



News Bulletin

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Update on SPDC/DKBA attacks at Ler Per Her and new refugees in Thailand

Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks against KNLA positions near to Ler Per Her IDP camp continue, as do joint SPDC/DKBA attacks against the camp of KNLA Battalion #202, located about 30 km north of Ler Per Her. Refugees have fled to Thailand from both areas, while other villagers who have yet to flee remain amidst the fighting facing their own humanitarian and security threats.

As of June 13th 2009, attacks by joint State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) forces against a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) camp located near to Ler Per Her camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Pa'an District of Karen State, continue. The attacks began on Friday, June 5th, with mortar fire followed by a ground assault. By the end of June 5th the refugees from Ler Per Her IDP camp and surrounding villages who had fled to Thailand reached over 3,000.¹ In the ground attacks, DKBA soldiers were operating at the front while SPDC soldiers followed behind and those conducting the shelling remained at the back. Meanwhile, on Sunday June 7th, joint SPDC/DKBA forces who had advanced towards the base of KNLA Battalion #202, which lies about 30 km north of Ler Per Her began shelling the KNLA camp there as well.



Displaced villagers from Ler Per Her IDP camp wait to leave the area by boat as they flee to Thailand on June 5th 2009 to avoid joint SPDC/DKBA attacks. [Photo: KHRG]

Since June 7th 2009, SPDC and DKBA forces operating around Ler Per Her have ceased ground attacks and have instead focused on shelling the KNLA camp from a distance. The SPDC has reportedly been using 81 mm and 66 mm mortars, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and 75 mm and 82 mm recoilless guns. Two or three shells have reportedly struck Ler Per Her IDP camp and another 9 or 10 shells have fallen just short of the IDP camp. Some mortar shells and RPGs which the joint SPDC/DKBA forces have fired at the KNLA camp have overshot their mark and landed in Thailand.

¹ For more information see *Over 3,000 villagers flee to Thailand amidst ongoing SPDC/DKBA attacks*, KHRG, June 7th 2009.

On Monday, June 8th, three RPGs which the joint SPDC/DKBA forces fired at the KNLA camp landed in Noh Boh (Nong Bua) village of Tha Song Yang District of Tak Province in Thailand. The Karen Information Committee has released a photo of one of the RPGs that reportedly landed in Noh Boh village on June 8th. Although KHRG has not yet been able to confirm the manufactured origin of these RPGs, the photo released by KIC may show a Chinese-made Type-69 RPG. DKBA forces previously fired this type of RPG at Htee Ber Kee village in Dta Greh Township of Pa'an District, in October 2008.²



The Karen Information Committee (KIC) released this photo which they describe as an RPG fired by joint SPDC/DKBA forces on June 8th which landed in the village of Noh Boh (Nong Bua) in Thailand. [Photo: KIC]

On June 10th, 4 more projectiles (either mortar shells or RPGs) landed in nearby Mae Salik village, also in Tha Song Yang District of Thailand. One of the June 10th mortar shells landed near to Mae Salik Luang School (a local Thai government school) but did not explode. Another two exploded in the bean fields of a local Mae Salik villager, although no one was injured.

Since June 10th 2009, Mae Salik Luang School in Mae Salik village has been closed due to concerns about ongoing shelling by SPDC and DKBA soldiers across the river. The villagers of Mae Salik, who are predominantly Thai-Karen, are also concerned that the DKBA will cross the border and enter the village. According to one Mae Salik villager,

"Right now they [DKBA] are staying very close to our village. A few days ago, the DKBA took a boat that belongs to Saw Th---, a Mae Salik villager, but in order to use it, they need petrol. So we were warned by our leader [the village head] that if there is any stranger, we have to be careful not to sell petrol to him. Now we can't travel freely, as we have to be mindful of the situation."

