

## Report

# Power through gun barrels: Abuses related to the DKBA offensive in Dooplaya District

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### I. Summary

Since early October 2008, the current military junta and its ally, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have been mounting a major military offensive to crush the Karen National Union (KNU) and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). During 1997 and 1998, most of Dooplaya district in central Karen State has been occupied and captured by the joint military offensives of the Burmese Army and DKBA troops. Since then, the military regime has changed its name from the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). However, the oppression has not stopped and instead the occupation troops have continued to extend their control over the Karen villages which have been supporting the KNLA/KNU troops.

After the end of the rainy season last year, the DKBA boosted its military offensive and operations in Pa-an, Kawkareik and northeast Kyainnseiky Township with the support of SPDC military columns under the command of Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) No. 545 and No 204. According to the records of HURFOM, armed clashes between the KNLA/KNU and DKBA (combined with the Burmese Army) occurred on at least 46 occasions between January 1<sup>st</sup> and February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in KNLA Brigade No. 6 and KNLA General Headquarters battalions areas which are situated in the Kawkareik and Pa-an Districts. Among them, at least 5 armed clashes involved only DKBA troops. Because of these ongoing armed clashes between the KNLA/KNU, DKBA and SPDC battalions, many ethnic Karen villagers have faced insecurity in their own villages and some have fled to safer areas. All armed forces involved in this ongoing armed conflict have been increasingly using landmines to restrict each other's movements. To effectively launch military offensives and protect themselves, the DKBA forces have been using some villagers as human minesweepers. In this monthly report, HURFOM documents abuses in Kawkareik, Kyainnseiky and Win Ye Townships in Dooplaya District from January to March 2009.

Demographically, the majority of the population living in these parts of central and western Dooplaya District are ethnic Karen with other groups of minorities including ethnic Mon, Lao Shan, Burman and Indian people who have been living in this area since the British colonial era. In this report, the field reporters have focused only on DKBA human rights abuses and violations against the local villagers who are mainly surviving as local farmers under the occupation of DKBA and SPDC Battalions. The human rights issues covered in this report include forced labor, extortion, looting, land and property confiscation, arrest, torture and movement restriction in the areas of Kawkareik, Kyainnseiky and Win Yae Townships of Dooplaya District, Karen State. Though this report documents human rights abuses committed by DKBA in over 25 villages, many other abuses occurred but were not documented by HURFOM.

### II. Background of Dooplaya District

Dooplaya District is one of the biggest districts in Karen State and covers near half of the southern part of the State. The district measures approximately 160km from north to south. Most of the villagers in the areas are ethnic Karen and other ethnic minorities include Mon, Lao Shan, Indian and Burman. Most of the villagers who live in western and central Dooplaya District make a living by cultivating betel nuts, rubber, limes, sugarcane and cardamom seeds while villagers in the eastern part of the district cultivate mainly tobacco and corn.

Since the beginning of 1997, SLORC/SPDC battalions have deployed greater numbers of troops and conducted major military operations in an attempt to control most of these areas. In late 1997 the regime gained control of most of the central area. Following this the SPDC utilized the DKBA, which split from the KNU/KNLA in 1994. However, until today, the KNLA/KNU was still powerful as a guerrilla force against the Karen ceasefire forces and their allies, the Burmese Army. As a consequence of armed clashes between Karen guerrillas and SPDC forces in central Dooplaya District, thousands of inhabitants were forced to relocate. Some villagers have tried to return to their home villages but as SPDC forces have consolidated their hold on the area many villages have faced heavy demands for army supplies, food and materials, forced labor, portering services and extortion.

### III. Abuses by DKBA Kloh Htoo Baw or 'Shwe Hpar Si' Tactical Command

Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command was established in Myawaddy Township when SPDC forces captured most of the Dooplaya areas in 1997. The current commander is Lieutenant Colonel Saw Law Bwe, locally known as Hna Kham Hmwe, who was originally a member of the KNLA/KNU and left in 1997 for reasons unknown. He then became a pro-

junta commander of DKBA Battalion No. 907. In late 2007 he was promoted to Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Commander by General Kyaw Than, a senior leader of the DKBA based in Myaing Gyi Ngu special region, established by Abbot U Thu Za Na.

