



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

December 7, 2016 / KHRG #16-77-S1

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## **Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township, June 2015 to August 2016**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District during the period between June 2015 and August 2016, including education, health, militarisation, KNLA forced recruitment, civilians' livelihoods, and development projects.*

- *In June 2016, middle school students' parents in Aung Pa Gyi village, Kaw T' Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District had to give money to the local school for tables and chairs.*
- *Between 2015 and 2016, villagers in eastern and western parts of Taw Naw area, Kaw T' Ree Township Township faced many illnesses, such as flu, diarrhoea, coughing, TB, cancer, stomach ache, stroke, pneumonia, throat infections, and diabetes.*
- *Between July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015 and August 4<sup>th</sup> 2016, there were six incidents of fighting between Border Guard Force (BGF) allied with Tatmadaw Battalion #230 and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in C--- village, Kaw T' Ree Township, Dooplaya District.*
- *The development projects in Kaw T' Ree Township, Dooplaya District between 2015 July and 2016 August included the construction of roads, schools, clinics, libraries, and establishing an electricity and water supply by the Burma/Myanmar government and foreign- aid partners.*

### **Situation Update | Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (June 2015 to August 2016)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016. It was written by a community member in Dooplaya 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.<sup>1</sup>*

#### **Education**

Between 2015 and 2016, the majority of the primary school teachers and middle school teachers in Kaw T' Ree [Kawkareik] Township, Dooplaya District were Burma/Myanmar government teachers and the others were village teachers [who are paid directly by the villagers]. Village teachers help to teach the students who do not understand Burmese [language by speaking to them in Karen language]. The students study five days [per week] but they only get a chance study Karen language for one period per week and they can only wear Karen clothes on Mondays and Fridays. They sing the Burma/Myanmar national anthem before and after school [on Tuesdays and Thursdays] and they sing the Karen national anthem on Mondays and Fridays. Primary schools and middle schools receive some support [school supplies] from the Karen

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<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar 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.

National Union [KNU], such as notebooks, pencils, pens, cane balls and footballs. Only around 30% [of school's supplies] were provided by the KNU and the other 70% were provided by the villagers themselves. [Burma/Myanmar government] Teachers' salary was paid by the Burma/Myanmar government but they do not get paid enough. Students' parents had to pay the salary for the village teachers.

In June 2016, there were more than three hundred primary school students and middle school students in Aung Pa Gyi village, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. Because of the high numbers of students, there were not enough tables and chairs for them. [Therefore] Teachers and village leaders have to ask for money from the students' parents [for more tables and chairs]. The middle school students' families each had to pay seven thousand kyat [US \$5.33],<sup>2</sup> but if there were two or three [middle] school students from the same family, they had to pay ten thousand kyat [US \$7.61] [per family]. The school committees had to buy tables and chairs for the students with the money that they got from [from the students' parents].

There were some teachers [in some schools] who got a salary from the Burma/Myanmar government and sometimes they had to attend the [teacher] training in the town [Kyain Town] during the school term for two weeks so the students had to stop studying [for this time]. It took a lot of the students' study time [away] so there was some disagreement and misunderstanding between the village teachers and the Burma/Myanmar government teachers. Between 2015 and 2016, there were some improvements in education in the villages in Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District.

### **Health**

Between 2015 and 2016, villagers faced illnesses, such as flu, diarrhoea, cough, TB, cancer, stomach ache, stroke, pneumonia, throat infection and diabetes. These illnesses usually happened in the eastern and western parts of Taw Naw Kaw T'Ree [Township].

Civilians who get these illnesses go to the Burma/Myanmar hospitals or clinics and they do not have to pay money. However there are not [any] qualified Burma/Myanmar nurses or medics, or enough medicine. The Burma/Myanmar government supported the hospitals and clinics in the villages [in Kaw T'Ree Township], but their nurses and medics only provided elephantiasis injections and anti-malaria treatment. There was no treatment for other serious illnesses. They could not treat the serious illnesses so civilians who had money went to private clinics and hospitals in the towns. Some villages have good quality free clinics and hospitals, and most of the patients go to small private clinics [in the villages]. Villagers [patients] who do not have enough money go to Burma/Myanmar government hospitals and clinics but if they cannot be treated there, they go to the hospitals in the towns. Some villagers get medical treatment from the Back Pack Health Workers and Free Burma Rangers [FBR]. Between 2015 and 2016, most of the villagers in Kaw T' Ree Township, Dooplaya District faced health problems.

Since August 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, there were more than one hundred children [between two and twelve years old] with a cough in Hpah Klaw Hkee village, eastern Taw Naw, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. Villagers who lived close to community-funded clinics received medicine and injections but they did not get better. [Therefore] The children still face this illness [cough] at the present time.

### **Military activity**

Since the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire agreement,<sup>3</sup> cases of extortion and forced labour have become less common but there are still some cases [of forced labour and extortion]. After the

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<sup>2</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016 official market rate of 1,313.97 kyat to US \$1.

<sup>3</sup> On January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. Negotiations for a longer-term peace plan are still under way. For updates on the peace

[2012 preliminary] ceasefire agreement, between July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015 and August 4<sup>th</sup> 2016, there were six incidents of fighting [between Border Guard Force (BGF)<sup>4</sup> and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)]<sup>5</sup> in C--- village, Kaw T' Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The BGF and Tatmadaw [Battalion] #230 collaborated and attacked DKBA *Bo<sup>6</sup> Na Ma Kya's<sup>7</sup>* area to occupy their land. Some of the soldiers [from the different armed groups] and civilians were injured [from shrapnel] during the fighting, which happened six times.

The most recent incident of fighting between DKBA *Bo Na Ma Kya* and BGF happened in D--- village on August 4<sup>th</sup> 2016. Villagers who were injured were:

1. Naw E--- Age 20 (pregnant female)
2. Saw F--- (Saw F---) – Age 44 [male]
3. Naw G--- Age 45 [female]
4. Naw H--- – Age 14 (Standard 8 student, I---, Kawkareik Town) [female]

### Forced recruitment of soldiers

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process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage](#) on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014. In March 2015, the seventh round of the negotiations for a national ceasefire between the Burma/Myanmar government and various ethnic armed actors began in Yangon, see [“Seventh Round of Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations,” Karen National Union Headquarters](#), March 18<sup>th</sup> 2015. Following the negotiations, the KNU held a central standing committee emergency, see [“KNU: Emergency Meeting Called To Discuss Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement And Ethnic Leaders’ Summit,” Karen News](#), April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015.

<sup>4</sup> 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 formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw. BGF battalions are assigned four digit battalion numbers, whereas regular Tatmadaw infantry battalions are assigned two digit battalion numbers and 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.

<sup>5</sup> The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was re-formed on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2016 as a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (2010 – present), and is also referred to as Na Ma Kya (‘Deaf Ear’). During fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA Benevolent throughout 2015, there was internal disagreement within the DKBA Benevolent which resulted in a number of commanders being dismissed in July 2015. These former commanders then issued a statement in January 2016 declaring the formation of a new splinter group. This organisation has phrased the formation of this group as the revival of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army which was formed in 1994 until it was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the still-active DKBA Benevolent. The group is led by General Saw Kyaw Thet, Chief of Staff and General Saw Taing Shwe aka Bo Bi, Vice Chief of Staff. Other lower ranking commanders in the DKBA Buddhist splinter group are San Aung and late Kyaw Moh aka Na Ma Kya (reportedly killed on August 26<sup>th</sup> 2016). The group is currently based in Myaing Gyi Ngu area in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State. This DKBA Buddhist (2016 – present) should not be confused with the DKBA Benevolent (2010 – present) from which it broke away in January 2016, or with the original DKBA (1994 – 2010) which was broken up in 2010 into the BGF and the DKBA Benevolent. Importantly, the DKBA Buddhist has not signed the preliminary or nationwide ceasefire with the Myanmar government whereas the DKBA Benevolent has signed both agreements.

<sup>6</sup> *Bo* is a Burmese title meaning ‘officer.’

<sup>7</sup> *Na Ma Kya* is a Burmese phrase which directly translates as ‘Deaf Ear’. Na Ma Kya in this context refers to the name of a Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) splinter group based in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. According to local villagers, this group often acts with impunity, ignoring both the local people’s input as well as the higher DKBA authorities’ orders. Commander Kyaw Moh, well known as Na Ma Kya, who was leading this splinter group, was killed by one of BGF Commander Bo Tin Win’s mahouts on August 29<sup>th</sup> 2016. For more information see [DKBA Splinter Group Confirms Leader’s Death](#), August 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, The Irrawaddy; [ပိုင်လ်နားမကြားက ဆင်ထိန်းများကို ပြန်ပေးဆွဲခြင်းမဟုတ်ဟု ဒီကောဘီအေငြင်းဆို](#), September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016, Democratic Voice Of Burma. According to unpublished KHRG information from Kawkareik Township in Dooplaya District the circumstances surrounding his death remained unconfirmed.

In June 2016, Karen Nation Liberation Army [KNLA] Battalion #18 chose [male] villagers who are eighteen years old [and above] from every village to be soldiers. [The KNLA] Forced recruitment of soldiers was in every village from J--- village to K--- village [on the] Thai-Burma Border. They chose two adult men from each village to become soldiers but they chose twelve men from L--- village to become soldiers. If the other villages did not have two men to be soldiers [because the village was too small], then it was okay if they just had one man to be a soldier. Villagers in all of the villages had to support the parents of villagers who had been recruited as soldiers with twenty thousand kyat [US \$15.22] or some of them [were given] thirty thousand kyat [US \$22.83]. These men have to be soldiers for three years and then they have to help the KNLA for six months afterwards.

