



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

March 31, 2017 / KHRG # 16-57-S1

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## **Dooplaya Situation Update: Kawkareik Township and Noh T’Kaw Township, April to May 2016**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Kawkareik Township and Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, during the period between April and May 2016, including education, healthcare, business activities, and armed groups’ activities.*

- *On April 4th 2016, Tatmadaw soldiers went to A--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, which is a Karen National Union (KNU) controlled area, without getting permission from KNU. The Tatmadaw were worried that the KNU soldiers were going to shoot them, so they used the villagers as human shields.*
  - *In some schools in Kawkareik Township, local Karen teachers had problems with the Burma/Myanmar government teachers. This is because the Burma/Myanmar government teachers were often absent for training and the Karen teachers did not get paid as much as the Burmese teachers.*
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### **Situation Update | Kawkareik Township and Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District (April to May 2016)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in May 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> This report was received along with other information from Dooplaya District, including one interview, 400 photographs and two video clips.<sup>2</sup>*

**May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

#### **Situation update from Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District**

1. Education
2. Healthcare
3. Business activities
4. Armed groups activities

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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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

## 5. NGO support

### **Education**

Regarding the education situation of Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, most of the schools are situated in rural areas. The majority of children are able to study in those schools. Some villages are very close to Thailand, so some children could go to a Thai school. Some religious organisations, and other organisations, try to send school teachers to the villages that are near to the border [between Myanmar and Thailand], in order to teach the children. For example, the organisation 'Save the Children' built schools in villages to improve the education situation. Therefore, students can study in the school without any problem. The Karen Education Department (KED)<sup>3</sup> cooperates with other volunteer groups to develop the schools [within Kawkareik Township]. The Burma/Myanmar government also tries to send their school teachers to rural areas. Thus, the education situation in Kawkareik Township is as good as in other areas. I [KHRG researcher] saw that by myself.

### **Healthcare**

[Compared to other areas] the healthcare situation in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, is not very bad. There is no particular sickness in this area. The healthcare situation has improved because the healthcare organisations try to help the villagers in their own places [operation areas of the healthcare organisations]. Some healthcare organisations are from the Burma/Myanmar government and some are from the KNU government, and they work near to the Thai-Myanmar border. Also, Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU) from Thailand came and helped the villagers inside Burma/Myanmar. Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) also come to the villages to help people with their health. The local villagers do not suffer as much with ill health when a lot of healthcare groups give help in the villages. The healthcare situation in other areas is as good as in Kawkareik Township

### **Business activities**

Regarding the business situation in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, there is nothing special to note, but some rich individuals from Thailand have come inside and done corn plantation every year. Perhaps there are many different business activities in the area of Myawaddy Township. I [KHRG researcher] could not go to the area of Myawaddy Township, so there is less information on the business situation.

### **Armed groups activities**

The situation of armed groups in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, is as follows. On April 4<sup>th</sup> 2016 Tatmadaw soldiers were active in A--- village, which is controlled by the KNU. KNU soldiers did not give Tatmadaw soldiers permission to be active in that area because it is a KNU controlled area. Yet, Myo Kyaw Thu, from Tactical Operations Command #3 (Tatmadaw), did not listen to the KNU and went into a KNU controlled area. When Tatmadaw soldiers went into A--- village, they were very careful because they had already sent their soldiers [Column #583] into B--- village, which is controlled by the KNU. That is called P--- in the Burmese language. Tatmadaw soldiers from Column #583 were worried that the KNU soldiers were going to shoot them, so they grabbed the villagers that they saw and used the villagers as human shields. The Tatmadaw soldiers who used the villagers as human shields are from Column (2) #583. The soldiers from Column (1) #583 had already gone to C--- area for a military operation. The

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<sup>3</sup> The Karen National Union's Education Department. The main goals of the KED are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture. During the civil war in Burma/Myanmar the KED became the main organisation providing educational services in the KNU controlled areas in southeast Burma/Myanmar. The KED also previously oversaw the educational system in the seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, however in 2009 these activities were restructured under the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE). See "[Conflict Erupts over Govt teachers deployed to KNU areas](#)," Karen News, August 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 and the KRCEE website: "[About](#)," accessed July 21<sup>st</sup> 2015.

Tatmadaw soldiers from IB (Infantry Battalion) #62 were active in D--- area. These Tatmadaw activities concerned the villagers a lot.

KNU [KNLA] soldiers truly love the villagers. If not, they would have already started fighting Tatmadaw soldiers during the activities that Tatmadaw were doing [and broken the ceasefire agreement]. Because of their love and KNU leader's guidance, the villagers did not have any problem about peace [because KNU/KNLA did not break the ceasefire to fight with Tatmadaw]. However, the villagers started to fear when they saw Tatmadaw soldiers going back to their army camps after they visited the KNU controlled-area. If the villagers had known earlier that Tatmadaw soldiers were active in A--- village, probably the villagers would have fled to other places [because of fear].