There are four main battalions directly managed by Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command: Battalions No. 901, No. 906, No. 907 and a security Battalion. Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command controls a large area including Myawaddy and Kawkareik Townships in Karen State. Since October 2008, Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command has been increasing its troop numbers to launch a major offensive against the KNLA in the areas around Kawkareik and Kyainseiky Township. According to local sources, more than 400 DKBA troops have joined with Burmese Army troops, particularly those from LIB No. 545 and No. 204 who aim to crush the KNLA/KNU in these areas. As one of the main aims of DKBA is to gain control over the locale, they have increased troops and set up additional camps in the controlled areas and committed a number of human rights abuses against their own people, the Karen.



Saw Law Bwe (aka) Hna Kham Hmwe  
Head of Klah Htoo Baw Tactical Command

### A. Current offensives against KNLA/KNU

Beginning in the first week of February, 2009, four military columns from DKBA Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command, in collaboration with military columns No. 1 and 2 from Burmese Army LIB No. 545 based near Kawkareik consolidated their offensive to crush KNLA/KNU Battalion No.18 and Brigade No. 6 in the eastern and western parts of the Dawna mountain range. According to a KNU township level official based in Brigade No. 6 near Three Pagodas Pass, the current joint offensive seeks to eradicate KNLA/KNU troops led by Major Hla Minn of Brigade No.6.

“Territorially, we have an advantage over the DKBA and Burmese troops as we know the area very well. We can move freely and launch guerrilla attacks or counter attacks against them as much as we can. We are quite confident in challenging these offensives and we strongly believe that our troops will not suffer many casualties although innocent civilians may well be hurt,” the official told our reporter.

In order to effectively control the area of flat lands on the western side of the Dawna mountain range, all of the DKBA battalions under Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command have increased the number of new camps in villages such as Kyake, Kaw Sai, Kwin Ka Lay, Pai Ka Lar Don, Lan Phan and A-Soon since the offensives began in February 2009.



Soldiers from DKBA Battalion No. 999 battalion, led by General Chit Thu

“We received information from the frontline that to directly manage the offensives, Colonel Saw Law Bwe, the Commander of Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command himself, moved to Taung Oak village, on the eastern side of the Dawna mountain range at the beginning of February. I think they’re under a lot of pressure by the SPDC right now,” the official added.

Following these offensives, many inhabitants were ordered to collect large amounts of bamboo, wooden poles, large leaves (for roofs) and supply food to the newly appointed DKBA camps.

### B. Demanding building materials, food and money for new camps construction

In the second week of February, 2009, DKBA battalions under the command of Kloh Htoo Baw and led by Colonel Saw Law Bwe repeatedly subjected local villagers to abuses such as demanding supplies of bamboo and wooden poles and looting their livestock. According to villagers who fled to the Thai-Burma border, these building materials are being used to construct new DKBA camps or repair existing camps. In Pha Luu (known as Minn Lat Pan village in Burmese), in the eastern part of Kawkareik Township, orders came directly from DKBA battalion commander, Major Kyaw Kyaw, to cut down and deliver bamboo and wooden poles to repair their barracks based in Wah Lay village tracts. Each household from villages including Pha Luu, Kwee Lat Tae, Taung Oak, Tay Baw Poe and Wah Lay were forced to cut down and deliver a quota of bamboo and wooden poles to Wah Lay DKBA battalion.

“They also forced us to transport the required materials by oxcarts or by foot if we didn’t have a cart,” said Saw Hae Lay (40) a resident of Kwee Lat Tae village who was forced to collect 20 wooden poles and 30 lengths of bamboo for the Wah



Saw Kyaw Kyaw  
Commander, DKBA  
Special Security  
Command

Lay DKBA camps repairs. Similarly, in the second week of January, DKBA troops based in the same area demanded rice and bamboo from villagers.

In one instance, on January 16<sup>th</sup>, DKBA Security Battalion, under the command of Kloh Htoo Baw and led by Majors Kyaw Kyaw and Ba Nyain, demanded four thousand bamboo poles and one hundred and twenty baskets of rice from Kaw Saing, Kyake and Pai Ka Lar Don villages, based in Kawkareik Township. The villagers were given a deadline of 18<sup>th</sup> January to hand over the rice and bamboo to the DKBA camp. One of the villagers from Pai Ka Lar Don quoted Major Kyaw Kyaw as saying; "If you do not bring the rice and bamboo before 18<sup>th</sup> January all of you will face problems."

