



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Field Report

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**Abuses since the DKBA and KNLA ceasefires:
Forced labour and arbitrary detention in Dooplaya**

In the six months since DKBA Brigade #5 troops under the command of Brigadier-General Saw Lah Pwe ('Na Kha Mwe') agreed to a ceasefire with government forces, and in the four months since a ceasefire was agreed between KNLA and government troops, villagers in Kawkareik Township have continued to raise concerns regarding ongoing human rights abuses, including the arbitrary detention and violent abuse of civilians, and forced labour demands occurring as recently as February 24th 2012. One of the villagers who provided information contained in this report also raised concerns about ongoing landmine contamination in two areas of Kawkareik Township, despite the placing of warning signs in one area in January 2012 and the incomplete removal of some landmines by bulldozer from another area in March 2012. The same villager noted that the remaining landmines, some of which are in a village school compound and in agricultural areas, continue to present serious physical security risks to local villagers, as well as disrupt livelihood activities and children's education.

Villagers in Kawkareik Township trained by KHRG have raised concerns about ongoing human rights abuses by both government troops and DKBA Brigade #5 since the DKBA ceasefire in early November 2011 and preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNLA and government troops in January 2012.

This report is based on eight pieces of field documentation gathered since November 2011 by a total of four villagers in Kawkareik Township trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses. Three of these documents have already been published in full on the KHRG website.¹ This information



This photo shows Naw C---, 47, who was injured by a landmine before warning signs were posted in January 2012 (photos below). [Photo: KHRG]

¹ For the full reports written by three different villagers, published as they were received with only minor edits for clarity and security, see: "Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Dooplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012; "Incident Report: Arbitrary detention and violent abuse in Dooplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012; and "Incident Report: Dooplaya District, August 2011," KHRG, March 2012.

indicates that during the period between November 2011 and April 2012, DKBA troops under the command of Brigadier-General Saw Lah Pwe² sought to re-consolidate control in the area of their former headquarters at Waw Lay village³ through demands for forced labour, and the levying of arbitrary taxes on commercial logging activities and at checkpoints along vehicle roads. During the same reporting period, government troops stationed in Dooplaya District levied demands for forced labour to transport rations and violently abused a total of five civilians detained in military custody.

Forced labour

On January 19th 2012, DKBA troops ordered the heads of four villages in Kawkareik Township to transport rations and carry water to Tatmadaw military camps. The village heads of Waw Lay, Lay Ghaw, Thay Baw Boh and Htee Ther Leh villages were informed that they had to provide hand tractors to facilitate the transportation of military rations from Aungmingalar village to the Tatmadaw camp in Htee K'Pler village. The order came from DKBA Office Manager Kyaw Pa Pun and ordered villagers to start complying by January 21st. A total of 115 hand tractors were provided by the four villages in order to fulfil this order. The table below shows the names of the four villages and the number of hand tractors that each had to provide to transport Tatmadaw rations.

No.	Village	No. of hand tractors demanded
1	Thay Baw Boh	25
2	Waw Lay	40
3	Htee Ther Leh	25
4	Lay Ghaw	25
Total		115

² DKBA forces in Pa'an and Dooplaya districts that refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions and which, in November 2010, began fighting Tatmadaw forces have been variously referred to as DKBA #907, *Klo Htoo Baw* (Golden Drum), and Brigade #5. Each of these terms refers to different configurations of DKBA units commanded by the Brigadier-General commonly known as Na Kha Mway, whose real name is Saw Lah Pwe. Na Kha Mway left the KNU/KNLA in 1997 and became the commander of DKBA Battalion #907; in 2007 he was promoted to head four DKBA battalions (#901, #906, #907 and a security battalion) as the commander of the *Klo Htoo Baw* [Golden Drum] Tactical Command. In May 2009 this unit was reconfigured as DKBA Brigade #5, with Na Kha Mway commanding Battalions #901, 905, 906, 907 and 909; Brigade #5 was active in the Kya-In Seik Kyi, Kawkareik and Myawaddy areas of Dooplaya and Pa'an districts. In September 2011, it was reported that remaining DKBA forces were to be reconfigured into two tactical commands, *Klo Htoo Wah* and *Klo Htoo Lah*, and that Na Kha Mway would be the senior commander of these forces. For more on the reorganization of DKBA command structure, see "DKBA to accelerate military tactics," *The Irrawaddy*, September 8th 2011.

