



News Bulletin

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Human minesweeping and forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa'an District

Since the end of September 2008, SPDC and DKBA troops have begun preparing for what KHRG researchers expect to be a renewed offensive against KNU/KNLA-controlled areas in Pa'an District. These activities match a similar increase in joint SPDC-DKBA operations in Dooplaya District further south where these groups have conducted attacks against villagers and KNU/KNLA targets over the past couple of weeks. The SPDC and DKBA soldiers operating in Pa'an District have forced villagers to carry supplies, food and weapons for their combined armies and also to walk in front of their columns as human minesweepers. This report includes the case of two villagers killed by landmines during October while doing such forced labour, as well as the DKBA's forced relocation of villages in T'Moh village tract of Dta Greh township, demands for forced labourers from the relocated communities and the subsequent flight of relocated villagers to KNLA-controlled camps in Pa'an District as a means to escape this abuse; all of which took place in October 2008.

Beginning on September 28th 2008 and continuing from this date, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) soldiers have been conducting joint operations in areas of Pa'an District which have a heavy Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) presence. Over 60 soldiers of DKBA Brigade #999, led by officer Maw Lah Wah, have moved into T'Moh village tract in Dta Greh Township of eastern Pa'an District. These soldiers are now operating in and around local villages situated in the hills in this area. At the same time, SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #565, led by battalion commander Hlaing Htun Oo and DKBA Brigade #555, led by officer Pah Doh Boh, have both been stationed in the plains area of T'Moh village tract near to Khaw Thoh Kee, Htee Moh Kee, T'Ree Poe Gkwee, Waw Mee Gklah and Htee Plah Ree villages. Currently these troops are restricting the residents of these villages (those in both the hills and the plains) from travelling outside of their respective villages except when they are needed as forced labourers by the soldiers of either group. In addition, some troops of SPDC LIB #565 and DKBA Brigade #555 have combined with DKBA Brigade #999 in preparation for what local KHRG field researchers operating in the area believe to be coming attacks against KNU/KNLA targets in Pa'an District. Such attacks would follow similar joint SPDC-DKBA attacks against KNU/KNLA targets and villagers in KNLA-controlled areas in Dooplaya District further south which have taken place over the past weeks.¹

According to a local KHRG field researcher, the DKBA openly informed local villages of such pending attacks when they declared through written documents issued during October to villages across Pa'an District that due to fact that the KNU does not agree with the DKBA's intention of constructing pagodas in Pa'an District, the DKBA would attack KNU/KNLA targets in the area. Villagers were furthermore warned that they must not contact or support the KNU/KNLA and if they did so, the DKBA would not take responsibility for any villagers injured during the attacks. In the same document, the DKBA forbade villagers from staying out in their farm field huts during the night time.

¹ For further details of these attacks, see *DKBA soldiers attack Karen village in Thailand*, KHRG, October 2008 and *Villager Killed and More than 200 Displaced by New Attacks in Central Karen State*, Free Burma Rangers, October 2008.

The dissemination of this document followed an incident on September 30th 2008, when DKBA Brigade #999 troops fought with KNLA soldiers near Htee Bper village of T'Moh village tract, resulting in the death of two DKBA soldiers. No KNLA soldiers were wounded in this battle. In the following days, SPDC LIB #565 and DKBA Brigade #555 troops increased their activities in T'Moh village tract. They forced local villagers to porter their supplies and to walk at the front their columns as human minesweepers; a process also known as 'atrocious de-mining'.



Pictured above left is a retrieved landmine that SPDC forces deployed in T'Moh village tract. SPDC and DKBA forces planted these exceptionally long-lasting landmines in the road and surrounding forest area. In the photo above right, a KNLA soldier (right) active in the area and a local villager (left) are attempting to find and remove these landmines. KHRG field researchers state that five landmines were removed by KNLA soldiers in T'Moh village tract during the last week of September 2008. These pictures were taken on August 26th 2008. [Photos: KHRG]

On October 3rd 2008, officer Maw Lah Wah of DKBA Brigade #999 forced five villages in T'Moh village tract of Dta Greh township to each send three to five porters to carry supplies, food and munitions in order to support their military operations. DKBA officer Maw Lah Wah issued demands to Htee Bper, T'Wee Koh, Toh Gkyeh Gkwee, Htee Bper Kee and Greh Nee villages. The DKBA soldiers then forced these villagers to walk in front of their soldiers along the trail they were patrolling. On October 5th 2008 at around 8:30 am, 62-year-old Saw Ngah Gkyar, from Pah Khay Gkwee village, stepped on a landmine near Htee Bper Kee village. At the time, DKBA soldiers had not forced this particular man to carry any supplies due to his age, but had nevertheless forced him to walk ahead of their troops. After the landmine injured Saw Ngah Gkyar, the DKBA neither provided any medical assistance nor evacuated him to a clinic. On the same day, another villager, 48-year-old Saw Pah Doo, stepped on a landmine at 2:30 pm while walking in front of DKBA troops patrolling in T'Moh village tract. Neither of the men received medical care and both later died of their injuries.

