

News BulletinJuly 17th 2009 / KHRG #2009-B8**DKBA attack on villagers and the forced dismantling of a mosque in Papun District**

Since mid-May 2009, the DKBA has become increasingly active in Papun District of northern Karen State. DKBA forces have issued new movement restrictions, demanded food and supplies from local communities and forced villagers to porter supplies and carry out other forms of forced labour. This news bulletin covers a targeted attack on villagers and the forced dismantling of a mosque – both of which were carried out by DKBA forces in Papun District during May-June 2009.

In Papun District of northern Karen State, the extent of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) control over the civilian population is varied. Much of Lu Thaw Township in the north of the district remains largely outside the consolidated control of the SPDC. In these non-SPDC-controlled areas, the Burma Army applies a shoot-on-sight policy targeting civilians and soldiers alike. In Bu Tho and Dweh Loh townships further south, however, the local population resides in areas that are largely, or at least partially, under the control of the SPDC and/or its local ally, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). While villagers in these two townships are less likely to face direct military attacks, SPDC and DKBA forces operating there continue to regularly demand forced labour, loot property and extort food, money and supplies.



In this photo a KNLA medic treats the wounded face and legs of Naw W---, a villager from Bu Tho Township, on June 19th 2009. A patrol of DKBA soldiers fired on Naw W--- and her family who were resting in a hut by their farm fields. Four villagers, including the mother and child seen here, received shrapnel injuries and another was killed. [Photo: KHRG]

Since May 15th 2009, DKBA soldiers from Brigades #333 and 555, as well as Special Battalion #777 (also called Gk'saw Wah ('White Elephant') Battalion) and Special Battalion #666, have become increasingly active in Bu Tho and Dweh Loh townships. Some observers believe that the increased activity by joint SPDC and DKBA forces in Papun is a northbound extension of the recent offensive against the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Pa'an District further south.¹ However, much of the SPDC and DKBA activity in Papun District has involved abuses against civilians rather than military attacks against the KNLA.

During recent months, DKBA soldiers in Papun have demanded forced labour and issued new movement restrictions to villagers which have been backed up by threats against non-compliance. In response, some villagers have fled into the forest to avoid the restrictions

¹ See, for example, "DKBA-Tatmadaw look to Brigade 5," *The Irrawaddy*, July 6th 2009. Accessed online at http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=16277 on July 15th 2009.

and abuse. However, because of the difficulties of maintaining their livelihoods and the humanitarian challenges of living in hiding, some of those who had fled to the forest subsequently returned to stay in areas under SPDC or DKBA control.

KHRG field researchers operating in Papun District have also reported that, since May, DKBA soldiers in Dwe Loh and Bu Tho townships have started building more army camps located near to villages and, in some cases, have built their camps within the villages themselves. Wary of potential fighting between the KNLA and the DKBA in and around their villages, some local residents have begun taking precautionary measures such as digging bomb shelters near to their homes.

Attacks on civilians

On June 18th 2009, a patrol of 11 soldiers and an officer from DKBA Special Battalion #666 departed from their camp at Meh Mweh in Bu Tho Township. Special Battalion #666 is under the command of Saw Bah Hsee, although he was not a part of this patrol. The patrol headed from the camp up into the surrounding mountains. Upon reaching hill fields belonging to residents of Meh Koo Kee village, the soldiers approached a villager and ordered him to serve as a porter alongside their patrol. The soldiers and officer then proceeded to Maw Ler Kee village. When they reached the farm fields at Maw Ler Kee, the soldiers spotted Naw W--- and her family members – all local villagers. Naw W--- and the others were resting in a field hut after having worked their paddy fields. The DKBA soldiers began firing automatic rifles at the hut and then, after setting up a mortar, fired two shells and two 'RPG-7'-model rocket propelled grenades at the hut, injuring all those inside.

The soldiers then ceased firing and ordered the villager serving as a porter to go and check on those inside the hut. Upon reaching the hut the porter saw the villagers, all of whom were seriously injured but not yet dead. The porter returned to the DKBA soldiers and reported on the status of those inside the hut. The DKBA soldiers then proceeded to fire their automatic rifles at the hut a second time. After a barrage of gun fire, the soldiers stopped firing and went themselves to check on the inhabitants. By this time, four of the villagers inside the hut were injured and one was dead. Those injured and dead inside the hut were:

	Name	Sex	Age	Relation	Status
1	Naw W---	female	36	Mother	Injured
2	Saw E---	male	7	Son	Injured
3	Naw M---	female	60	Grandmother	Injured
4	Saw B---	male	35	N/A	Injured
5	Saw P---	male	70	N/A	Dead



These pictures were taken on June 19th 2009, the day after DKBA soldiers fired on the field hut of farmers at Maw Ler Kee village in Bu Tho Township. The photos show 60-year-old Naw M--- (left) and her seven year-old grandson, Saw E--- (right), both of whom were injured in the attack. [Photos: KHRG]

After checking on the injured villagers and dead villager in the field hut, the DKBA patrol left the area and spent the night at Meh Koo Kee village. As other villagers in the area had fled when they heard the gun and mortar fire, there was no one around to check on those in the field hut. The four injured villagers therefore had to spend the night in the hut with the dead body of Saw P---.