DKBA Battalion No. 901, led by Deputy Commander Saw Mu Shae and based at Kyainnseiki Township, have continually forced local villagers to collect wooden poles and bamboo to use in a new DKBA camp construction in A-Soon village, around 22 miles from Kawkareik town. The materials are being used to build a new camp, which has been

planned since last year according to local sources.

According to a resident of A-Soon village, "Commander Saw Mu Shae and his 30 soldiers arrived here on February 10<sup>th</sup> and demanded that all of us prepare wooden poles and bamboo slats. All the bamboo and wood had to meet the required quality. The length of all wooden poles had to be five hand-spans in length (local measurement) and each group of five families were required to deliver 100 wooden poles and 100 bamboo slats by February 20<sup>th</sup>. Right now, everyone is struggling to meet the quotas required by Commander Saw Mu Shae. He also forced us to carry the bamboo and wooden poles to the location where they planned to construct their new camp outside the village."

In another incident on February 20<sup>th</sup>, while this exploitation of the villagers was going on, the DKBA troops also extorted money from saw mill owners, saying it was for annual work permits. According to a villager close to one of the victims, "there are four villagers who own sawmills and Commander Saw Mu Shae demanded that they pay 100,000 Kyat each for annual permits."

This is ten times the legitimate fee and, according to another source from the village, one of the sawmill owners was forced to pay 120,000 kyat.

In a similar incident, DKBA Battalion No. 906, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nyan Minn and his deputy, Major Steel and based in Khalae Tha Gon Daing village tract, ordered local villagers to deliver bamboo slats and wooden poles to their camps near the village for use as fencing and to repair the outer boundary of their base.

"The required amount is 50 bamboo lengths and 5 wooden poles per household. Bo Nyan Minn said all villagers needed to provide the bamboo and wooden poles for reconstructing the outer fences of the base." a villager reported.



Saw Mu Shae  
Deputy Commander,  
DKBA No. 901

### C. Destruction of properties

During January 2009, when the joint forces of Burmese LIB No. 545 and DKBA Battalion No. 907 increased their efforts to crush KNLA/KNU Battalion 18 in southeast Kawkareik Township, they destroyed and seized property belonging to the local villagers in the area. Generally, both Burmese and DKBA forces have been taking numerous measures to reduce support, intelligence, recruitment and the provision of shelter between local villagers and KNLA/KNU troops.

The forces are continually warning the villagers not to supply any kind of food or communication materials such as telephones, batteries, torches, bulbs or radio sets to the KNLA/KNU troops. On any occasion when such tools or materials are found in villages close to rebel activity they are seized or destroyed without compensation.

For instance, on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009, DKBA Battalion No. 907, led by Major Poo Kyaw and Captain Zaw Thein, entered Maekanae and Apyin Kwin Kalay villages, in Kawkareik Township and seized villagers' phones (known locally as cordless phones and registered by a Thai company) and small AA size batteries from local shops and also took 20 villagers to use as porters.

"They just entered my neighbors' shops and asked for some AA size batteries to use for their two way radios. When the commander found dozens of AA batteries, he ordered them all to be seized from those shops," explained Mae Ka Nae resident, U Luu (55).

The DKBA forces are very concerned about the supply of materials that could be used for communication such as mobile or cordless phones, radio sets, batteries and two-way radios, according to other local sources from the village.



U Lu continued, "The DKBA know that many of the KNLA/KNU troops from Battalion No. 18 or No. 17 come frequently to buy batteries for their radio communication sets. That's why the DKBA are intent on seizing communications tools and accessories." In another incident, DKBA Battalion No. 907 forcibly seized cordless phones belonging to residents of Apyin Kwin Kalay village, eastern Kawkaeik Township.

"I think it was around the third week of January 2009. A military column from DKBA Battalion No. 907, led by Major Poo Kyaw which was temporarily based at Maekanae village, came and captured two owners of cordless phones and accused them of sending information to KNLA/KNU troops near the village. The DKBA seized two phones, antennas, a phone receiver, batteries and extorted 300,000 kyat from them," said a source close to one the victims.

#### **D. Confiscating livestock and agriculture products**

While conducting military offensives against the KNLA/KNU the DKBA have extorted money and confiscated livestock from the local villagers. HURFOM field researchers reported that during the second week of February 2009, a military column from the DKBA Security battalion under Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command, led by Major Kyaw Kyaw and his deputy, Major Ba Nyein, were responsible for these types of abuse. A local villager who had ten chickens forcibly seized by a group of DKBA privates, under the orders of their commander, claimed that his chickens were worth at least 50,000 kyat in total and he had been keeping them to produce eggs and obtain some income to support his family.

The villager said, "A DKBA Sergeant led four privates onto my farm. Then they broke the fence and violently seized ten chickens. My son and I begged them not to take them. But we could not stop them and a soldier pointed his pistol at me instead. I worked hard and bought these hens for our future benefit but now all our efforts have been in vain."

On the same day, DKBA troops led by second commander, Major Ba Nyein entered Mae-Ka-Toh village and seized property owned by the local villagers. Saw Htoo (45), who lives on a farm near Mae-Ka-Toh village, witnessed DKBA troops raid a house owned by a man who was distilling alcohol from rice. The soldiers took more than a dozen liters of liquor without payment. "The distiller... said the DKBA troops forcibly took 15 liters of rice alcohol from him. These troops were led by a known captain under the command of Major Ba Nyein," said Saw Htoo.

Reports from local sources indicated that villages under the control of the DKBA were also regularly being extorted for money, agricultural products, food and livestock by soldiers of the Burmese Army LIB No. 545 as well as the allied DKBA troops.

#### **E. Using villagers as minesweepers, guides and porters**

Since the joint offensives of the DKBA and the Burmese army against the KNLA/KNU began in the central parts of Dooplaya District, Karen State in October 2008, the local inhabitants have been abused by the both sets of troops. According to field reporters' documents, at least a dozen villagers from Taung Oak, Kwee Lat Tae, Tay Baw Poe and Pha Luu villages have been forced to act as guides, porters and human minesweepers in the jungle areas of the eastern Dawna mountain range where the joint troops have targeted their attacks on the KNLA/KNU.

At the beginning of January 2009, an approximately 50 strong combined force of troops from the DKBA and SPDC Battalion No. 545 began offensives that aimed to occupy KNLA/KNU controlled areas. During their offensives, the combined troops required local villagers from the above-mentioned villages to carry ammunition, food supplies and heavy loads. Furthermore, the reporter found that the joint troops had planned to use these porters for other purposes. While the DKBA and SPDC troops marched into the KNLA/KNU controlled areas, they ordered the porters to act as human minesweepers. The victims were made to walk in front of the military columns in order to trigger any landmines and clear the way for the military.

"Villagers were ordered to walk in front of the DKBA soldiers whenever they prepared to attack the KNLA/KNU bases," explained one of the residents who subsequently fled. "We had to escape from our village."

The increased DKBA presence and subsequent abuses have caused at least four households to flee the area. "In our village, many people wanted to escape because of the DKBA and Burmese soldiers," said a resident of Taung Oak. "Villagers have to provide food and to work as forced laborers every day."

#### **F. Attacks on religious freedom**

The DKBA was formed after some Buddhist leaders felt the KNU to be dominated by Christians. Since then DKBA assaults on Christian villagers have taken place in an attempt to destroy the KNU's support base. Although the DKBA reportedly includes some Christians and there are some Buddhists in the KNU, the conflict between the two Karen

groups has included actions characterized as religious intolerance. In many Karen villages in Dooplaya district, the DKBA have forced majority Christian villages to clear land to construct Buddhist pagodas. In some cases, the Buddhist pagodas or monasteries have been built directly in front of churches. Apart from being forced to work as laborers, the Christians were also forced to provide money, which was designated as “donations.”

For example, in the third week of February 2009, according to a HURFOM reporter from Pha Luu village, the Commander of DKBA Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command, Lieutenant Colonel Saw Law Pwe forced villagers near Maw Hto Talay village, Kawkareik to provide labor and donations to build a Buddhist pagoda. This new pagoda is situated in the Kyauk Guu Buddhist monastery in Pha Luu village, on the middle of the motor road between Pha Luu and Myawaddy, Karen State. According to a reliable source, locals from Apyin Kwin Kalay, Ahtae Kwin Kalay and Maekanae villages were forced to send 20 laborers per days until the construction of the pagoda was complete.

“I think the villagers who live in that areas were upset about Commander Saw Law Bwe’s orders because most of these villagers are Christians and only a few of them are Buddhist,” commented a 29 year old villager.

