



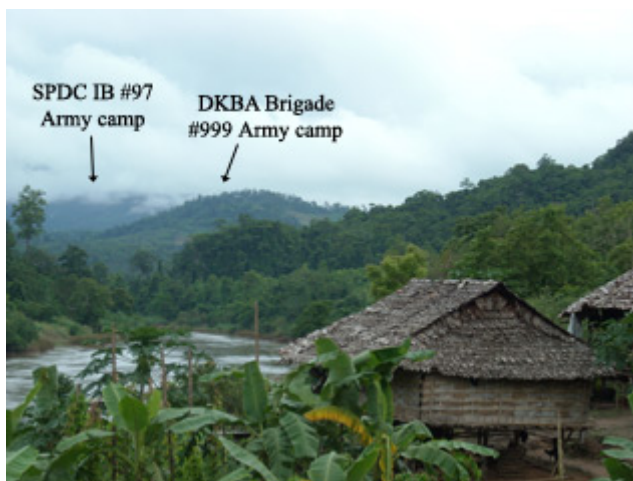
Report from the field

August 8th 2008 / KHRG #2008-F11

Forced labour and extortion in Pa'an District

At a time when civilians in Pa'an District are already struggling with rising food prices and unemployment, an increasing number of villagers are being subjected to forced labour and extortion by local SPDC and DKBA forces. This is especially true in eastern Karen State, near the Thoo Mweh (Moei) river, where DKBA commanders are forcing villagers to ignore their own livelihoods in order to help these leaders cultivate their personal rubber plantations. The result of these abuses is a worsening food crisis and constant economic migration to other areas both in Burma and in neighbouring Thailand, places where villagers hope to find more sustainable employment opportunities. This report describes the situation in the Dta Greh and T'Nay Hsah townships of Pa'an District from January to June 2008.

Since the beginning of 2008, troops belonging to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have been actively patrolling villages in eastern Karen State, especially those along the Dawna mountain range as it passes through Dta Greh township, Pa'an District. Patrolling soldiers have committed myriad abuses against Karen civilians over this period, subjecting them consistently to forced labour and extortion. These abuses have only exacerbated hardships in an already weak economy where Pa'an residents struggle daily to find sustainable methods of survival. The majority of residents are farmers and the remaining population usually works as day labourers on these farms, finding seasonal employment at planting and harvest times. In an effort to supplement meagre incomes, some of the worst-off villagers contract out their children for a year's time to look after other villagers' cattle in exchange for 20 baskets (640 kg / 1,408 lb) to 30 baskets (960 kg / 2,112 lb) of rice. Life is especially difficult for villagers who try to trade or do any kind of business in the region's plain areas, where one basket (32 kg / 70.4 lb) of rice now costs over 20,000 kyat (US \$17); a price far out of proportion with a family's daily income of about 5,000 kyat (US \$4).



This photograph, taken on July 1st 2008, shows the bases of DKBA Brigade #999 on Gklay Poh Hta hill and SPDC Army IB #97 on Bpoo Loo Dtoo hill. Local villagers fear that the SPDC and DKBA will begin attacks on the KNU/KNLA from these positions. [Photo: KHRG]

"We have over 300 households [in the village] and our population is over 1,000 people. Villagers are cultivating hill and flat fields for their livelihoods. Some get enough food and some don't. This is because of the [SPDC-imposed] movement restrictions and the enemy's [the SPDC's] oppression."

-Naw W--- (female, 27), L--- village, Dta Greh township (July 2008)

Forced labour

Throughout the first half of 2008, SPDC and DKBA troops have patrolled Pa'an District, worsening circumstances for local residents. Patrols rotate throughout a given area for six-month periods and set up camps in local villages for two or three days. During this time, soldiers often force villagers to porter for the army or pay arbitrary taxes. On February 1st 2008, SPDC soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #548 entered Dta Greh township. Upon arriving in the area, soldiers ordered local civilians to porter their military supplies. Village heads were instructed to select porters and rotate shifts of porters as needed. Soldiers warned the village heads not to send news of the army's activity to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Villagers have been threatened with punishment or torture if caught relaying any information to the KNLA.

Since June 1st 2008, SPDC soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #97 have patrolled the eastern side of the Dawna mountain range. During the dry season (about December to May), soldiers ordered villagers to hack down high, dense overgrowth along the sides of a road running through the region in order to locate landmines and eliminate hiding places for KNLA forces (as well as spotting displaced villagers evading the SPDC). When the rainy season made the road impassable in June of this year, the troops began marching through the forest on foot and ordered village heads to conscript villagers into portering SPDC supplies. Listed below are the details of two LID #44 sub-units operating in Dta Greh township and the locations of their camp or base.