- Naw P--- (female, 50), Mae Salik village, Thailand (June 2009)

There are now well over 3,000 refugees from Ler Per Her IDP camp and the surrounding villages who have fled to Thailand to avoid fighting and forced labour as porters carrying SPDC and DKBA munitions and supplies amidst the violence. According to the Karen CBO Emergency Relief Committee³, as of June 11th, 3,446 villagers from 14 villages (including Ler Per Her IDP camp) had been forced to flee from the Ler Per Her area to Oo Thoo Hta, Noh Boh, Mae Salik and Th'Lay Hta villages in Tha Song Yang District of Thailand.⁴ The Free Burma Rangers (FBR) provides a figure of 3,521 as the number of refugees from the Ler Per Her area, which FBR says are now residing at Oo Thoo Hta, Noh Boh, Mae Salik and Mae Salik Noi in Tha Song Yang District.⁵ However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which limits its numbers to those its staff can personally verify, has only confirmed a population of about 2,000 new refugees from the Ler Per Her area now residing at five sites in Thailand. Local Thai authorities have expressed concern for the security of some of the new refugees who currently remain at a site along the Moei River, and are reportedly considering relocating them to a more secure location.

² *Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts*, KHRG, February 2009.

³ The Karen CBO Emergency Relief Committee is a coalition of Karen community-based organisations which formed in June 2009 to provide aid to the new refugees from the Ler Per Her area following the recent attacks.

⁴ This information was received by email from the Karen CBO Emergency Relief Committee on June 11th 2009.

⁵ "Burma Army and DKBA mortars land in Thailand as attacks on Karen people continue in Ler Per Her refugee camp area," Free Burma Rangers, June 12th 2009.

Despite the large numbers of refugees from Ler Per Her IDP camp and the surrounding area, the residents of some villages near to Ler Per Her have yet to flee their homes and thus remain amidst the fighting with little security. Some of these villagers may have been conscripted as porters to carry supplies for local SPDC and DKBA forces amidst the current fighting. Before the attacks began on June 5th, some of these villagers had been using mobile phones (connecting through Thai mobile networks) to contact fellow villagers who had already fled to Thailand. Since the start of the attacks on June 5th, these communications have ended, although the reason for this is not clear.

According to refugees who have recently arrived in Thailand from the Ler Per Her area, on June 11th 2009, a DKBA officer from Battalion #4 of Brigade #999 sent a villager from the Ler Per Her area as a messenger to contact the new refugees. The messenger informed those who had fled from Mae La Ah Kee, Mae Lah Ah Htah and Wah Mee Gkalah villages that they were to send back 3,000 Thai Baht (approx. US \$88) per village to pay the DKBA to cover the cost of hiring porters to carry supplies amidst the ongoing attacks. The refugees told KHRG that they were not going to send back money to the DKBA now that they have already fled to Thailand.



Newly displaced refugees from the Ler Per Her area in Pa'an District of Karen State receive humanitarian aid on June 7th 2009 in Noh Boh village in Tha Song Yang District of Tak Province, Thailand. [Photo: KHRG]

So far, many of the newly arrived refugees who have arrived in Thailand from the Ler Per Her area have received some form of humanitarian assistance, either from international NGOs, the UNHCR, Karen community-based organisations, the Thai Healthcare Department or a combination of these. At present, the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) has taken the lead role in coordinating international humanitarian assistance to the refugees, while Karen CBOs have formed a Karen CBO Emergency Relief Committee to coordinate assistance amongst local Karen groups. Nevertheless, there remains a need for further humanitarian assistance. In particular, the UNHCR has noted that "*Among the most urgently needed items are clothes, especially baby clothes, as well as soap, and bamboo pallets to keep from having to sleep in the mud amid heavy rains.*"⁶ Furthermore, given the ongoing insecurity on the Burma side of the border, these refugees remain in need of protection assistance and any future repatriation to Burma must of course be voluntary.