Before the DKBA initiated the construction of the pagoda in February, they demanded that the three villages contribute so-called “donations” for the building. “We were ordered to pay for the pagoda in late January. My family has had to pay 2,000 kyat as a ‘donation’ already,” the villager complained.

Similarly, beginning on February 10<sup>th</sup>, a local source said that the same Brigade Commander had forced local Christian villagers to build a Buddhist pagoda near the primarily Christian Maw Hto Talay village. Commander Saw Law Bwe’s order also required residents living in Thaug Oak and Tay Baw Poe villages to work as laborers on the project.

“We are Christian, but the commander forced us to build the pagoda in our village,” said a woman (58) from the area. “We have to work on building the pagoda every day until it is finished.”

## G. Movement Restriction



Saw Ba Luu  
Commander, DKBA  
No. 901

Since February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, DKBA Battalion No.901, commanded by Major Saw Ba Luu and Deputy Commander Saw Mu Shae have increased military operations against the KNLA/KNU near Kyake Ywa, Kwin Ka Lay, Kaw Saing, Lam Pham, A Sin, Tone Set Thone Zu, Khu Tone and Pai Kalar Don villages located in the eastern part of the Hong Tha Raw river, Kawkareik Township, Karen State. According to a reporter who met with several villagers from those areas Commander Saw Moe Shae and his troops prevented the local villagers from leaving the village to work on their farms.

“They said they don’t want the people in these areas to support the KNLA/KNU so they banned people from leaving the villages from February 10<sup>th</sup>. They also declared that any villagers who were found outside would be fined and beaten. So no-one was able to go and work outside the villages to harvest their crops or take care of their farms,” an anonymous villager from Kyake village explained to the reporter.

Similarly, in the third week of February 2009, villagers from Khu Tone, Pai Ka Lar Don and Lar Phan villages received orders from Major Saw Ba Luu that no villagers would be allowed to travel outside of their villages without the permission of DKBA Battalion No. 901.

“We didn’t dare travel outside of the village boundary. The soldiers said they didn’t want to see any of us outside of the village during their military operation against the rebel troops. A captain from the DKBA threatened to beat or fine anyone found outside,” a young villager, who wished to remain anonymous, told the reporter. “Even our headman was afraid of them.”

In an example of the likely repercussions, a group of locals from Pai Kalar Don village were captured by a military column from DKBA Battalion No. 901 outside their village boundary in the last week of February 2009 and subjected to brutal beatings. A woman from the village witnessed the incident.



A DKBA Battalion No. 999 military column in Tha Mile Gone village, Kawkareik Township

“They were arrested on the way to their farmland. The leader of the DKBA column, I don’t know his name, tied them up with ropes and kicked them in their faces and heads with his military boots. Some of his troops beat them with the butts of their guns,” she said.

#### **IV. Abuses by DKBA Special Battalion No. 999**



A DKBA military column leader from Battalion No. 999

During the recent offensives conducted by the DKBA and SPDC joint operations in the central and eastern areas of Dooplaya District, Karen State, DKBA Special Battalion No. 999 have been repeatedly subjecting local villages under its control to human rights abuses similar to those committed by other DKBA battalions. Along with SPDC battalions, DKBA Special Battalion No. 999, led by General Saw Chit Thu (aka Mg Chit Thu) and operating under the command of DKBA Brigade No. 999, commanded by General Hpa Ngwee, transferred from its original base in Shwe Koh Ko, Myawaddy Township to Tha Mai Gone village tract in the southeast part of Kawkareik, Dooplaya District in early November 2008. When the DKBA and SPDC increased their combined

operations in eastern and central Dooplaya District, Special Battalion No. 999 joined with DKBA Battalion No. 907 based near Thin Kan Nyi Naung, close to Myawaddy Township, eastern Karen State and committed human rights abuses against innocent civilians in the area.

#### **A. Systematic looting of food and livestock**

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009, troops from military column No. 3 of DKBA Special Battalion No. 999, led by Major Mya Htike and deputy Than Lwin, looted livestock from the local Karen inhabitants of villages under Kawkareik Township, Karen State. A HURFOM reporter learnt that members of DKBA pointed their weapons at villagers as they seized their livestock and agricultural products.

According to Kloh Say, 35, from Khu Done village, Kawkareik Township, the troops came into the village and seized 25 baskets of husked rice from locals.

