



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Report from the field

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Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts

The DKBA has intensified operations across much of eastern Pa'an and north-eastern Dooplaya districts since it renewed its forced recruitment drive in Pa'an District in August 2008. These operations have included forced relocations of civilians, a new round of forced conscription and attacks on villages. The DKBA has also pushed forward in its attacks on KNLA positions in both districts in an apparent effort to eradicate the remaining KNLA presence and wrest control of lucrative natural resources and taxation points in the lead up to the 2010 elections. Skirmishes between DKBA, SPDC and KNLA forces have thus continued throughout this period. Local villagers have faced heightened insecurity in connection with the ongoing conflict. DKBA, SPDC and KNLA forces all continue to deploy landmines in the area and DKBA forces have fined or otherwise punished local villagers for attacks by KNLA soldiers. This report documents incidents of abuse in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts from August 2008 to February 2009.

Since August 2008, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) forces have conducted an intensified military campaign in Dta Greh and T'Nay Hsah townships of eastern Pa'an District and Kawkariek Township of north-eastern Dooplaya District. The Dawna mountain range, running north-south in eastern Karen State, crosses through all three of these townships.

In Pa'an District, the DKBA's recent operations have involved forces from Special Battalion #999 under the command of Maung Chit Thu, Brigade #555 under the command of Pah Doh Boh and Brigade #999 (not to be confused with Special Battalion #999) under the command of Pah Nwee. Maung Chit Thu commands Special Battalion #999 from his base in the town of Shwe Ko Ko, located in eastern T'Nay Hsah Township (Myawaddy Township in SPDC maps) along the Moei River bordering Thailand.

In Dooplaya District, DKBA operations have involved combined troops from Special Battalion #999 and Battalion #907, operating under the command of Na Kha Mway and Saw La Po. DKBA operations in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts have included forced relocations of civilian populations, restrictions on movement, attacks on villages and village destruction, deployments of landmines near civilian areas and forced recruitment of soldiers.

State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #565, led by battalion commander Hlaing Htun Oo, has been active alongside DKBA forces in Dteh Greh Township. SPDC forces active in Kawkariek Township include LIBs #401 and 407.



DKBA soldiers fired this Chinese-made Type-69 RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade) at Htee Ber Kee village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District, in October 2008 after ordering local residents to relocate to DKBA-controlled Htee Ber village. DKBA forces receive these weapons from the SPDC. DKBA soldiers fired two or three similar RPGs at Htee Ber Kee village each day for a week following forced relocation orders. This particular RPG failed to explode and was photographed by KHRG on November 28th 2008. [Photo: KHRG; disregard incorrect date printed on the photo]

Soldiers from KNLA Battalions #21, 22 and 101 – all under the command of the KNLA's 7th Brigade – are currently active in Dta Greh Township of Pa'an District. KNLA Battalion #101 was previously based in T'Nay Hsah Township, but since the split of former 7th Brigade commander Htain Maung and the formation of the Karen National Union / Karen National Liberation Army – Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC) in January 2007, KNLA forces have been unable to operate in the area. Battalion #101 has therefore moved into Dta Greh Township to operate alongside battalions #21 and 22. As a consequence, there are no longer any KNLA units based out of T'Nay Hsah Township. In Kawkariek Township, active KNLA units include Battalions #103, 201 and 18.¹

The recent operations of DKBA, SPDC and KNLA forces in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts have created additional threats to local communities already facing severe financial and livelihood challenges. Aside from the DKBA's forced relocation efforts in eastern Pa'an District, the group has also threatened and carried out punitive measures against civilian communities residing near incidents of attacks conducted by KNLA forces. In at least one case, villagers in Dta Greh Township petitioned local KNLA forces to not deploy landmines in the area so as to avoid punitive action taken against them by DKBA forces. Villagers and livestock residing in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts have also been regularly injured and killed by landmines deployed near their homes. Nevertheless, DKBA, SPDC and KNLA forces all continue to deploy landmines in the area.

Destruction of villages

DKBA attacks on villages in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts since August 2008 have been employed for two primary purposes: forced relocation of villagers or punitive measures against civilians for alleged cooperation with the KNLA.

