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Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

October 19, 2017 / KHRG #17-55-S1

Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Kyaukkyi Township, January to May 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District between January and May 2017, including land confiscation, education, Tatmadaw activities and two killing cases which were committed by Tatmadaw soldiers.

- *Local villagers have been trying to regain their land ever since it was confiscated by Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #550, LIB #599, LIB #60 and LIB #351 63 years ago. The land is near A--- village, Mee Chaung Kone village tract, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. While LIB #550, LIB #599 and LIB #60 have now returned the confiscated land to the original land owners, LIB #351 is yet to return their portion of the confiscated land.*
- *Villagers from B--- village, Tha Pya Lar village tract, Phyou Township (Bago Division), Nyaunglebin District said that a newly constructed Burma/Myanmar government primary school in their village is of poor quality. Therefore, they reported it to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Ethnic Affairs in order for them to reconstruct the school to a higher quality. However, villagers have yet to receive either a reply or support for the repairs.*
- *On February 16th 2017, LIB #20 started construction of a road near Thel Phyu Chaung river, Kaw Pyin village, Mone area, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. However, they did not consult with local villagers before they constructed the road, nor did they ask for permission from local armed groups. They said that they constructed the road for rural development although local villagers interpreted the construction as being for military use.*
- *On March 18th 2017, a C--- villager named U D---, was shot and killed by Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #589 at a gold mining site in Shwegyin Township. The leaders of the Tatmadaw and the gold mining company each provided one million kyat (US \$736) to the victim's family as compensation.*
- *On May 14th 2017, an eight year old girl, named Nan E---, was held hostage and killed by a Tatmadaw soldier from LIB #598 at the army camp in C--- village in Shwegyin Township. The LIB #598's Battalion Commander and Headquarter Commander each paid one million kyat (US \$736) to the victim's family.*
- *As a result of these two killings in the same village, many villagers felt afraid and unsafe, and raised their concerns about the Tatmadaw army camp based around the village. They verbally requested the Tatmadaw leaders to withdraw the army camp from its location near the village.*

Situation Update | Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District (January to May 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in May 2017. It was written by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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

¹ 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

report was received along with other information from Nyaunglebin District, including 14 interviews, 261 photographs and one video clip.²

Introduction

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kyaukkyi Township, Mone Township and Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District during the period between January and May 2017 including land confiscation, education, Tatmadaw activities and two killing cases which were committed by the Tatmadaw.

Land confiscation

The majority of the people in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District usually work as labourers on farms and as gardeners to support their livelihood. 63 years ago [in approximately 1954], Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) #550, LIB #599, LIB #60 and LIB #351 confiscated land from villagers near A--- village, Mee Chaung Kone village tract. The confiscated land was used by the military. Following the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement³ (NCA) in 2015, villagers had hoped for the restoration of their land. Therefore, local villagers [whose lands had been confiscated] went back to live in their original [confiscated] land in 2016. The Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) helped some of those land owners to get their land back. LIB #550, LIB #599 and LIB #60 returned the confiscated lands to the original land owners. However to date, LIB #351 has not given back the lands to villagers. They have kept hold of 30 acres of villagers' private land [land used for housing] and 264 acres of villagers' plantation land.

On April 9th 2016 Tatmadaw officer Wa Na from LIB #351 went to A--- village and he threatened the villagers and told them to leave, under the order of Kyaukkyi Township administrator U⁴ Tin Myo Aung. Local villagers were very frightened. However, later an apology was given to the villagers. Local villagers reported that farming is their main source of income and they still have not received their land from the Tatmadaw. Therefore, they have to work as daily labourers [on other villagers' farms] for a living.