“We had to collect the demanded amount between a few of us. I had to give one and half baskets of my own rice. The troops entered the village at 9 o’clock in the morning and seized rice belonging to twelve households including my family.”

In an earlier incident on February 9<sup>th</sup>, a young man from Kaw Saing village witnessed DKBA troops seizing livestock from locals. “The same troops from column No. 3 forcibly seized two head of cattle, eight chickens, a pig and eleven baskets of husked rice. All the livestock belonged to my village and the pig was owned by my friend, Saw Nay Blwe. The incident upset him since the DKBA troops confiscated his pig with no compensation. He said his pig was worth at least 70,000 kyat at the current market price.”

In another case, a 42-year-old female resident of Kaw Saing village, who wishes to remain anonymous, reported that Captain Maung Tin Nyunt and 20 troops from DKBA Battalion No.907 entered her hut near the village and demanded that her husband provide half a basket of rice and a liter of bean cooking oil without payment.

“It was on the evening of February 14<sup>th</sup>. While three of my kids and I finished our dinner, my husband came in with DKBA troops and told me to give them the rice and oil. After they left my husband explained to me that Captain Maung Tin Nyunt wanted the food for their dinner. My husband was frightened of receiving a penalty or punishment so he couldn’t refuse.”

#### **B. Destruction, arrest and extortion**

DKBA joint troops from Battalions No. 999 and 907, led by Commander Kyaw That and comprised of 50 men, entered Mae Pa Leh village, close to O Taw Khee village tract, Kawkareik Township and burnt down three houses belonging to locals. They then arrested one of the owners, Saw Sar Poe Poe, 30, and accused him on of being connected to the KNLA/KNU.





A group of villagers who fled from Taung Oak village following abuses committed by DKBA Kaloh Htoo Baw tactical command led by Commander Kyaw Kyaw in eastern Doooplaya District, Karen State

of KNLA/KNU troops who were launching military operation in the area. They also asked them to indicate the houses of KNU/KNLA supporters in the village. No one would do it and they were beaten by bamboo sticks repeatedly.”

A source who spoke with a victim’s family claimed, “actually, my brother is an ordinary villager and farmer. He was an innocent victim among the 20 detainees and had wounds to his head and chin after the incident. We were ordered to pay 100,000 kyat for his release but we only had to pay 50,000 in the end. Others also had to pay to free their husbands and sons.”

Another local villager agreed, saying “All the men were released after their family members guaranteed payment of between 50,000 and 100,000 kyat each to DKBA Commander Bo Par Htaw and his troops. In reality, I think they may have known that these villagers were not rebel supporters. They just wanted to make money from them.”

In an earlier incident in O Taw Khee village, on February 4<sup>th</sup>, troops from the same battalion burnt down four houses and some agricultural materials belonging to residents.

“They burnt the houses and also some property which belonged to the owners while they were all working on their farms but I don’t know why they did it,” said a 40-year-old local eyewitness.

The battalion has also frequently extorted money from local villagers. On February 3<sup>rd</sup> troops demanded 500,000 kyat each from elephant owners as a yearly work permit or ‘elephant tax’. In O Taw Khee village tract, there are nine households who own elephants and each was forced to pay by Commander Phar Htaw and his troops.

“Actually the elephant taxes have been collected by DKBA in these areas since after the Burmese army occupation in 1997 – 1998. However, the previous amounts were not as much as this year. Last year it was 250,000 kyat for yearly work permits. I don’t know why they increased the amount this year. People might find it very difficult to meet these demands,” said San Oo, 36, from Mae Pa Leh village in the O Taw Khee village tract. HURFOM has records of the names and ages of 5 of the elephant owners taxed by the DKBA, though this information is being withheld for security reasons.

Local farmers have also reported that DKBA troops from Battalion No.999 set up temporary checkpoints on the roads between Maepaleh, Seh Ka Weh and Ka Toh Hta villages. Local farmers on their way to work on their land faced demands of between 2,000 and 5,000 kyat for daily work permits. This measure affected most inhabitants of these three villages as the majority make their livings as betel nut and rubber producers.

“These types of payments are being demanded all the time, not only from [DKBA] Battalion No. 999 but also from Battalions No. 901, No.906 and No.907. Also, betel nut and rubber prices have dropped so we can’t earn as much as in previous years,” an anonymous farmer from Seh Ka Weh village explained.