In some cases, these attacks have been employed as part of a forced relocation program in which soldiers have burnt down villages (typically located on the slopes of Dawna mountain range) in order to prevent the return of villagers relocated into DKBA-controlled areas. Such relocation reduces the possibility of contact between villagers and KNU/KNLA personnel and provides increased resources (new recruits as well as villagers' labour, money, food and supplies) for local DKBA forces.



This photo – taken on December 31st 2008 – shows the remains of a house at Htee Bper Kee village, Dta Greh Township, which DKBA forces destroyed on October 8th 2008 after issuing forced relocation orders to local residents. [Photo: KHRG]

On August 26th 2008, for example, DKBA forces operating under Bo Gk'Do, an officer serving under DKBA Special Battalion #999, burnt down the village of Ler Bpoo in T'Nay Hsah Township.² On October 7th 2008, DKBA Brigade #999 officer Mu Naw Dweh and 20 soldiers under his command burnt down Gk'Law Lu village and forced local residents to move to DKBA-controlled Htee Bper village in Dta Greh Township. On October 8th 2008, DKBA soldiers from Brigade #999, Battalion #2, Company #1, under the command of Captain Maw La Wah, travelled to Htee Ber Kee village and evicted villagers who had not yet relocated to Htee Ber village. The soldiers then burnt down or otherwise destroyed villagers' houses and caught and

¹ While the Karen Peace Force (KPF) and the KNU/KNLA-PC remain active in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts, respectively, KHRG has not received any reports of military attacks or abuses by either of these groups since August 2008.

² For more details of this incident, see *DKBA soldiers burn down Ler Bpoo village*, Pa'an District, KHRG, August 2008.

ate villagers' livestock.³ However, many villagers refused to relocate and some fled into the surrounding forest. The DKBA responded by firing two-to-three Chinese made Type-69 RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenades) at Htee Ber Kee village each day for the following week. The DKBA received these Chinese-made Type-69 RPGs (which are a variant of the Soviet RPG-7) from the SPDC.

Due to the demands and restrictions placed on relocated villagers living under DKBA control in eastern Pa'an District, many villagers have sought to avoid relocation and to flee (either before or after relocation) to Thailand or other areas inside Karen State. From January 15th to 16th 2009, for example, approximately 20 villagers – who faced persistent demands after losing their farm fields when forcibly relocated to DKBA-controlled Htee Bper village – fled with the intention of reaching the Thai-Burma border. However, the DKBA blocked nearby forest paths with landmines, forcing the villagers to travel by road. Local DKBA forces were thus able to catch these villagers as they were travelling and send them back to Htee Bper.

In other cases, DKBA attacks on villages have been employed as a punitive measure taken against villagers in response to KNLA landmine deployment or KNLA attacks on DKBA forces.



These pictures, taken on January 26th 2009, show destroyed farm huts of Thai-Karen residents of Gklaw Htaw village, Umphang District, Thailand, which DKBA forces burnt down on January 3rd 2009. The soldiers burnt down these huts as they were returning to their camp in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, after a clash with KNLA forces during which a number of DKBA soldiers were injured. [Photo: KHRG]

On January 3rd 2009, for example, DKBA soldiers from a combined force of Special Battalion #999 and Battalion #907 were injured during skirmishes with KNLA troops near the base of KNLA Battalion #103 in Dooplaya District. The DKBA soldiers therefore withdrew to their base at Tha Waw Thaw in Kawkareik Township. On the way to Tha Waw Thaw, these DKBA troops burnt down the farm field huts of the Thai-Karen residents of Gklaw Htaw, which was located near the area of the fighting.⁴

³ For more details of this incident, see *Human minesweeping and forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa'an District*, KHRG, October 2008.

⁴ For more details of this incident, see *DKBA soldiers burn down huts, detain villagers and loot property in Thailand*, KHRG, January 2009 and *Pictures of Oppression: Attacks, Displacement and Oppression in Karen and*

Forced recruitment

Since August 2008, DKBA military units – particularly Maung Chit Thu's Special Battalion #999 – have been engaged in an aggressive forced recruitment drive. KHRG previously reported on the DKBA's conscription of soldiers in T'Nay Hsah township in August 2008.⁵ At that time, DKBA Special Battalion #999 was able to forcibly conscript 175 new recruits from local villages in T'Nay Hsah Township. Some of the new recruits were told that they were to be sent south to join in DKBA attacks against the KNLA in Dooplaya District.

In 2009, the DKBA has initiated another round of forced recruitment in T'Nay Hsah Township. Villages have been told to provide a specific number of recruits from amongst their residents and also pay 20,000 Thai Baht (approx. US \$572) per recruit in order to support them during their time as soldiers. The names of villages and number of conscripts demanded during one incident of forced recruitment (in T'Nay Hsah Township on January 28th 2008) are listed below:

#	Village name	# of conscripts	Support funds demanded ⁶
1	Htee Wa Blaw	10	200,000 Baht (US \$5,723)
2	Bpaw Baw Koh	11	210,000 Baht (US \$6,009)
3	Htee Law Thee	6	110,000 Baht (US \$3,147)

On February 2nd 2009, local DKBA authorities in T'Nay Hsah Township ordered Htee Gkah Rah village to provide 10 recruits to serve as DKBA soldiers. Then on February 3rd, local DKBA authorities ordered an estimated 10 villages in Noh Gkay village tract of T'Nay Hsah Township to each provide 10 villagers as new recruits.

Landmines

"I don't want to go back and stay as they [DKBA] ordered because I can't work for them. They always demand forced labour and have also planted landmines around the area and villagers dare not go outside of the village. For these reasons I don't want to go back and stay there [at Htee Ber]. And so I decided to come here [to an IDP camp in Karen State]."

- Saw P--- (male, 29), --- village, Pa'an District (October 2008)

In Pa'an and Dooplaya districts, SPDC, DKBA and KNLA military units all continue to regularly deploy large numbers of landmines. Some of these deployments have been fatal while others have caused severe injury and dismemberment.

SPDC landmines

The most common type of landmine which SPDC forces deploy in Karen State are domestically-made copies of the American M-14 landmine. Landmine Monitor reports that these domestic M-14 landmines are "*manufactured by Myanmar Defense Products Industries at Ngyaung Chay Dauk, in Bago division.*"⁷ While the M-14 can prove fatal, in most cases victims initially only lose the lower section of one or both legs. However, if these injuries are not treated, survivors may subsequently die from blood loss or infection. Being factory-made, the M-14 is durable and can, once deployed, remain active for years.

Karenni States, Free Burma Rangers, January 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.freeburmarangers.org/Reports/2009/20090119.html> on February 6th 2009.

⁵ *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District*, KHRG, September 2008.

⁶ In the cases of Bpaw Baw Koh and Htee Law Thee villages, local DKBA authorities told the villagers that the DKBA would cover half the cost of one recruit (i.e. 10,000 Thai Baht – approx. US \$286). Thus the total amount of funds demanded from these two villages was 10,000 Thai Baht less than otherwise would have been the case.

⁷ *Landmine Monitor 2007*, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Accessed at <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/burma.html> on February 5th 2009.

In August 2008, KHRG field researchers operating in T'Moh village tract of Dta Greh Township encountered an SPDC-deployed M-26 landmine. Although SPDC forces have reportedly deployed this type of landmine in the past it has – before this instance – not been recently been encountered. SPDC soldiers had lain the landmine around a camp in T'Moh village tract and left it behind after withdrawing from the area. In a correspondence with KHRG in December 2008, Landmine Monitor provided the following statement about this mine:

“The mine in the photograph is... a bounding mine. This means when triggered, a small explosive charge blows the mine up from the ground where a much larger explosion takes place at chest height. They are lethal. The mine is an American made M26. Where it came from is a mystery to our experts as they state the mine is extremely rare. The mine which you document being lifted was brand new, and laid by someone who did not understand how it worked. Your photographs showed that it had been laid upside down. Our experts noted that one of your pictures showed that the arming pin [was] in place, so the mine was probably not armed. The internal trip wire spool in the base of the mine was still in storage position, and the tripwire lever was also in its storage position. Despite that, if armed correctly, the M26 is extremely dangerous and can also function on pressure.”



A Burmese copy of an American M-14 as photographed in January 2009. The M-14 is most commonly deployed by SPDC troops, but this particular mine was planted by DKBA soldiers active in Dta Greh Township. [Photo: KHRG]



An American-made M-26 bounding mine photographed in August 2008. This mine was retrieved from around a recently abandoned SPDC Army camp in Dta Greh Township. [Photo: KHRG]

SPDC forces operating in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts have mostly deployed landmines around army camps and bases and alongside vehicle roads and bridges. In mountainous northern Karen State, SPDC forces have frequently deployed landmines in abandoned villages after residents have either fled or been forcibly relocated. While not a common practice, SPDC forces have in some cases informed local communities about the deployment of landmines in a given area – typically when laid around more permanent army bases.

