



Interview

August 22, 2019 / KHRG Log # 19-15-A3-11

Mergui-Tavoy Interview: *Land confiscation by a private company in Ler Muh Lah Township, January 2019*

In 2006, U¹ Kway, a company owner also known as U Hla Myint, confiscated seven acres of land from a local villager in Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, resulting in livelihood difficulties. She did not receive any compensation and her complaint letters have remained unanswered. The victim shared her anger with KHRG, as well as her desire to get her land back and live in peace.²

Interview, January 17th 2019 | Naw T--- (female, 50), U--- village, Ka Paw area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer (betel nut plantation)

[...] How many family members do you have?

[...] I have eight family members in my house.

[...] How do you earn a livelihood?

[...] I have a betel nut plantation and I sell [betel nuts] in town.

Do you have any other job apart from this?

I just have this job. We have to process [the betel nuts] step by step. We do not do farming because we do not have land for that anymore.

I heard that a company confiscated people's lands here. Was your land also confiscated by the company?

Of course. When they [U Kway's company] came to confiscate my land, while they were cutting down our trees, my husband went to see the owner [U Kway] and begged him not to do it. My husband told him: "*I did not inherit this land from my ancestors. I have my own family and I had to work hard to get this land.*" Then the owner replied: "*We are not cutting down the trees on your land. We are doing it on the government's land.*" My husband responded that he had his

¹ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

² The present document is based on information received in February 2019. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy district who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons.

[Karen National Union (KNU)]³ land title with him so he showed it to the owner. The owner told my husband: “*Your land title is useless so you can use it to wipe your shit.*”

Do you know the name of the company that confiscated your land?

It is U Kway’s company.

Where is it located?

It is located in Myeit (Blee) [Town].

What did they plant after they confiscated the land?

They planted rubber trees.

When did they confiscate the land?

They confiscated the land in 2006.

How many acres of your lands were confiscated?

I think they confiscated seven acres of my lands. When they [U Kway’s company workers] cut down my fields, they were full of betel nut trees, mango trees and wax gourd plants. We had not even touched those plants yet. Betel nuts were ready to be harvested. When they [U Kway Company’s workers] could not climb up the betel nut trees, they cut them down with a machete. My husband felt very sad and whenever he visits the [confiscated] lands, he always cries. He told me he does not want to go there.

Did [the company] give you compensation after confiscating your land?

No, they did not give us anything.

Did they come and meet with you after that?

No. They never came.

You said that they planted rubber trees, so can they tap them now?

They have been tapping them for four or five years already.

What challenges did you face after the company confiscated your land?

We faced so many challenges. We do not want to talk about it because whenever we talk about it, it makes us angry. So we stay like this without even trying to talk about it.

As you did not get any compensation, do you have anyone who speaks for you to get something in return?

The company has people who speak for them but we do not have anyone.

Have you ever submitted a complaint letter or something like that to solve your land issue?

Yes, we submitted two or three letters already.

Did you get any response?

No. We even went to the Myiet (Blee) [Myanmar government’s] office.

What did they respond to you when you went to the Blee office?

[Myanmar government officers] asked us so many questions when we went there. The authorities asked questions to [U Kway] too. Then, he answered that he took the land in U---village because Shwe La Thar [Lah K’Paw Htoo] signed an agreement for him.

³ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

Since U Kway said that Lah K'Paw Htoo signed [an agreement] for him, have they ever shown you that agreement?

No. They never showed it to us.

Did you also submit [complaint] letters to the KNU?

No. We did not submit [complaint] letters to the KNU, but we submitted [complaint letters] to the Myanmar government.

Did you get any response from them?

No. We did not get any response from them.

Who do you think should solve this problem?

I want the government and the authorities to solve it for us. We would like to hear whether we can get our land back or not. They should let us know about that. If we are told that we won't get our land back, then we will try to remain calm and start new jobs for our livelihood.

How do you want people [authorities] to solve this problem for you?

We just want them to help us get our land back so that we can work on it and pass it on to the next generations. If they [U Kway's company] pay us compensation, we will just spend everything. We cannot keep it for the next generations, so we just want our land back.

Do you have any other land left, apart from the confiscated land?

Yes, we still have some land left.

What do you think about the company that confiscated your land?

I do not like them at all. When we see them, we do not talk to them anymore.

What about the [...] Myanmar government?

We submitted [complaint] letters to the Myanmar government. They told us we would get [our land] back if we ask them but we haven't got it [back] yet. We also hope that our KNU leaders will do something to help us.

What do you think the Myanmar government should do to solve this issue?

We just want them to let us know whether we can get our land back or not. They should let us know through the local authorities.

As [you live in an area controlled by the] Myanmar government, what do you think they should do for the people in U--- village?

We just want to hear a response from them. We hope that we will get our land back so we can farm again for our children.

What kind of ruling system do you want the Myanmar government to implement?

We do not want the Myanmar government to rule us. We just want the KNU to rule and control us. If our Karen people rule us, our life will be more peaceful than if the Myanmar government rules us. Now, they [Myanmar government] are ruling us and we cannot escape their control so we always have to obey them.

What would you want to suggest to the Myanmar government?

I dare not suggest anything so I remain silent and keep [my feelings] inside.

Why do you remain silent and keep your feelings inside? How do you feel about that?

I feel very bad because they just confiscated our land without telling us anything.

How do you want to earn a livelihood in the future?

I want to live in peace but I do not know whether [my life] will get worse than this or better. We had to flee all the time when we were young so now we just want to live in peace. We also hope that our future generations will live in peace.

Do you have any other thing to say or to suggest to us?

I cannot suggest [anything] but I would like to say that if Karen people are ruled by Karen [leaders], we will have a better life. However, if the Myanmar government rules us, I think that we will not have any place to live in the future. We just want to be ruled by Karen leaders. We would like to respond to the Myanmar government people but we dare not do it.

How do you want us to use the information you gave to us?

We just want other people to know what we face. We do not want them to face the same situation.



These two photos were taken on January 17th, 2019 in U--- village, Ka Paw area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. They show lands that were confiscated by the company to plant betel nut and rubber trees. [Photos: KHRG]

Further background reading on issue of land confiscation by private companies in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Land Confiscation by the Asia World Company, March 2019”](#), (July 2019)
- [“Thaton District: Land Confiscation by the Super One Company in Kyaikto Township, October 2018”](#), (May 2019)
- [““Development without us’: Village Agency and Land Confiscations in Southeast Myanmar”](#), (August 2018)

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrq.org.

Mergui-Tavoy (Tanintharyi) District