³ Waw Lay village is also called 'Sone Seen Myaing' in Burmese and is located in what is known as Myawaddy Township on Burma government maps. Waw Lay village was a focal point of armed activities during post-election conflict in Dooplaya District in 2011 and 2012, due to the fact that it was the previous base of Brigadier-General Na Kha Mway. Between November 7th 2010 and November 2011 when DKBA signed a ceasefire agreement, KHRG published a total of 24 short updates that dealt with fighting between armed actors, displacement of civilians and human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest, detention, and sexual violence in Waw Lay village; see "Displacement Monitoring: Regular updates on protection concerns for villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts and adjacent areas in Thailand," October 2011. For more on the origins of the post-election conflict and the conclusion of the ceasefire agreement in November 2011, see: "Protection concerns expressed by civilians amidst conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts," KHRG, November 2010; and "DKBA Brigade 5 Reaches Ceasefire with Naypyidaw," *The Irrawaddy*, November 4th 2011.

According to one of the villagers who provided information contained in this report, Waw Lay village was subjected to additional forced labour demands after rations transport to Htee K'Pler was completed. Waw Lay villagers were ordered by soldiers from Tatmadaw IB #24, which is under the control of LID #22 and based in Thaton, to send two hand tractors every day to carry water uphill to their camp in Aungmingalar and comply with other *ad hoc* demands, including traveling into Aungmingalar to purchase food for soldiers. According to the villager, the IB #24 soldiers did not pay any money for the cost of the food, and villagers had to spend their own money to purchase petrol every day in order to comply with the demands. The villager noted that these demands were occurring on a daily basis as of February 24th 2012.⁴

Demands for forced labour from armed groups are often backed by implicit threats of violence in the case of non-compliance.⁵ In this case, forced labour orders that require villagers to not only provide their own vehicles, but also drive them and pay for all expenses incurred, serve also to deplete villagers' financial resources and prevent the tractors from being used for other agricultural purposes, as well as constitute a serious incursion into time that villagers would otherwise be able to spend in pursuit of their own livelihood activities to support their families.

On February 29th 2012, DKBA soldiers also ordered the residents of two additional villages, Ta Uh Hta and Kwee Ler Hsguh, to build the DKBA camp and fence in Ta Uh Hta village.⁶ In March 2012, a villager trained by KHRG also reported that an arbitrary tax of 4,000 baht and 1,500 planks per month was levied on every resident of Kwee Ler Hsguh village who sets up a log sawmill and that 2,000 baht was paid every month by the KNU Department of Forestry. The DKBA also demands 30,000 baht, supposedly to pay for the building of a hospital in Ta Uh Hta village, from any individuals or companies from outside the village that want to come and set up a sawmill at Meh K'Ya. The villager who submitted this information also raised concerns about increased logging in Kawkareik Township in recent months.

If there is more logging in the future, there will be deforestation. The river will dry up, the trees will decrease, the heat will increase and animals in the forest will decrease. Because of lower water levels and less shade, it is very important to be aware. It is very important for the armed groups to maintain the forest.

Situation update written by a villager in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District
(Received in March 2012)⁷

⁴ Demands for the transportation of military rations by the Tatmadaw have also been reported in Toungoo District between November 2011 and February 2012, with five villages being forced to provide a total of 77 motorcycles for rations transport in February 2012 alone. See: "Ongoing forced labour and movement restrictions in Toungoo District", KHRG, March 2012.

⁵ Further analysis of implicit and explicit threats backing forced labour demands, as well as 207 written forced labour orders, several of which include explicit threats that villagers would be treated as 'enemies' and 'punished' accordingly for non-compliance, are included in the recent KHRG report *Civilian and Military order documents: March 2008 to July 2011*, KHRG, October 2011; see particularly Orders #123, #201 and #202.

⁶ This is an extract from an incident report written by a villager trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses, based on information provided by a local village head. It was received by KHRG at the end of March and has not yet been processed and published in full on the KHRG website.

⁷ This situation update was received by KHRG at the end of March and has not yet been processed and published in full on the KHRG website.

In addition, the villager noted that arbitrary fees are levied by both DKBA and Tatmadaw Border Guard troops for vehicles travelling along the roads in Kawkareik Township. There are four DKBA checkpoints between Palu and Waw Lay villages and a further six checkpoints between Palu and Myawaddy. At every DKBA checkpoint, trucks have to pay 200 baht and passengers in cars have to pay 50 baht each. Border Guard soldiers also demand payment at each of the checkpoints between Palu and Myawaddy; truck drivers have to pay 500 baht and passengers in cars have to pay 500 kyat each.

Arbitrary arrest, detention and violent abuse

Two villagers trained by KHRG raised concerns about an incident that occurred on December 12th 2011, in which 25 male and female H--- villagers were detained by IB #283 troops in a church and each interrogated for an hour.⁸ Ten men were detained overnight on suspicion of KNLA membership, during which one detainee who was in fact a KNLA soldier escaped. The next morning, five of the villagers were released, but four continued to be held in the custody of IB #283.