DKBA landmines

The DKBA utilises a mixture of handmade landmines which they produce themselves and factory-made landmines which they receive from the SPDC. DKBA-deployed handmade landmines include those constructed out of glass bottles, metal pipes or wooden blocks stuffed with gun powder to which a battery-powered detonator is fastened. These handmade landmines can typically stay active for about six months. After this time, these mines stop functioning due to battery depletion or corrosion from water seepage.

Factory-made landmines which the DKBA receives from the SPDC are mostly domestically produced copies of the American M-14 mine described above. DKBA forces in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts have deployed landmines on roads, around abandoned villages after residents have been relocated and on forest paths. The DKBA typically does not inform local communities regarding the whereabouts of its deployed mines.

In some cases, DKBA forces have planted landmines specifically to block civilian travel. This was the case following the relocation of villagers in Dta Greh Township to DKBA-controlled Htee Bper village in October 2008. At this time, residents of Htee Ber Kee village were attempting to flee the area to reach the Thai-Burma border via paths in the forest. DKBA soldiers therefore laid landmines along these forest paths forcing villagers to instead travel by roads which the soldiers could more easily monitor.



This landmine - made by hand from a block of wood, gun powder and battery-powered detonator – was deployed by DKBA soldiers from Special Battalion #999 in Dta Greh Township. It was subsequently retrieved and photographed by KHRG in January 2009. [Photo: KHRG]

"They forced villagers to go back and stay in [Htee Bper] village under their control. When the villagers didn't go back [to Htee Bper], they [DKBA soldiers] came and burnt down the village. They don't want the villagers to stay outside of the villages that they control. But the villagers know that if they go back and stay in [Htee Bper] village, the DKBA will plant landmines and they won't be able to go out to work. The villagers don't like to live among them. Some villagers have said that even if we dare to live among them, we still have to be afraid of landmines when we go to work. If they [DKBA soldiers] want to go somewhere, they always force villagers to go ahead of them [to trigger any mines encountered on the way]."

- Naw Y--- (female, 40), --- village, Pa'an District (October 2008)

On October 15th 2008, at about 7:00 am, 40-year-old Saw Pah Nya Loo, a resident of Khaw Tho Kee village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District, was walking to his hillside farm field located about 20 minutes from the village. On the way, he stepped on a landmine laid by soldiers from DKBA Brigade #999, Battalion #2, under the command of deputy company commander Pah Muh Naw Dweh. When the mine exploded, Saw Pah Nya Loo lost a large part of one of his legs. As the explosion had been audible from a distance, Pah Muh Naw Dweh's soldiers arrived an hour later to check on the landmine. Some local villagers also came at this time to see what had happened. When the soldiers and villagers arrived at the site of the explosion, they saw Saw Pah Nya Loo severely injured and bleeding but not yet dead. Saw Pah Nya Loo was unable to speak at this time. He indicated with hand gestures to those who stood around him that he wanted something to drink. It then took about half an hour for him to die.

Villagers have also reported to KHRG that their cattle and buffalos have been injured and killed by landmines laid near their villages. On October 10th 2008, for example, 15-year-old Saw Ht--- and 20-year-old Saw P---, of Kh--- village, Lu Pleh Township (which borders Dta Greh), went out to look after their cattle on a nearby hillside. At this time, three cattle belonging to Saw Ht--- and two cattle belonging to Saw P--- stepped on landmines planted by DKBA soldiers of Brigade #999, Company #1, under deputy commander Pah Muh Naw Dweh. When the first cow set off a landmine, the rest of the cattle were spooked by the explosion and ran off. The cattle owners were likewise frightened and were afraid to walk around. Within one day, four more cattle had stepped on landmines in the area.