The next morning, on June 19th, KNLA soldiers from Company #3 of Battalion #102, who had received reports about the DKBA attack, went and examined the place where the attack had occurred. The KNLA soldiers then saw the injured villagers and the dead body of Saw P---. The soldiers collected the survivors and carried them to an IDP site elsewhere in Papun District. Before leaving, the KNLA soldiers asked other local villagers to bury the dead body of Saw P---. When the surviving villagers subsequently arrived at the IDP site and received medical care, it became evident that Naw W--- had been hit by 21 separate pieces of shrapnel, 7-year-old Saw E--- with four pieces of shrapnel and Naw M--- with nine pieces.

The motivation behind these attacks is not entirely clear. Maw Ler Kee village is under partial SPDC/DKBA control and so the Burma Army's shoot-on-sight policy has not been implemented in the area. The most likely reason why the DKBA would target these villagers is that Naw W---'s husband is a KNLA soldier. However, Naw W--- told KHRG that she has long had cordial relations with local DKBA personnel, and in particular Saw Gkaw Htoo, who was in the very patrol which fired on her and her family. Naw W--- also said that Saw Gkaw Htoo had long known about her husband's involvement in the KNLA, but she had not previously faced any punishment over the issue.

Eviction of Muslims and the forced dismantling of a mosque

Muslims in Burma continue to face some of the most persistent persecution out of any ethno-religious group in the country.² Most recently, in Papun District, this persecution has involved the forced dismantling of a mosque and the relocation of Muslims to the outskirts of their resident village.

In early 2009, DKBA personnel met with the Muslim community in Gk'Ter Dtee village, Dwe Loh Township. At the meeting, the DKBA told those Muslim villagers in attendance that the local mosque would have to be dismantled in order to make way for a Buddhist pagoda. Following the meeting the local Muslim community wrote a petition letter to the DKBA authorities, asking that the pagoda be built elsewhere, even offering to dismantle their homes, rather than the mosque, in order to clear space for the pagoda construction. However, the DKBA authorities did not accept the proposed amendments to the construction arrangements.



This photo shows the framework of a new mosque being built on the outskirts of Gk'Ter Dtee village in Dwe Loh Township on June 11th 2009. DKBA soldiers earlier ordered that the existing mosque at Gk'Ter Dtee village be dismantled and relocated, along with many of the village's Muslim residents, to an area outside of the village proper. [Photo: KHRG]

Unexpectedly, on May 2nd 2009 at 7:30 am, 30 soldiers from DKBA Headquarters Security Force led by Pah Ngeh arrived at the Gk'Ter Dtee village mosque while Muslims from the local community were in the midst of prayers. The soldiers were accompanied by lay

² For an extensive report on the human rights situation of Muslims in Burma, see *Easy Targets: The persecution of Muslims in Burma*, KHRG, May 2002.

religious leaders as well as Buddhist monk U Thuzana, nominal head of the DKBA. The DKBA soldiers reportedly said to those in the mosque, *"Have you finished worshipping? If you've finished worshipping, go away. This is our time to worship. It's not your time anymore."*

The DKBA then ordered half of the Muslim men in Gk'Ter Dtee village to help the soldiers dismantle the mosque. The DKBA enforced the dismantling of the mosque by threatening that if the Muslim villagers did not take part in this work, they would not be allowed to construct a new mosque anywhere else. While the mosque was being dismantled, villagers informed Tha Aye, commander of SPDC LIB #102, which was based in Gk'Ter Htee village. However, Tha Aye would not intervene to prevent the mosque from being dismantled. KHRG field researchers reported that the dismantling of the mosque was completed on June 1st 2009.

After the mosque was dismantled, the DKBA then ordered nine Muslim households located nearby to dismantle their homes and relocate to a new site on the outskirts of the village. This was followed by an order for further Muslim households to relocate. In total, the DKBA forced 27 Muslim households from Gk'Ter Dtee to relocate outside the village. As it is now the rainy season, the site identified for relocation is wet and muddy, making the construction of new homes difficult. Furthermore, local DKBA authorities have issued an order to the Muslim villagers that they must not leave the confines of the relocation site after 9:00 pm and anyone wanting to go outside of their homes at night must use a wood or bamboo torch rather than a flashlight.

Following the dismantling of the mosque, the DKBA ordered local Buddhist villagers to take part in forced labour building the new pagoda on the now empty land. Muslim villagers were not ordered to take part in the labour. Nearby, in two other villages, the DKBA reportedly plans on having the local Christian churches dismantled in order to clear land for further pagoda construction. Should this happen, the local Buddhist communities in those villages will likely have to take part in forced labour constructing the new pagodas.

Further background on the situation in Papun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *IDPs, land confiscation and forced recruitment in Papun District* (July 2009)
- *IDP conditions and the rape of a young girl in Papun District* (April 2009)
- *SPDC and DKBA road construction, forced labour and looting in Papun District* (March 2009)
- *Attacks, killings and the food crisis in Papun District* (February 2009)
- *Mortar attacks, landmines and the destruction of schools in Papun District* (August 2008)
- *Burma Army attacks and civilian displacement in northern Papun District* (June 2008)

Photos documenting the human rights situation in Papun District are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2009* (updated June 2009), *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008* (updated February 2009) and other previous KHRG photo galleries and photo sets. These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at www.khrg.org.

Karen Districts



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