Regarding the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)<sup>4</sup> activities, the DKBA has partners who are rich [business people]. The DKBA gave permission to the rich people to do logging and farming in these areas. The rich people can do a lot of farming and plantation, because they have a lot of money. Their deforestation has destroyed large areas of the forest.

### **NGO support**

A Japanese company came to the village and distributed 3,018 bags of rice to the villagers, which benefited the villagers.

### **Conclusion**

I [KHRG researcher] just know the situation as mentioned above in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. I do not know the situation in other places because I could not travel everywhere. Even though I [KHRG researcher] can go to some places, I asked some people about the situation but they did not want to tell me, so I could not know it all.

**May 14<sup>th</sup> 2016**

### **Situation update from Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District**

1. Education
2. Healthcare
3. Business
4. Army activities

### **Education**

The situation of education in Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, is improving. In some areas transportation is very difficult, because of the hard road and the wild mountain range. Therefore, some children cannot study very well. In some areas the situation is normal [not improving], but in some other areas the students are able to study well. In some schools Karen

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<sup>4</sup> The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA Benevolent) was formed in 2010 as a breakaway group following the transformation of the majority of the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (1994 – 2010) into Border Guard Forces (BGF). This group was originally called the Democratic Karen *Buddhist* Army until it changed its name to the Democratic Karen *Benevolent* Army in April 2012 in order to reflect its secularity. This group is comprised of different divisions, including Kloh Htoo Baw Battalion and DKBA-5, and was led for many years by General Saw Lah Pwe aka Na Khan Mway who died in March 2016 and was replaced by General Saw Mo Shay in April 2016. The DKBA (Benevolent) signed a preliminary ceasefire with the Burma/Myanmar Government on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011 and then signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. The group is based in Son Si Myaing area, Myawaddy/Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, southern Kayin State. This DKBA (Benevolent) (2010 – present) should not be confused with, either the original DKBA (Buddhist) (1994-2010) which was transformed into the BGF in 2010, or with the DKBA (Buddhist) (2016 – present) which was formed in 2016 as a splinter group of the DKBA (Benevolent). Importantly, the DKBA (Benevolent) has signed both the preliminary and nationwide ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government, whereas the DKBA (Buddhist) has not signed either agreement.

teachers have a problem when they are teaching, because they have to cooperate with Burmese teachers. The problem Karen teachers face is that they have to take the Burmese teachers' classes when the Burmese teachers are missing. This is because the Burmese teachers, from the Burma/Myanmar government, have to go back to town once or twice a month to attend training. However, Karen teachers do not get paid as much as Burmese teachers do. They have to depend on the KED (Karen Education Department) for support. The Burma/Myanmar government pays Karen teachers just 130,000 kyat [\$95.51]<sup>5</sup> per year. If it was not because of Karen teachers, students in the village would not be able to go to school at all. This situation happens only in some villages, not everywhere.

### **Healthcare**

Regarding the healthcare situation in Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, healthcare organisations are trying to help the villagers as much as they can, in their own way. The villagers did not face any big health problems [sickness] because of the health organisations. These healthcare organisations are from the Burma/Myanmar government and the KNU government. For example, the FBR and the BPHWT are really trying their best for the villagers in their own places [operation areas].

### **Business**

I [KHRG researcher] saw some differences regarding the situation of the business in Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. There are some people who do business by mining gold. This year the price of gold has decreased, so less people are mining for gold. Some people stopped mining gold. In 2015 the price of gold was very good; so, many companies were involved with gold mining. In 2016 the price of gold was not very good; therefore, many companies did not conduct gold mining. Now business people focus on road construction because the road is not finished yet. In 2016, Mar Myint Hay Company tried to make the road in Noh T'Kaw Township better and wider. If the road is finished the villagers will be able to travel easily and smoothly. However, some of the villagers' properties have been destroyed.

### **Army activities**

There is no special army activity in Noh T'Kaw Township. Tatmadaw soldiers are always careful whenever they travel. Everywhere they go they always bring their guns with them. If they [Tatmadaw] travel on the road by military car, the villagers have to be careful about their cars because they [Tatmadaw soldiers] do not stop driving or reduce their speed on the road. If the people see their cars the people have to drive slowly, because it is dangerous.

Regarding the activity of the Border Guard Force (BGF)<sup>6</sup> soldiers, they went to a village and measured the land. When they measured the land, some of the land belonged to the villagers. The purpose of the land measurement was not known by the villagers, or by myself [KHRG researcher]. They also measured the farms and fields of the villagers. So it is known that they [BGF] are doing land measurement, because they have been told [ordered] by the Burma/Myanmar government. However, the villagers worry that their lands will be taken away.

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<sup>5</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the 16th March 2017 official market rate of 1,361 kyat to US \$1.

<sup>6</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.

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

- "Dooplaya Situation Update: Win Yay Township, June to July 2015," (March 2017)
  - "Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyonedone Township, September 2015 to December 2015," (January 2017)
  - "Dooplaya Incident Report: Rape and killing of a teenage girl in Kawkareik Township," (January 2017)
  - "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)
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## Dooplaya District



## Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)