Education

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 southeastern Burma/Myanmar, 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. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

³ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see "[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#)," Reuters, October 15th 2015. Despite the signing of the NCA prompting a positive response from the international community, see "[Myanmar: UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement](#)," UN News Centre, October 15th 2015, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe's decision to sign has been met with strong opposition from other members of the Karen armed resistance and civil society groups alike, who believe the decision to be undemocratic and the NCA itself to be a superficial agreement that risks undermining a genuine peace process, see "[Without Real Political Roadmap, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Leads Nowhere...](#)," Karen News, September 1st 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

⁴ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

The education situation in 2017 has changed a lot in comparison to previous years. The [Government of Burma/Myanmar] Ministry of Education now provides the school fees for primary students and they [Ministry of Education] also provide students' uniforms and some school materials such as pencils and books for the primary students. Another new development is that it is now allowed to teach Karen language at schools. However according to local Karen teachers, they have to teach Karen language as an extra class, out of the school period, which means the students often have little energy left to learn Karen language. Students' parents reported that their children have to go to school early in the morning and they come back home very late due to Karen language being taught outside of school hours, both before and after school. The long hours of teaching are not appropriate for the age of their students. One of the female Karen teachers reported that she has a problem with [having to teach] the extra class for Karen language [due to the long hours]. Also, she suffers from discrimination from the Burma/Myanmar government teachers at school, who do not treat her very well.

Local villagers in Kyaukkyi Township reported that school teachers from most of the Burma/Myanmar government schools in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District use the internet on their phones and play games while they are teaching in class. Therefore, they do not concentrate on their teaching which negatively impacts the students' education and passion for learning. Also, they [school teachers] do not come to school regularly. As a result, this creates a barrier for students to study and the students do not want to go to school anymore.

Moreover, when I [KHRG researcher] went to conduct interviews in B--- village, Tha Phya Lar village tract, Phyou Township [Bago Division], Nyaunglebin District, one female school teacher and village head reported that since its establishment, the Ministry of Education has never supported a primary school in their village. This year the school had to change [expand] to a post-primary school [up to sixth standard] so villagers reported this change to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs in order for them to improve the school building. However, villagers have not received any reply or support. This will be very problematic in monsoon [as there is not a suitable school building for use throughout the monsoon]. Villagers said that they will probably have to build a hut [small school building] for students this year by themselves. The schools in many villages in Nyaunglebin District are already worn and old. However, the Ministry of Education provides a limited budget for local schools. Local villagers in Nyaunglebin District only receive a small fund for the school budget.



These photos were taken on April 20th 2017 in B--- village, Tha Phya Lar village tract, Phyou Township, Nyaunglebin District. It shows a local school in the village. This school was constructed by the village community. Until now, this school has not received any budget for school construction from the Burma/Myanmar government. This year the school is for students up to 6th Standard, but the school building is old and has already sustained damage. That is why the children have to study in the bamboo hut [small building]. It is not comfortable or easy for students to study in the hut. [Photos: KHRG]

Tatmadaw activities

After the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed, there has been no fighting in Nyaunglebin District. However, the Tatmadaw constructed roads in rural areas for their own use although they told local villagers that the road construction projects are for rural development. On February 15th 2017 LIB #20 brought machines [bulldozers] to a place near Thel Phyu Chaung stream, Kaw Pyin village, Mone area, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. On February 16th 2017 they [LIB #20] started to construct the road. However, they did not consult the local villagers before they started the construction of the road, nor did they ask permission from the Karen National Union (KNU). Therefore, the KNU released a letter disagreeing with this road construction project. On February 17th 2017 they [LIB #20] halted the road construction project and they left that area [with the project unfinished].

Besides this, Tatmadaw Military Engineering Battalion #911 constructed the road between F--- village and G--- village in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. They told villagers that the road construction is for rural development. Actually [the villagers perspective is that] the road was constructed for the use of the Tatmadaw.



