



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers along the Asian Highway displaces villagers in Dooplaya District, July 2015

This News Bulletin describes the displacement of villagers in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District as a result of fighting that took place during July 2015 between Tatmadaw and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) soldiers over control of a recently completed section of the Asian Highway. This information was provided by monk U T---, in whose monastery many of the displaced villagers sought refuge. This News Bulletin also lists several specific incidents of fighting and the implications of these incidents on the surrounding villages.

- *As a result of the fighting, more than 1,000 villagers from more than five different villages in Kawkareik Township temporarily fled their homes and sought shelter at monasteries in Kawkareik Town. The schools in these villages were forced to close temporarily out of fears over the safety of the students, who were consequently unable to attend their lessons.*
 - *The displaced villagers struggled to maintain their farms and plantations, as well as to look after their livestock during the fighting. The villagers slept at the monasteries throughout the night, as they were afraid that they would be ordered to porter for the Tatmadaw soldiers if they had stayed in their villages.*
 - *On July 6th 2015, two villagers who were travelling on a path near to where Tatmadaw soldiers had taken up position for fighting were shot dead in Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District, see more at [“Recent fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers leads to killing and displacement of villagers in Hpa-an District, July 2015,”](#) KHRG, August 2015.*
 - *On July 7th 2015, a primary school building in Kawkareik Town was hit and damaged by a grenade reported to have been fired by two DKBA soldiers. However, no students or teachers were harmed as the incident took place at 7 am before the school had opened for the day.¹*
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On July 21st 2015, a community member trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions met with monk U T---, from G--- monastery in Kawkareik Town, Dooplaya District. Monk U T--- reported to him that during the fighting between the Burma/Myanmar Tatmadaw's Border Guard Force (BGF)² and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)³ that started on

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast 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.

² 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

July 2nd 2015 and continued sporadically throughout the month, more than 1,000 villagers were temporarily displaced, many of whom were sheltering in his monastery and R--- monastery in Kawkareik Town.

The fighting broke out between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers on the Asian Highway⁴ between Myawaddy and Kawkareik Town on July 2nd 2015. The fighting erupted after attempts were made by Tatmadaw soldiers to secure this section of the Asian Highway ahead of the newly built road's opening ceremony. Tensions between the Tatmadaw and DKBA escalated into conflict when Tatmadaw soldiers ordered the DKBA to remove their base from the highway.⁵ The villagers from surrounding areas who were affected by the fighting had to leave their homes; they were unable to tend to their paddy fields and some of their properties have been destroyed as a result of the fighting.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on July 22nd 2015, between Myawaddy and Kawkareik Town, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District and show a section of the Asian Highway. An opening ceremony for the highway was planned by the Thai and Burma/Myanmar governments, scheduled to take place on July 20th 2015, but the plans were cancelled due to the fighting that took place between the DKBA and Tatmadaw soldiers. The fighting erupted after Tatmadaw soldiers tried to take control of the highway ahead of the planned ceremony. [Photos: KHRG]

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.

³ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see [“Inside the DKBA,”](#) KHRG, 1996. The DKBA now refers to a splinter group from those DKBA forces reformed as Tatmadaw Border Guard Forces, also remaining independent of the KNLA. As of April 2012, the DKBA changed its name from “Buddhist” to “Benevolent” to reflect its secularity.

⁴ The Asian Highway Network is a United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific-supported project that aims to link 32 countries in Asia across 141,000 kilometres of roadway. In Burma/Myanmar the project has involved land confiscation and forced labour. For more information about the Asian Highway Network, see [“The Asia Highway: Planned Eindu to Kawkareik Town road construction threatens villagers’ livelihoods,”](#) KHRG, March 2015; [“With only our voices, what can we do?: Land confiscation and local response in southeast Myanmar,”](#) KHRG, June 2015; [“Tollgates upon tollgates: En route with extortion along the Asian Highway,”](#) KHRG, October 2009; and [“Development by Decree: The politics of poverty and control in Karen State,”](#) KHRG, April 2007. In addition, fighting continues erupting between the Tatmadaw and the DKBA along the highway, with the latest clash erupting in early July 2015, resulting in the highway between Myawaddy and Kawkareik shutting down for several days, [“DKBA, Tatmadaw fight over illegal highway tolls,”](#) *Myanmar Times*, July 3rd 2015.