They were abused, punched and beaten until the skin on their shins was torn. They also did not get enough food. ... The four people whom I have mentioned were tortured very badly and also accused of being Kaw Thoo Lei⁹ soldiers. However, none of these four people has ever joined the army.

Incident report written by a villager in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District
(Published March 2012)¹⁰

According to one of the villagers who provided information about this incident, one of the men in custody, 24-year-old Saw M---, had his shins burnt during interrogation; H--- village leaders who



This photo, taken in December 2011 in Waw Lay village, Kawkareik Township, shows soldiers from Tatmadaw IB #24. According to the villager who took this photograph, as of February 24th 2012, IB #24 soldiers were ordering residents of Waw Lay to use two of their own tractors to carry water to their camp every day. [Photo: KHRG]

⁸ Both villagers were trained by KHRG to document human rights abuses and wrote reports about this incident which have been published in full on the KHRG website; see: "Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Dooplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012; and "Incident Report: Arbitrary detention and violent abuse in Dooplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012.

⁹ Both the researcher conducting the interview and the interviewee used the term 'Kaw Thoo Lei', which refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU). The exact meaning and origin of the term 'Kaw Thoo Lei' is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. True Love and Bartolomew: Rebels on the Burmese border, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

¹⁰ For the full published report written by this villager, see "Incident Report: Arbitrary detention and violent abuse in Dooplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012.

tried to follow up on the case by guaranteeing that these four villagers really are villagers were told by the Operations Commander: "*They confessed that they are revolutionaries. You guys are liars.*" According to the same villager, as of January 29th 2012 when his report was written, the case was under review in Naypyidaw and the four men continued to be held in custody.¹¹

A third villager trained by KHRG documented a separate incident, which occurred on February 15th 2012 in Palu village, Kawkareik Township. Th---, a 38-year-old Buddhist man originally from Myitkyina in Kachin State, who had been working in Thailand for 12 years, decided to return to Burma in February 2012 to avoid arrest by the Thai authorities, as he was working without an identification card or documentation papers. He told a villager trained by KHRG that he arrived in Myawaddy but left the town for fear that he would be arrested because he did not have identification; he was subsequently found by KNLA soldiers at the foot of a nearby mountain and handed over to the Palu village head. While in Palu, he was severely beaten by a Tatmadaw Border Guard soldier based there, named Ah Noh. The villager trained by KHRG who met Th--- provided him with medical assistance and financial support to return to his home in Myitkyina.



The two photos above, taken in February 2012, show Th---, a 38-year-old Buddhist man, originally from Myitkyina in Kachin State who was severely beaten by Tatmadaw Border Guard soldier Ah Noh, based in Palu. Some of the injuries that Ky--- sustained to his face and back are visible in the photos above. [Photo: KHRG]

Landmines

One of the villagers who provided information for this report raised serious concerns about landmines that had not yet been removed following the DKBA ceasefire with government troops in early November 2011; the villager specifically noted ongoing landmine contamination in U Kray Hta village and an agricultural area near Waw Lay village, known locally as Oh Koh Nee.

KHRG has previously reported the new planting of landmines in the U Kray Hta area during armed hostilities between DKBA and government troops after the November 7th 2010 election.¹²

¹¹ For the full published report written by this villager, see: "Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Dooplaya District, December 2011," KHRG, March 2012.

¹² See for example Update No. 54: "Landmines planted near Oo Kreh Htah village", KHRG, February 15th 2011. It should be noted that the difference between the current spelling of 'U Kray Hta', compared with 'Oo Kreh Htah'

While it is not clear which armed actor was responsible for planting the mines, in January 2011, a local source described the DKBA warning villagers that they had planted landmines near U Kray Hta village in order to prevent Tatmadaw troops from accessing the village.¹³ Oh Koh Nee is also the site of a former DKBA *Kloh Htoo Baw* camp and, according to the villager who provided this information, residents of U Kray Hta have asked the DKBA to remove landmines inside U Kray Hta village, but the DKBA soldiers have not yet done so because the landmines were planted by many different soldiers, some of whom have since died, and the exact locations of the mines were not noted or marked at the time they were planted.

The villager did however photograph one case of incomplete mine removal in March 2012, during which three bulldozers owned and operated by Tatmadaw troops were used to clear some landmines planted in U Kray Hta village and along the vehicle road near U Kray Hta. In February 2012, the same villager photographed the marking of mines with warning signs in Burmese, Karen and English languages near Oh Koh Nee. Local sources reported that DKBA *Klo Htoo Baw* Warrant Officer Maw Keh Keh, now Company Second-in-Command, informed the villagers that he had ordered the warning signs to be posted in January 2012.

