, we do so. But if we can't, we just stay as people without work. Now I have food for just one month and for the future, if we can't go and get rice from K---, we will have to go to a refugee camp."*

– Saw J---- (male, 40), H----- villager, Tantabin Township (June 2007)



Villagers from Toungoo District wait to cross a road while traveling to the Thai-Burma border in the hopes of making it across to a refugee camp. They fled their homes following increasing SPDC military activity. [Photo: KHRG]

Despite the SPDC's persistent efforts to establish absolute military control over Toungoo District and other areas of northern Karen State, they are nevertheless hindered by the local mountainous geography, current rainy season conditions, and the resistance strategies of the local population. However, despite civilian efforts to claim their rights and retain possession of their homeland, the increasing militarisation of Toungoo District has led to increasing poverty, malnourishment and a deepening humanitarian crisis for both those communities living under SPDC control and those in situations of displacement. On top of this, local villagers in both situations live with the ever-present



threat of being shot on sight should they be caught travelling outside of military-designated confines in order to tend crops, trade with neighbouring communities or access non-SPDC sanctioned medical treatment.

*"We don't want to go to a refugee camp, but we have no choice because we can't get food any other way. Now that we live here we're unable to plant rice."*

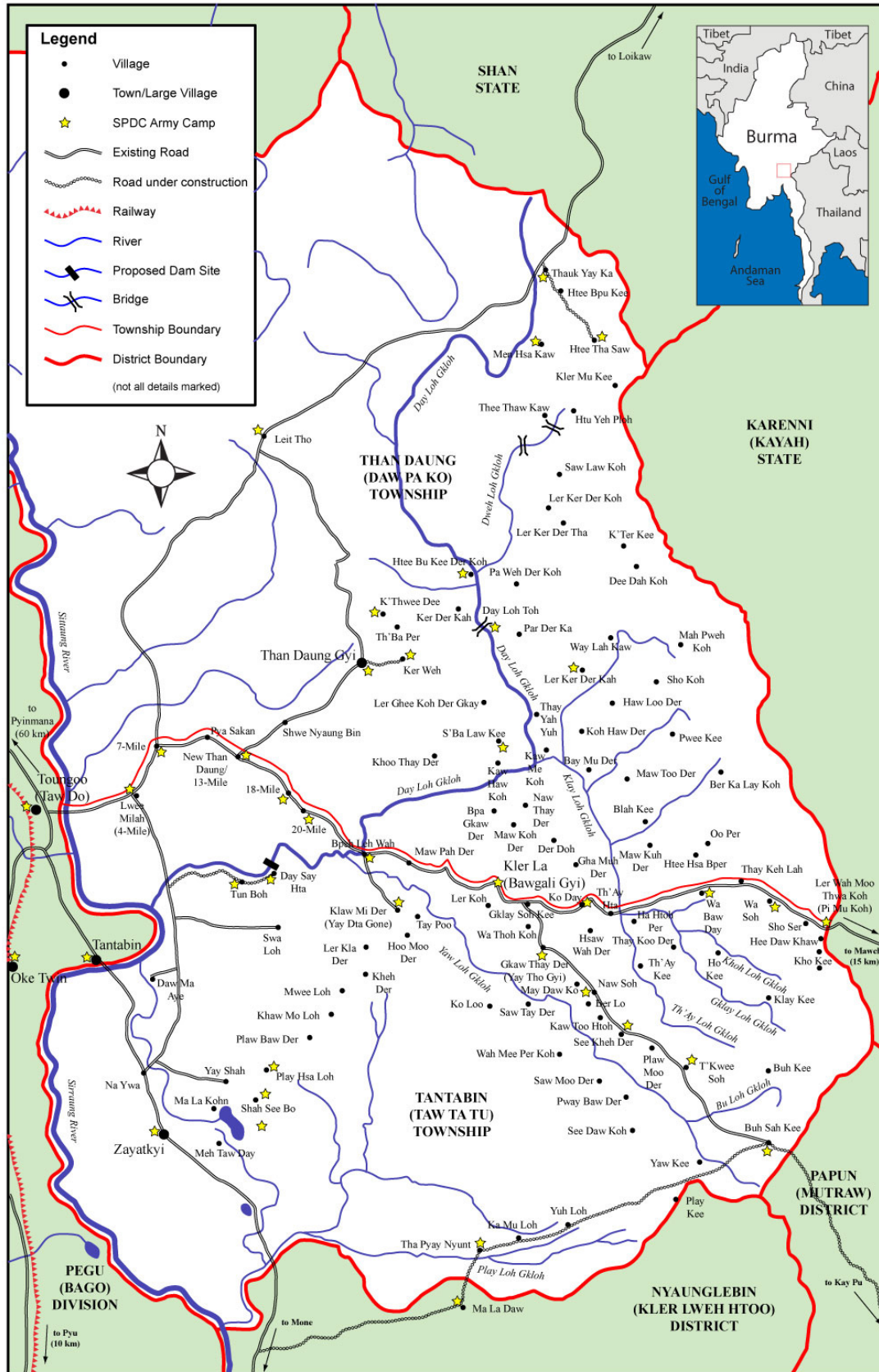
– Saw J---- (male, 40), H---- villager, Tantabin Township (June 2007)

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

- *Provoking Displacement in Toungoo: Forced labour, restrictions and attacks* (KHRG #2007-F5, May 2007)
- *Bullets and Bulldozers: The SPDC offensive continues in Toungoo District* (KHRG #2007-F1, February 2007)
- *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 2007* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 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



# Karen Districts