Checkpoints have also been set up between other villages with locals facing similar demands for money. During an incident that occurred at the end of February a DKBA soldier assaulted a farmer who could not meet the fee at a checkpoint on the road between Lan Phan and A-Soon villages, Kawkareik Township. U Maung Chin, 40, a local farmer from Lam Pham village was asked to pay 5,000 kyat by a DKBA soldier from Battalion No. 999 but told the soldier he had no money and begged to be allowed to pay another time. However, the checkpoint soldier refused the

According to a villager who witnessed the incident, Commander Kyaw That demanded 600,000 kyat from the man’s parents and family for his return. “They begged the commander to reduce the amount and he later lowered it to 500,000 kyat.” The following day, the family paid up and Saw Sar Poe Poe was freed.

During the second week of February 2009, a group of troops from DKBA Battalion No.999, led by Commander Bo Phar Htaw, which had been operating near O Taw Khee village, Kawkareik Township, arrested 20 local men and accused them of links with the KNLA/KNU. The soldiers tied the arrested men up with ropes and beat them brutally during the interrogation to extract information of the KNLA/KNU’s activities. HURFOM has records of names and ages of 8 of the 20 victims, though this information is being withheld for security reasons.

A local eyewitness who saw the incident said, “the DKBA Commander asked the detainees to show the locations



plea and struck the farmer's head with the butt of his rifle. A few minutes later, another farmer who knew U Maung Chin arrived at the checkpoint and brought him back to Lan Phan village on a local man's bull cart.

"He had been knocked unconscious and his head was bloody when I picked them up," said an eyewitness.

According to a township level KNU officer from Kawkareik Township, the main reason DKBA troops set up checkpoints on the roads and restrict movement is to extort money from cattle traders.

"Villagers who trade cattle must pay between 50,000 and 80,000 kyat depending on the number of cattle they trade and a checkpoint could earn between 400,000 and 500,000 kyat a month through this," he said.



### C. Appointment of spies and informants

During January to February 2009, HURFOM reporters also documented cases of DKBA troops arresting local villagers and accusing them of links with the KNLA/KNU near Seh Ka Weh village tract, Kawkareik Township. According to an anonymous source with knowledge of DKBA activities, it is believed that both DKBA and SPDC troops have appointed spies and informants in the area causing local inhabitants to feel insecure and threatened.



DKBA soldiers marching into a Karen village in Kawkareik Township

“Both DKBA and SPDC troops want to keep tight security in these KNLA/KNU influenced areas. They don’t want KNLA/

KNU soldiers receiving any support from the villagers. So they instruct the informants or spies to watch people closely. When they get information about suspected villagers believed to be KNLA/KNU supporters, the troops arrest them, tie them up and torture them during interrogation about the rebel’s activities. In some cases the DKBA find that the arrested villagers are not linked with any armed groups so they just demand money for their release.

For example, in mid January 2009, a group of troops from DKBA Battalion No. 999 arrested two villagers from Seh Ka Weh village. Major Mya Khaine and his soldiers were outside the village preparing to enter when they saw the two villagers returning home from their plantations. The soldiers accused them of being KNU soldiers and the villagers were detained. However, after the village headman confirmed their identity as local residents the major demanded seventy-five baskets of rice and 70,000 kyat before he would release them. The headman had to request contributions from the whole village and once this was handed over the two detained men were released.

### V. Conclusion

The recent DKBA human rights abuses associated with the military campaign against the KNLA/KNU has caused suffering to thousands of local inhabitants in the townships of Dooplaya District. While both of the DKBA units involved, Kloh Htoo Baw Tactical Command and Special Battalion No.999, are focused on destroying the remaining forces of KNLA/KNU and assuming control of their areas, part of this campaign includes targeting the local populace who they perceive as supporters of the KNLA/KNU.

Alongside their allies, the Burmese military, the DKBA have used numerous tactics to win the war including cutting supplies to the KNLA/KNU through movement restrictions, seizing property, livestock and agricultural products, forced labour and the extortion of millions of Kyat. These factors have led some villagers to flee their homes and seek safety in areas such as the Thai-Burma border where a few of them have tried to settle in refugee camps.

A 35 year old Karen villager, who fled his home in the eastern part of Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya district., stated, “I will not go back to my home village if the DKBA or Burmese Army are still there. I don’t want to live in the place where power comes through gun barrels.”

*Note: Some names have been replaced by pseudonyms for security reasons*

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