



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, January to March 2013

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in March 2013 by a community member describing events occurring in Papun District between January and March 2013. The report describes the use of villagers from approximately 40 villages in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract for forced labour. The perpetrators were led by the presiding monk of Myaing Gyi Ngu, U Thuzana. Villagers, including elderly people, women and children, have been forced to work on the construction of the Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge. Villagers are required to perform labour for consecutive days and are not informed of what length of time they will be required to work before the project's completion. The report also describes a landmine incident on February 11th 2013, which occurred between P--- village and S--- village in K'Ter Tee village tract, Bu Tho Township. A landmine exploded while five villagers were transporting sand by car for the Green Hill Company and all five villagers in the vehicle were killed. No armed group took responsibility for the incident, though the Green Hill Company compensated 300,000 kyat (US \$318.13) to the family of each victim. Additionally, the manager of the company, Ko Myo, donated 200,000 (US \$212.10) kyat to each of the victims' families.

Situation Update | Bu Tho Township, Papun District (January to March 2013)

The following situation update was written by a community member in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Papun District, including five incident reports, 14 interviews, one other situation update and 66 photographs.²

¹ KHRG trains community members in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2013. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the report, "Demands for labour and money in Papun District, January 2013," KHRG, June 2013.

The human rights abuses and social problems that happened between January 1st 2013 and March 18th 2013

The human rights abuses and the social problems that we are going to address happened between January 1st 2013 and March 18th 2013. These problems happened in the villages from Meh Mweh village tract to Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract.

The social problems that have been happening include the explosion of a landmine in the west of the Yunzalin River Bank, between P--- village and S--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Papun District. The explosion happened in February 2013. Regarding this explosion, none of the armed groups took responsibility.³

The human rights abuses that happen from Meh Mweh village tract to Htee Th'Daw Hta tract are caused by Myaing Gyi Ngu monk, U Thuzana,⁴ who controls the whole area of Myaing Gyi Ngu. For the landmine explosion case, we still do not know and still cannot figure out who was the perpetrator.

Even though we do not know why the landmine was planted, we know that U Thuzana's construction of the bridge in Karen State is to make the transportation [routes] better, so he constructed the Htee Lah Eh Hta Bridge.

Since January 1st 2013, the Myaing Gyi Ngu monk started constructing Htee Lah Eh Hta bridge (or) the bridge that crosses the Yunzalin River in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Papun District. Even though we do not know which company supports U Thuzana's work, he is ordering the villagers from Meh Mweh village tract to Lwa Sin village tract to go for volunteer work. He ordered every villager including men and women, adults and children, from every village starting from Meh Mweh village tract to Lwa Sin village tract [to work on the construction of the bridge]. Therefore, the villagers in the areas face many problems. If it is volunteer work, he [U Thuzana] should only order the villagers [to work for] one or two days. But now, he ordered the villagers to construct the bridge until it is completely finished; we do not know how many months

³ For detailed information on this incident, see "Landmine explosion and death of villagers in Papun District," KHRG, May 2013.

⁴ U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, March 1996. In 1995, KHRG reported that U Thuzana had collaborated with the Tatmadaw, and met with then-Southeastern Commander Major General Maung Hla to obtain weapons and supplies for 4,000 soldiers in his monastery. As a result of the agreement, U Thuzana's monastery in Myaing Gyi Ngu, in northern Hpa-an District, reportedly developed a reputation as a mystical safe haven for villagers avoiding Tatmadaw abuses. See "Karen Human Rights Group commentary," KHRG, February 1995.

and years it will take, so it cannot be called volunteer work anymore. Moreover, it [the work] does not meet the standards of ILO [International Labour Organization] rules.⁵ He [U Thuzana] forced the villagers to work, whether the villagers want to work or not. So, regarding U Thuzana ordering the villagers to construct the bridge, it is obviously forced labour.⁶

The village tracts that are being ordered to do forced labour by U Thuzana are Meh Mweh village tract, Day Wah village tract, Kyaw Pah village tract, Meh P'Lee village tract and Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, which are five village tracts in total. There are about 40 villages in those five village tracts. He [U Thuzana] ordered everyone from those villages including old people, youth [and] children, [both] men and women. Some of the workers [construction workers in additional villagers] who construct the bridge receive payment and some do not. He [U Thuzana] ordered the villagers starting on January 1st 2013 and until now.⁷ We do not know how many months and years it will take in the future.