Regarding the current situation in Pa'an District, a KHRG researcher operating in the area reported that:

"The DKBA and SPDC have intensified their operations in Pa'an District with the aim of seizing and occupying the KNU/KNLA's Pa'an District headquarters. Since the last week of September, combined SPDC and DKBA troops have forced villagers to carry supplies, food and munitions. Furthermore, they have forced villagers to walk in the front as mine sweepers. They have also burnt down homes and forced villagers to move to a relocation site under their control."

In Pa'an District, some villagers live in remote mountain areas distant from other villages and it is logistically difficult for DKBA soldiers to control them. Currently, the DKBA are attempting to destroy these mountain villages and relocate the villagers to the plains area under their control. On October 7th 2008, DKBA Brigade #999, led by brigade commander Pah Nwee ordered his officer Mu Naw Dweh and 20 soldiers to burn down Gk'Law Lu village and force the villagers to move to Htee Bper village. When DKBA soldiers arrived in Gk'Law Lu village they ordered the villagers to get out of their houses. The troops reportedly

announced: *"Villagers [living in Gk'Law Lu village] are disobedient for trying to live in the mountains."* After that, the soldiers burnt down the villagers' homes and forced the villagers to relocate to Htee Bper village, which is located in an area of the plains more firmly controlled by the DKBA. The soldiers burnt down all eight homes in Gk'Law Lu village. After the soldiers had burnt down Gk'Law Lu village, they marched to Htee Bper Kee village (not to be confused with Htee Bper village to which local villagers were relocated) and burnt it down as well. In Htee Bper Kee village there were four households. After the DKBA soldiers burnt down the houses in Htee Bper Kee, they rounded up all of the livestock, eating some and sending the rest back to their camp. The following table lists the animals and property of the four households in Htee Bper Kee that were either looted or destroyed by the DKBA soldiers along with the name of the relevant head of household.

#	Villagers' names	Possessions stolen or destroyed and their approximate value
1	Saw P---	Three goats and three pigs (valued at approx. 205,000 kyat / US \$186)
2	Naw M---	Three goats and one pig (valued at approx. 160,000 kyat / US \$145)
3	Saw Gk---	These villagers did not own any livestock, but the soldiers burnt down their homes with all possessions inside.
4	Naw B---	

After destroying Gk'Law Lu and Htee Bper Kee villages and forcing the inhabitants to move to Htee Bper village, DKBA Brigade #999 brigade commander Pah Nwee ordered his soldiers to build a new camp near to Htee Bper village. On October 8th 2008, DKBA soldiers ordered one person per household per day in Htee Bper and Dta Greh villages to begin forced labour constructing the new DKBA army camp. These soldiers also ordered villagers from Htee Moh Kee, Khaw Thoh Kee, May Too Htar and Bplaw Nyar Thee in Lu Pleh township to begin cutting bamboo for use in the construction of their camp. In order to finish the new DKBA camp as soon as possible, DKBA soldiers have used an average of 100 villagers per day as forced labourers. The villagers have had to bring with them their daily food supplies and their own tools with which to build the camp.

After the villagers of Gk'Law Lu and Htee Bper Kee were forcibly relocated to Htee Bper village, they no longer had access to their agricultural fields or plantations. They had also lost belongings that were destroyed by DKBA soldiers during the forced relocation. As a consequence, these villagers have faced a difficult situation trying to set up their lives anew, while also attempting to continue working for their livelihoods.

On October 15th, in response to the varied abuses they were facing following forced relocation, five households totalling 29 people left Htee Bper village and fled to stay at L---, a KNLA controlled camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in eastern Pa'an District. Then on October 17th, 43 Gk'Law Lu villagers who had been relocated to Htee Bper village likewise fled to L--- camp. Regarding the new arrivals at L--- camp, a KHRG researcher reported on October 19th that

"More than 70 villagers are in need of urgent assistance such as blankets, mosquito nets and mats, because there are many mosquitoes in L--- camp where they [the displaced villagers] are now staying."

At present, SPDC LIB #565 and DKBA Brigade #555 are patrolling villages in T'Moh village tract of Dta Greh Township. DKBA Brigade #999 remains active in the surrounding forest, and has increased the use of local villagers as human mine sweepers.

For more information on the human rights situation in Pa'an District and the recent joint SPDC-DKBA attacks in Dooplaya District, see the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *DKBA soldiers attack Karen village in Thailand (October 2008)*
- *DKBA bans alcohol consumption to justify human rights abuses in Pa'an District (October 2008)*

- *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District* (September 2008)
- *Daily demands and exploitation: Life under the control of SPDC and DKBA forces in Pa'an District* (September 2008)
- *DKBA soldiers burn down Ler Bpoo village, Pa'an District* (August 2008)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2007*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG website at <http://www.khrq.org>.



Karen Districts



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