⁵ For more information see: [“Gov’t troops and DKBA Clash Over New Asia Highway,”](#) *Karen News*, July 2015 and [“Recent fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers leads to killing and displacement of villagers in Hpa-an District, July 2015,”](#) KHRG, August 2015.

According to monk U T--- the displaced villagers staying at G--- and R--- monasteries were from five different villages located in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. These villages are:

1. A--- village;
2. B--- village. Fighting took place again in B--- village at 8 am on July 21st 2015;
3. C--- village;
4. D--- village and,
5. E--- village.

Monk U T--- reported that during the period of July 2nd to July 6th 2015, the villagers who were temporarily displaced and sheltering in his monastery attempted to go back to their villages to look after their farms, plantations, and livestock during the daytime, returning in the evening to sleep at the monastery. All the boys and adult male villagers in particular were staying at the monastery, as they were afraid that they would be ordered to porter for the Tatmadaw soldiers if they were found in the villages.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on July 21st 2015 in Kawkareik Town, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. The first photo shows G--- monastery, where the displaced villagers were staying, having fled the fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers. The second photo shows sacks of rice which were donated to the displaced villagers staying in G--- monastery by civilians from Myawaddy. [Photos: KHRG]

Finally, monk U T--- explained that as a result of the fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers, children from these five villages were unable to go to school because the schools had to close, so they attended classes that were held at nearby villagers' houses. The teachers told the students that the schools were closed because of the fighting. The teachers were too concerned for the welfare of the students to let them attend school, because they were afraid that there would be more fighting in the areas surrounding the schools. The schools reopened later in July 2015 when the fighting ceased. In addition to the schools being forced to close, monk U T--- reported that there is a clinic established by the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) in K--- village that was also prevented from providing services to the villagers during the fighting, as the medics from that clinic were also afraid to stay and work there.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on July 20th 2015, in J--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. The photos shows the J--- village primary school and students after the school reopened when fighting between the DKBA and Tatmadaw soldiers ceased. The school was closed for two days, on July 15th and July 16th 2015, because of the fighting. According to J--- villagers, DKBA soldiers slept in the school one night during the fighting and on another night Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #230 led by Battalion Commander Aung Naing Thu slept in this school. [Photos: KHRG]

In addition to the information provided by monk U T---, KHRG also received the following information on some of the consequences of the fighting that took place during July 2015 along the Asian Highway between the Tatmadaw and DKBA:

- On July 4th 2015, a lady over 50 years old from L--- village, Kawkareik Township was hit by grenade shrapnel in her backside and was injured as a result of the fighting.
- On July 6th 2015, fighting occurred between Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁶ #545 and DKBA soldiers in S--- area, between M--- and N--- villages, Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District. The fighting lasted from 7:00 pm until 7:30 pm and caused the deaths of two villagers.⁷
- Construction of Aw Hpa Bridge in Aw Hpa village stopped for two days due to the fighting. The company that is building the bridge is scheduled to finish the project in September 2015, but they had to temporarily cease working, because the fighting was dangerously close to the bridge construction site.
- On July 7th 2015, a grenade fired from an M79 grenade launcher hit a primary school building located within the grounds of the high school in Chaung Thaug section, Kawkareik Town. Part of the primary school was destroyed, but as the incident took place at 7 am in the morning the school was not yet open and consequently no students were harmed. According to the KHRG community member, two DKBA soldiers from the *Kloh Htoo Baw* battalion, under Battalion Commander Bee Kye,⁸ went to the area near

⁶ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) comprised of 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Primarily for offensive operations but sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁷ For more information of this incident, see "[Recent fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers leads to killing and displacement of villagers in Hpa-an District, July 2015](#)," KHRG, August 2015.

⁸ *Kloh Htoo Lah* is under the command of Bo (Officer) Bee and is one of the three current DKBA Battalions, the others being *Kloh Htoo Wah* and *Kloh Htoo Baw*, that were formed in September 2011 and refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions. *Kloh Htoo Baw* (Golden Drum) referred to the DKBA before 2011, but was then reconfigured to have the two additional battalions as well. DKBA forces in Hpa-an and Dooplaya districts that

Kawkareik Town by motorbike and fired two grenades from an M79 grenade launcher into Chaung Taung section. One grenade hit the primary school building roof, damaging the roof and the window. Another grenade hit the ground and exploded at the back of the school grounds. According to villagers who witnessed the two DKBA soldiers firing the M79 grenade launcher, the two soldiers headed back towards V--- village, Kawkareik Township after the incident.