A KNLA soldier removes a DKBA-deployed landmine in December 2008 from a road in Dta Greh Township – a road which local villagers frequently use. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo, taken on November 27th 2008, shows a water buffalo belonging to a villager in Dta Greh Township. The buffalo stepped on a DKBA-deployed landmine and subsequently died. [Photo: KHRG]

In another incident at the beginning of October 2008, 47-year-old Saw Pah Gkah, 45-year-old Saw Pah Leh, 18-year-old Saw Pah Htuh and 60-year-old and Saw Gkyaw Nweh – all residents of DKBA-controlled Htee Bper village – led their buffalos out to pasture on a nearby hillside for three or four days. While the buffalo were out grazing on the hillside, DKBA soldiers from Special Battalion #999 arrived and deployed landmines nearby. When the villagers learned that mines had been laid in the area, they decided it was too dangerous to travel up the hillside to retrieve their buffalo. By October 13th 2008, six buffalo had been injured after detonating six separate landmines. When the first landmine was triggered, the explosion frightened the rest of the buffalo which then ran off and stepped on other mines in the area.

KNLA landmines

KNLA forces operating in Pa'an and Dooplaya District – like their DKBA counterparts – make use of handmade landmines fabricated from glass bottles, metal pipes and wooden blocks. As with the DKBA's handmade landmines, the KNLA mines typically last for about six months before becoming inactive. KNLA forces employ landmines as a means of ambushing SPDC and DKBA patrols or as a defensive barrier around KNLA army camps and IDP hiding sites.

Typically, KNLA forces that deploy landmines inform local villagers about their locations. Furthermore, as DKBA forces who have stepped on KNLA-deployed landmines have fined or otherwise harassed civilians living nearby, KNLA forces in some areas have sought permission from local villagers before planting any mines.

In one incident in October 2008, KNLA forces operating near Dt--- and P--- villages in Dta Greh Township wanted to deploy landmines in order to obstruct the operations of DKBA soldiers from Brigade #999 who were active in the area. However, as the DKBA would likely harass the villagers should any soldiers step on landmines deployed nearby, the village elders told the KNLA not to plant landmines in the area. The KNLA thus refrained, in this case, from doing so.

Conclusion

Recent military activity in eastern Pa'an and north-eastern Dooplaya districts and their associated human rights abuses are intimately tied to the ongoing conflict between DKBA and KNLA forces in the area. DKBA operations appear to be directed towards the dual objectives of eradicating KNLA forces in the area and taking control of more people and land (which, in Pa'an and Dooplaya, is both resource-rich and offers a number of profitable taxation points).

The recent pattern of military activity in these areas differs from the offensive in northern Karen State where the SPDC, as the principal actor, has focused less on eradicating KNLA forces and

more on attacking civilians, non-SPDC controlled villages and hiding sites, farm fields and food storage facilities in an effort to flush out the civilian population residing in the difficult-to-control forested mountains of Toungoo, Nyaunglebin and Papun districts.

One significant factor of the situation in eastern Pa'an and northeastern Doolaya districts that distinguishes it from northern Karen State is the large DKBA presence. While it has been widely reported that SPDC authorities will seek to disarm ethnic ceasefire groups prior to the planned 2010 elections⁸, it is still not clear how this will affect the DKBA. Recent reports suggest that the group may be allowed to retain their arms on the condition that they remake themselves, at least superficially, into a border security force.⁹ However, the exact post-2010 election status of the DKBA (and other ceasefire groups) remains uncertain and possibly depends on their military and economic strength at the time of the 2010 elections when they may need to negotiate their long-term political status. The DKBA's intensification of military operations in Pa'an and Doolaya districts may therefore be an effort to strengthen their bargaining position in the lead-up to the elections. How much the recent DKBA attacks on KNLA targets are independent initiatives – and not done at the behest of SPDC authorities – remains unclear. Regardless, there is no indication that ongoing fighting between DKBA, SPDC and KNLA forces will cease any time soon. Associated threats to local communities, such as those described in this report, are therefore likely to continue.