On April 6th 2017 [Tatmadaw] Engineering Battalion #911 came to construct a road between F--- village and G--- village in Mu Thel village tract, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. They [Engineering Battalion #911] told G--- village head that they constructed the F--- to G--- road project for rural development. In fact, they constructed this road for use by the Tatmadaw.
[Photo: KHRG]

Killing cases committed by the Tatmadaw

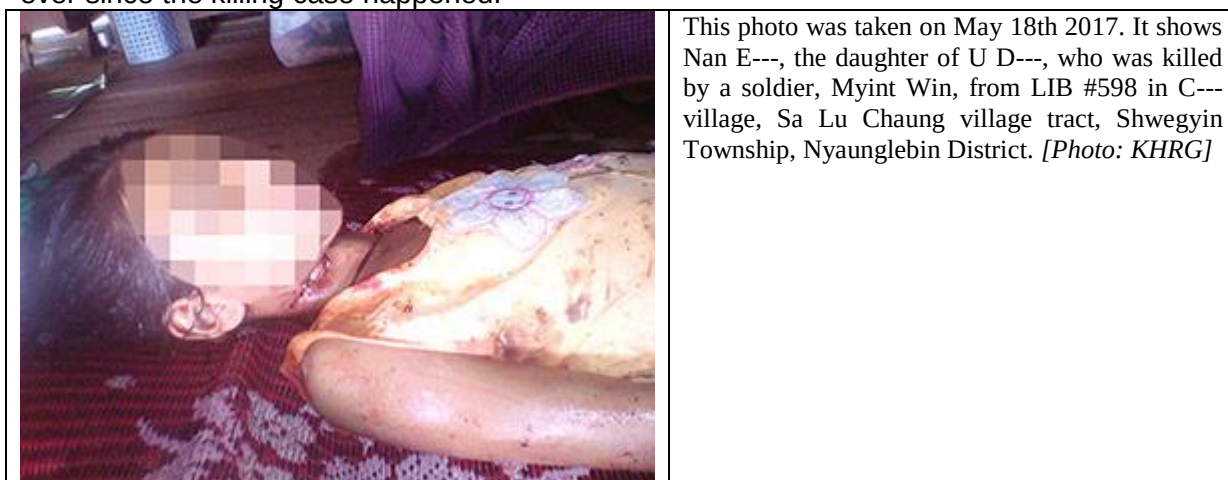
On March 18th 2017, villagers from C--- village, Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District had the opportunity to mine for gold. According to an agreement by local authorities, each village [in Kyaukkyi Township] has the opportunity to mine for gold [on an alternating basis]. On that day [March 18th 2017] every adult from C--- village went to the K'lain area to mine for gold. Then a soldier, whose name is Min Min from LIB #589, shot a C--- villager, whose name was U H---. Villagers do not know why the Tatmadaw soldier killed U H---.⁵

Similarly, on May 14th 2017 a Tatmadaw soldier, Myint Win from LIB #598, went to C---village, Sa Lu Chaung village tract, Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District and he was verbally abusive towards villagers. He entered U D---'s house, in C---village, at midnight. He then took a knife from the kitchen and behaved in an aggressive and violent manner. He cut U D---'s wife's hand and took U D---'s daughter, Nan⁶ E---, as a hostage. He said that he will kill her [Nan E---] if somebody tried to approach him. The girl was found dead the next morning with her throat cut. Villagers who live in Kyaukkyi Township felt threatened due to the presence of the Tatmadaw

⁵ For more information regarding this case see the KHRG report, [“Two separate killing incidents committed by Tatmadaw soldiers in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District \(March and May 2017\).”](#) September 2017.

⁶ Nan is a P'wo Karen title used for females, before their name.

near their villages. The C---village administrator reported that villagers have been frightened ever since the killing case happened.⁷



Conclusion

As mentioned above, human rights abuses are still happening in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, even though the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed by the Burma/Myanmar government and the Karen National Union in 2015. There is still evidence of human rights abuses being committed and as a result local villagers continue to worry about their future.

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

- “Two separate killing incidents committed by Tatmadaw soldiers in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District (March and May 2017)”
- “Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw A---, November 2016” (September 2017)
- “Nyaunglebin Interview: Saw P---, December 2015,” (December 2016)
- “Nyaunglebin Interview: Naw I---, November 2015,” (October 2016)
- “Nyaunglebin Interview: U A---, January 2016” (September 2016)

⁷ For more information regarding this case see the KHRG report, [“Two separate killing incidents committed by Tatmadaw soldiers in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District \(March and May 2017\).”](#) September 2017

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)