While the recent flow of refugees to Thailand from the Ler Per Her area is larger than any single occasion in recent years, it is not an isolated event. Rather, the joint SPDC/DKBA attacks at Ler Per Her, the forced labour of villagers to carry military supplies amidst the fighting and the forced recruitment of new DKBA soldiers that preceded it, fit into a wider trend that can be traced back to the latter half of 2008.

KHRG began reporting on the increased forced recruitment of soldiers by the DKBA and on joint SPDC/DKBA operations in Pa'an and Dooplaya Districts as early as September 2008.⁷

⁶ "Thailand: UN working to assist 2,000 recently-arrived Myanmar Refugees," UNHCR, June 12th 2009.

⁷ See *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District*, KHRG, September 2008 and *Human minesweeping and Forced relocation as SPDC and DKBA step up joint operations in Pa'an District*, KHRG, October 2008.

As one local resident in Pa'an District noted at the time, "*Their [the DKBA's] aim is [to send the] new soldiers to Dooplaya District. I heard [this] from a village head. The DKBA has signed an agreement with the SPDC that this year they will attack Dooplaya District until they win.*" Subsequently, in early 2009, KHRG reported increased attacks by DKBA and joint SPDC/DKBA forces on KNLA positions in Pa'an and Dooplaya Districts and the impact these attacks were having on local villagers.⁸ This fighting brought insecurity and new refugees into Umphang and Pobpra Districts of Tak Province in Thailand. More recently, KHRG reported on joint SPDC/DKBA attacks against the camp of KNLA Battalion #201 at Ghaw Lay Kee in Dooplaya District that ended with the fall of the camp on April 28th, after about 200 villagers had fled for safety to Pobpra District in Thailand.⁹

Since May 2009, KHRG researchers operating in Pa'an District have been reporting that DKBA officials in Pa'an District have begun referring to the DKBA as the "Border Guard Force", using the English acronym "BGF". In a meeting in May 2009 between SPDC and DKBA authorities, the SPDC reportedly ordered the DKBA to recruit more soldiers to serve in the Border Guard Force and to work towards eliminating the fixed positions of KNLA forces. This meeting was followed by yet another round of DKBA forced recruitment amongst local villagers living in Pa'an District. When 119 villagers fled to Ler Per Her IDP camp to evade this recruitment in late May 2009, they brought the camp's total population to over 1,200 people.¹⁰ However, as has been reported recently by KHRG and others, joint SPDC/DKBA forces began attacks against the camp of KNLA Battalions #101, 21 and 22 located near to Ler Per Her on June 5th. In the recent fighting around Ler Per Her over 3,000 villagers, including those who had earlier fled forced recruitment, evacuated to Tha Song Yang District in Thailand.

As noted in this and previous news bulletins, joint forces from DKBA Brigade #555 and SPDC Light Infantry Division #22 have also been shelling the camp of KNLA Battalion #202, which lies about 30 km north of Ler Per Her, opposite Thailand's Mae Salik village. Refugees have already fled this area as well, and there remains a possibility that others will flee as the security situation changes.

A KHRG slide show with 32 photos documenting the recent refugee flight from the Ler Per Her area to Thailand is available online at:
http://www.khrq.org/slide_show/khrq_2009_pic.html.

For more information on the impact of DKBA/SPDC attacks on villagers in Pa'an District, see the following previously published KHRG reports:

- *Over 3,000 villagers flee to Thailand amidst ongoing SPDC/DKBA attacks* (June 2009)
- *Over 700 villagers flee to Thailand amidst fears of SPDC/DKBA attacks on a KNLA camp and an IDP camp in Pa'an District* (June 2009)
- *Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts* (May 2009)
- *Extortion and restrictions under the DKBA in Pa'an District* (March 2009)
- *Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts* (February 2009)

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

⁸ See *DKBA soldiers burn down huts, detain villagers and loot property in Thailand*, KHRG, January 2009 and *Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts*, KHRG, February 2009.

⁹ *Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts*, KHRG, May 2009.

¹⁰ *Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts*, KHRG, May 2009.



Karen Districts



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