On February 11th 2013, because of the landmine explosion, five villagers died and a car was damaged. The explosion happened between P--- village and S--- village, [in the] western part of Yunzalin River in K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Papun District. The place where the landmine exploded is not close to the K'Ter Tee army camp and is three furlongs⁸ away from the vehicle road. The place where the explosion happened is located in the eastern part of the vehicle road.

No one knows who is to blame for the landmine explosion. The armed groups who are active in the area are the BGF [Border Guard Force Battalion]⁹ #1013, BGF #1014, DKBA [Democratic Karen Benevolent Army]¹⁰ and KNU [Karen National Union].¹¹ None

⁵ The community member is knowledgeable of ILO standards due to a training coordinated by KHRG with ILO representatives and KHRG community members in January 2012.

⁶ For additional information on this incident and other demands for labour and money by Buddhist leaders in Papun District in 2013, see "Demands for labour and money by religious leaders in Papun District," KHRG, June 2013.

⁷ The report was submitted to KHRG on March 25th 2013.

⁸ A furlong is a unit of distance equivalent to 0.125 of a mile or 0.2 of a km.

⁹ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalized ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry or light infantry battalions are identified by two or three digit battalion numbers. For more information, see "DKBA officially becomes Border Guard Force" Democratic Voice of Burma, August 2010, and, "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009.

¹⁰ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces.

of them took responsibility regarding this incident and none of them tried to find out who the perpetrator was.

Even though we do not know who the perpetrator of the landmine explosion was, there was a lot of damage and death. It happened like this: U L---, who is from Papun, lent his car to Ko Myo, former administrator of K'Taing Tee who took responsibility for the transportation of sand for Green Hill Company.¹² Therefore, U L---'s car was the car that carried sand for the Green Hill Company.

Green Hill Company is [based in] the building that was built for the Border Guard Force #1013 and #1014 to stay in. While carrying the sand for the Green Hill Company, the car got hit by a landmine that was planted by unknown people. It got hit by the landmine on February 11th 2013 while carrying sand from the sand bank.

When the landmine exploded, U L---'s car was damaged and left the car driver and four other villagers dead. Five villagers died in total. For the death of the villagers, Green Hill Company donated 300,000 kyat (US \$318.13)¹³ [to the family] for each villager who died. Likewise, the former administrator Ko Myo also donated 200,000 kyat (US \$212.10) [per family] for the villagers who died.

The forced labour and landmine explosions will still happen in the future because even though the ceasefire happened, the Burmese [Burma] government did not lead their armed groups effectively according to the ceasefire agreement. For example, the leadership in the headquarters is not practiced by the lower rank soldiers [lower ranking soldiers do not follow orders from headquarters]. And the lower rank soldiers also do not follow the rules. Therefore, for sure, there will still be some problems in the future.

The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. The DKBA changed its name from "Buddhist" to "Benevolent" in April 2012 to reflect its secularity.

¹¹ Here the villager is referring to the armed wing of the KNU, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

¹² Green Hill Company is affiliated with both BGF #1013 and #1014, and also comes under Burma government control.

¹³ As of June 13th 2013, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 943 Kyat to the US \$1.

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

- “Demands for labour and money by religious leaders in Papun District, January 2013,” (June 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2012 to January 2013,” (May 2013)
- “Landmine explosion and death of villagers in Papun District,” (May 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Forced labour in Bu Tho Township, January to February 2013,” (April 2013)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August to September 2012,” (April 2013)