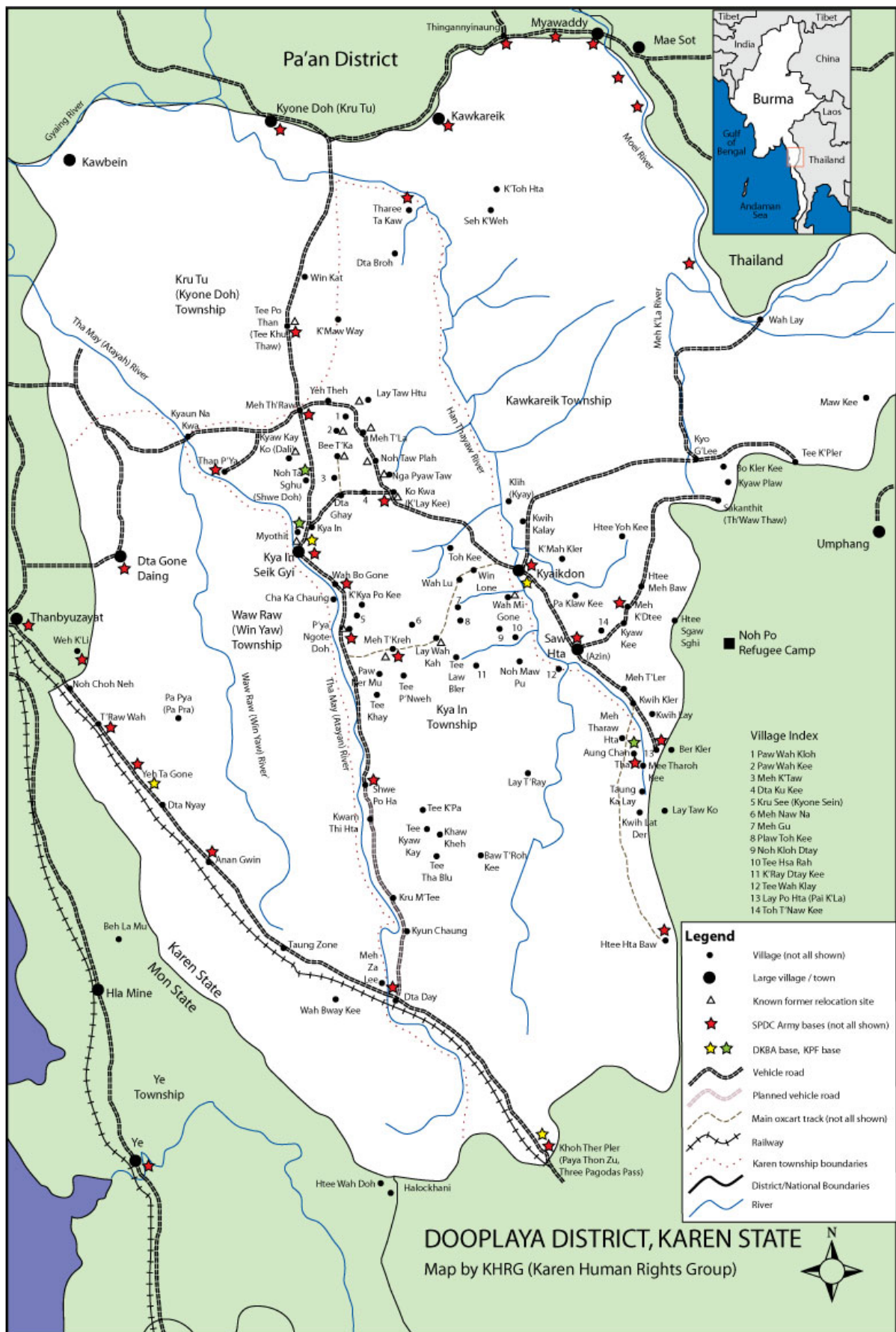
For more information on the situation in Pa'an and Doolaya districts, see the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *DKBA soldiers burn down huts, detain villagers and loot property in Thailand* (January 2009)
- *DKBA soldiers attack Karen village in Thailand* (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)
- *SPDC and DKBA order documents: October 2007 to March 2008* (August 2008)
- *Exploitative governance under SPDC and DKBA authorities in Doolaya District* (July 2008)
- *SPDC soldiers arrest and kill villagers on allegations of contacting KNU/KNLA* (January 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>.

⁸ See for example, "Shan Rebels Sound Warning Bell For All Ceasefire Armed Groups," *Mizzima*, March 25th 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.mizzima.com/component/content/article/4-inside-burma/278-shan-rebels-soundwarning-> on February 6th 2009 and "Ethnic Minorities Hold the Key to Burma's Future," *The Irrawaddy*, January 23rd 2009. Accessed at http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=14979 on February 6th 2009.

⁹ "DKBA Told It Must Provide Border Guards," *The Irrawaddy*, January 6th 2009. Accessed at http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14881 on February 4th 2009.





Karen Districts



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