These photos were taken by a KHRG community member on July 11th 2015, in Kawkareik Town, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. The first photo shows a section of roof that was damaged when a grenade fired by DKBA soldiers from an M79 grenade launcher hit the primary school building in Chaung Taung section. The second photo shows where another grenade fired from the M79 grenade launcher hit the ground and exploded within the school grounds. No students were injured by either grenade. [Photos: KHRG]

- On July 17th 2015 at 5:30 am, there was fighting between DKBA soldiers led by *Bo San Aung*,⁹ whose company is known as *na ma kya* [deaf ear]¹⁰ and is under the *Kloh Htoo Baw* battalion, and Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #231, who combined with LIB #230, led by Major Thet Paing Zaw and Deputy Battalion Commander Major Soe Min. The fighting took place in and around Y--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District. Some villagers fled to their friends' houses in Kawkareik Town, while some villagers fled to H--- village in Kawkareik Township. Some villagers also escaped to G--- monastery in Kawkareik Town, whilst villagers from C--- village fled to R--- monastery.
- On July 21st 2015, villagers from Z--- village, Kawkareik Township, reported to KHRG that there was a violent clash between DKBA and Tatmadaw soldiers on July 20th 2015,

refused to transform into Tatmadaw Border Guard battalions began fighting Tatmadaw forces in November 2010 and have been variously referred to as DKBA #907, *Kloh Htoo Baw*, Golden Drum, and Brigade #5.

⁹ Tactical Commander General Saw San Aung, commonly known as *Bo* (Officer) San Aung, from DKBA Battalion #907, was relieved of his position in the beginning of 2015 after fighting broke out between his battalion and Tatmadaw troops. Acting independently, he formed his own armed group with approximately 70-80 soldiers. In April 2015, Bo San Aung was accepted back into the DKBA after discussions with the DKBA's top leaders. Following the most recent bout of fighting between the Tatmadaw and DKBA along the Asian Highway, in which Bo San Aung and his company "deaf ear" were involved, Bo San Aung has once again been dismissed from the DKBA as a result of his conduct. For recent information on Bo San Aung, see "[Two separate clashes between armed actors in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, February 2015](#)," KHRG, May 2015; and "[DKBA sacks Brigadier General Saw Kyaw Thet and Colonel Saw San Aung](#)," Mizzima, July 2015.

¹⁰ *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) unit 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. For more information see "[Dooplaya Interview: Naw A---, March 2015](#)," KHRG, April 2015 and "[Two separate clashes between armed actors in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, February 2015](#)," KHRG, May 2015.

on Kaw Tha Wa Mountain, close to Kyaikdon Town, Kawkareik Township. The villagers from Z--- village reported that they felt extremely frightened and vulnerable to the negative impacts that might result from the fighting between the armed actors.

- On July 22nd 2015, members of the 969 Movement¹¹ donated food that was worth 14 million kyat (US \$11,996.57)¹² to families of around 350 internally displaced persons (IDPs), who were staying at P--- monastery, R--- monastery and W--- monastery.

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

- Dooplaya Interview: Saw A---, April 2014 (August 2015)
- Dooplaya Incident Report: Killing case in Win Yay Township, October 2014 (August 2015)
- Dooplaya Photo Set: Road Construction in Kyainseikgyi and Win Yay townships, November 2014 to January (August 2015)
- Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Kyonedoe townships, January to February 2015 (August 2015)
- “Rape and violent threats in Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District, April 2014 to May 2015,” (July 2015)

¹¹ The 969 Movement is a nationalist, anti-jihadist movement in Burma/Myanmar that opposes any expression of Islam in the country. The 969 Movement was founded by activist Buddhist Monk Wirathu. For more information on the 969 Movement see: “[Myanmar Buddhist community bans anti-Muslim organisation](#),” Reuters, September 2015. For more information on Monk Wirathu see: “[Ashin Wirathu: Myanmar and its vitriolic monk](#),” BBC News, January 2015.

¹² All conversions for the kyat in this report are based on the July 24th 2015 official market rate of 1,167 kyat to the US \$1.

Dooplaya District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)