According to the villager who took these photographs, the marking of the landmines near Oh Koh Nee has not yet resulted in their removal and the clearing of landmines with bulldozers in U Kray Hta was neither systematic nor complete. While some landmines were removed from the village and the vehicle road, according to his estimate at least some landmines still remained in and around U Kray Hta village, including three inside the school compound. As of the end of March 2012, these remaining landmines continued to prevent villagers from entering the compound to re-build the school and constituted an ongoing disruption to children's education.

The incomplete clearance of landmines in this way may serve to heighten physical security risks to villagers, where it creates the false impression that an area has been de-mined and is safe to enter. Underlining the serious risk to residents, the villager provided information about two landmine casualties in areas of Kawkaeik Township in which new landmines were planted during post-election conflict. 47-year-old Naw C--- (pictured above) was injured in March 2011 by a landmine in Oh Koh Nee before the warning signs (pictured below) were posted in January 2012. Her left leg was destroyed and she received treatment in Thailand. In January 2012, the villager also photographed Saw D---, a 36-year-old logger and resident of Lay Ghaw village, who was injured by a landmine on Lay Ghaw Hill when he went to cut wood. Lay Ghaw is one of the four villages that was ordered to provide hand tractors to transport rations to Aungmingalar in January 2012. Saw D---'s landmine injury was sustained while he was pursuing his own livelihoods activities; in other cases documented by KHRG, however, demands for forced labour

used in past KHRG reports, follows from the adoption of a new KHRG transliteration key in January 2012, which was developed in cooperation with fourteen local NGOs and CBOs to ensure the consistent spelling of place names.

¹³ While it is not clear which actor planted these landmines, in January 2011, a local source in the U Kray Hta area described the DKBA warning villagers that they had planted landmines near U Kray Hta village in order to prevent Tatmadaw troops from accessing the village; see Update No. 54: "Landmines planted near Oo Kreh Htah village", KHRG, February 15th 2011. It should be noted that the difference between the current spelling of 'U Kray Hta', compared with 'Oo Kreh Htah' used in past KHRG reports, follows from the adoption of a new KHRG transliteration key in January 2012, which was developed in cooperation with fourteen local NGOs and CBOs to ensure the consistent spelling of place names.

have increased the risk of landmine exposure by requiring villagers to travel and work in areas with which they are unfamiliar and in which they lack knowledge about mined areas.¹⁴



The two photos above, taken in January 2012, show Saw D---, a 36-year-old logger and resident of Lay Ghaw, who was injured by a landmine on Lay Ghaw hill while going to cut wood. His left leg was destroyed. [Photo: KHRG]



These photos were taken in February 2012 about 30 minutes on foot from Oh Koh Nee, an agricultural area of Kawkaik Township, Dooplaya District. The photos show a warning sign for landmines between two corn plantations belonging to Saw B---. According to the villager who took these photographs, the photo at right shows a landmine underneath a banana tree between the same corn plantations. [Photo: KHRG]

¹⁴ For example, a villager was killed by a landmine while travelling on an unfamiliar path on the way back from forced portering for Tatmadaw Border Guard troops in January 2011; see “Papun Interview: Saw H---, March 2011,” KHRG, February 2012



These photos, also taken in February 2012 about 30 minutes on foot from Oh Koh Nee, show two different warning signs about landmines, one of which (left) has fallen down. According to the villager who took these photos, the mines were planted by the DKBA during post-election conflict and the signs were put up in January 2012. The sign at right is located in front of another corn plantation, near to the plantation pictured above. [Photo: KHRG]



The photos above, taken in March 2012, show the Tatmadaw camp beside U Kray Hta village and three bulldozers parked in front of the camp. These three bulldozers were used to clear landmines planted in U Kray Hta village and on the vehicle road. According to the villager who took these photos, the clearing of the landmines was not systematic or complete, and at least some landmines still remain in and around the village, including in the U Kray Hta school compound. The vehicle road from which some mines were cleared by the bulldozers is visible in the foreground in both photos. [Photo: KHRG]

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

- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw L---, June 2011," (May 2012)
- "Incident Report: Arrest and torture in Dooplaya District, December 2011," (March 2012)

- "Incident Report: Arbitrary detention and violent abuse in Dooplaya District, December 2011," (March 2012)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: August to October 2011," (March 2012)
- "Dooplaya Interview: Saw Ca---, September 2011," (February 2012)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: August 2011 to September 2011," (December 2011)
- "Dooplaya Situation Update: August 2011," (October 2011)