The deadline for the names of the men to be recruited to be submitted to the KNLA was July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016. Some adult men did not dare to go [to be soldiers] but they had to go. Between 2015 and 2016, the [KNLA's] military's activities were getting less frequent but there was still some activity.

### **Livelihoods**

After the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire agreement, civilians in Karen State [Doooplaya District] could work on their land farms, hill farms, plantations and businesses, and they can now travel more freely than before the [2012 preliminary] ceasefire agreement. Civilians can travel well on the roads and bridges built by the Burma/Myanmar government in the villages. Even though these roads and bridges have already finished being built, armed actors still asked for taxes from the civilians who were travelling [on the roads and bridges].

For the villagers who were cultivating crops on land farms, many of their paddy plants were destroyed by poor weather. During paddy planting time, villagers had to pay other people between six thousand kyat [US \$4.56] and eight thousand kyat [US \$6.10] for each person to plant paddy for them. Even though some people had money [to pay people to plant paddy for them], there was no one available to plant paddy for them. For the people who planted paddy for other people and were paid between six thousand kyat [US \$4.56] and eight thousand kyat [US \$6.10] [per day], they used this money to pay for their children's studies or to celebrate traditional Karen festivals, such as Karen New Year, Karen National Day, Karen Martyrs' Day, Karen Wrist Tying Day,<sup>8</sup> Karen Revolution Day and many religious events. For people who do not have a farm, they rent other people's farms and they cultivate corn, chilli, peanuts, sugarcane and many other plants too. During the poor weather, some of them have been losing [money] from their plantation because they rented other people's land or borrowed money from the rich people. Therefore, there were not many civilians who received benefits from their plantations.

### **Development**

The development projects in Kaw T'Ree Township, Doooplaya District between 2015 and 2016 included the construction of roads, schools, clinics, libraries, and electricity and water supplies. These construction projects were supported by the Burma/Myanmar government and some foreign countries [and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)]. Regarding the road construction, Burma/Myanmar government [workers] tried to construct them [the roads] in all seasons: rainy season, summer and cold season. However many of the old roads [that they had built previously] were destroyed before they had finished building the new ones. Regarding clinics and hospitals, they constructed large buildings [clinics and hospitals] but there was not enough medicine. Regarding electricity, they distributed solar panels [to villagers] but some villagers did not get them. Even though some villagers got them, they could only use them for a short time [and then they did not work properly]. [Regarding the water supply] It was supported by a community-based organisation [CBO] which donated between forty thousand kyat [US \$30.44],

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<sup>8</sup> 'Wrist tying' refers here to a Karen cultural practice whereby the wrist is bound with white thread in order to rid the individual of spirits believed to be the cause of their illness. Annual wrist-tying ceremonies are traditionally held during the August full moon in order to encourage cultural continuity and ward off disease.

thirty thousand kyat [US \$22.83] and twenty thousand kyat [US \$15.22] to every village tract but some civilians did not get water in the summer season [because it ran dry].

Villagers and civilians in Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District got support from the Burma/Myanmar development [projects] and foreign countries.

### **Short information and situation update**

Between 2015 and 2016, we saw many companies coming to Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District through [support from] the Burma/Myanmar government and [they were] constructing roads. They were repairing roads and they destroyed some civilians' farm lands, plantations and houses [during the road construction]. Some of the civilians got some compensation [for the damage to or loss of their land] but some of them did not get anything.

The Burma/Myanmar government and some companies conducted a lot of logging, stone mining and gold mining in Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. Because they conducted [logging, stone mining and gold mining] with industrial machines, it affected the environment and the rivers. [Therefore,] Villagers who live there used the dirty water and then it caused many illnesses to the villagers. They [loggers and miners] were also destroying civilians' plain farms, hill farms and plantations but they [villages] did not get any compensation. [The Burma/Myanmar government and an unknown company] Set up electricity poles on the farm land of the villagers who live near Kaw T'Ree Town but they did not pay compensation. Some villagers and land owners reported it to the KNU responsible leaders but they did not get any result [response from them].

Many of the villagers in the villages in Kaw T'Ree Township were using and selling drugs [*yaba*].<sup>9</sup> Many children, students and married women also used drugs so I reported it in this Situation Update.

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

- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw B---, March 2015," (November 2016)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, February 2016" (November 2016)
- "Ongoing militarisation in southeast Myanmar," (October 2016)
- "Dooplaya Field Report: Military conflict, violent abuse, and destruction caused by development projects, January to December 2015," (October 2016)
- "Forced recruitment of a child soldier by KNLA in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District, October 2015 (UPDATED)," (October 2016)

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<sup>9</sup> *Yaba*, which means 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, [Yaba, the 'crazy medicine' of East Asia](#), UNODC, May 2008; "[Woman raped and killed in Pa'an District, October 2012](#)," KHRG, December 2012; and Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014.

# Dooplaya District



## Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)