Unit	Sub-unit	Officer in charge	Troop strength (estimated)	Base or camp location
LID #44	LIB #548	Myit Soe	145 soldiers	T'Nay Hsah Lay Koh
	IB #97	Nay Lin	50 soldiers	Bpoo Loo Htoo

Villagers in Dta Greh township are regularly obligated to provide both money and labour – including the collection of tree posts, bamboo poles, and thatch – to support SPDC and DKBA military construction projects. Villagers are seldom compensated for setting aside their own livelihood activities in order to gather supplies for the SPDC and DKBA. And when soldiers do pay labourers for such work, the money is soon reclaimed through SPDC and DKBA extortion and arbitrary taxation.

"I don't know why they come and demand money – they just come and make demands. The money sometimes goes towards building a school or a road or towards celebrating a festival or building a pagoda. There are many different kinds of forced donations. If we can't give donations, we will not be allowed to live in the village. So we have to borrow money from other people in order to meet these demands."

- Naw ---- (female, 29), G---village, Dta Greh township (July 2008)

Residents of B'n--- and Bp--- villages – both in T'Nay Hsah Township – have been forced by SPDC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #358 to act as messengers and porters. While one villager is sent off to gather provisions or porter, another is made to enter surrounding villages to collect information on KNLA forces in the area. Messengers are threatened with a fine of 2,000 kyat (US \$1.70) if they return without any information to report.

Another example of forced labour is from June 3rd and 4th 2008, when DKBA Brigade #999 Brigade Commander Pah Kwee demanded villagers work on his rubber plantation close to Day Nyah mountain. Below is a list of the dates and villages required to work without pay on the commander's plantation:

Dates	Villages	Numbers of villagers conscripted
June 3 rd 2008	Pa--- village	29
	Tw--- village	30

June 4 th 2008	G--- village	16
	To--- village	N/A
	Te--- village	N/A
	Tw--- village	30
	To---, Te--- and G--- villages	12

Extortion

Along with forced labour, extortion is another common abuse in Pa'an. A commander from DKBA Battalion #999 owns a rubber plantation near H--- village in the area around M--- bridge in T'Nay Hsah township. On February 2nd 2008, the commander decreed that any cattle owners whose stock ate his rubber plants would be fined 10,000 baht (US \$297) per plant. A cow belonging to Saw Bp--- ate a plant and was fined 10,000 baht. In another incident from February 2nd 2008, in Ht--- village, a bull belonging to Saw P--- ate two rubber plants. He was not only told he had to pay the fine, but also informed that he would have to give the camp commander his bull. Saw P--- pled with the officer, explaining that that the only way he could pay the fine was to keep the bull. Though he wasn't forced to hand over the bull that day, Saw P--- was still forced to eventually sell it and give the money he received from the sale – 20,000 baht (US \$595) – to the same camp officer.

On June 27th 2008, Deputy Company Commander, Pah Toe Heh of DKBA Brigade #999, 2nd Company, demanded money from villages in Dta Greh township. He used this money to buy herbicide in order to kill grass in his rubber plantations. The names of the villages forced to give money and the amounts they gave are included below.

#	Village	Amount (kyat)
1	Pa--- village	100,000
2	W--- village	100,000
3	R--- village	100,000
4	H--- village	100,000
5	D--- village	60,000
6	P--- village	60,000
7	Ta--- village	60,000
8	To--- village	20,000
9	O--- village	20,000
10	G--- village	20,000
Total		640,000 (US \$ 547)

"I didn't have enough rice, or even chilli, salt or MSG powder to eat at every meal. The money we earn, we have to give [to the SPDC]. They often come and demand chickens and pigs from our villagers."

- Saw --- (male, 32), L--- village, Dta Greh township (July 2008)

Conclusion

Due to the exploitative policies of SPDC and DKBA forces operating in Pa'an District, villagers have been made to balance the demands by both groups for labour and money with their own efforts to grow crops and support their families. Rather than struggle trying to meet these demands, many villagers have chosen instead to migrate to other areas of the country or cross over into Thailand in order to find viable livelihood opportunities. The money they earn from this work is sent back to family members who have remained in Burma. Although some of this money does indeed help support its intended recipients, providing crucial food and supplies, the SPDC confiscates much of the remittances through arbitrary taxes and other forms of extortion.

"When I lived in our village, there were a lot of demands and taxes placed upon us. I have two young children and I have to look out for my family's livelihood. I didn't have the money to pay taxes or pay soldiers and if I went somewhere to find work, we had to pay money along the way [to clear the checkpoints]. I couldn't handle this kind of oppression and so came to live in L--- village."

- Saw --- (male, 32), L--- village, Dta Greh township (July 2008)

For more information on the situation in Pa'an District see the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *Update on the KNU/KNLA-PC: Statements by a deserter and a 'retiree' (July 2008)*
- *Child soldiers recruited to support expansion of the KNU-KNLA Peace Council (May 2007)*
- *Forced labour, extortion and festivities: The SPDC and DKBA burden on villagers in Pa'an District (December 2006)*
- *Pa'an District: Land confiscation, forced labour and extortion undermining villagers' livelihoods (February 2006)*

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2008* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2007*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.



Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles