

## **August 2011 Update on Situation in Karen State and Baik-Daweh District**

(By Karen National Union)

On August 18, 2011, the new military-backed USDP, or Thein Sein government, released a statement expressing its willingness to resume peace talks with the ethnic armed organizations. It called on the ethnic armed groups willing to resolve armed conflicts and build peace to talk, individually, first with the state level authorities concerned.

Most political analysts on Burma and the ethnic leaders see it as another ploy to divide the ethnic unity and to gain time for preparing a major offensive in the coming dry season. It is clear that the regime is still following the devious divide-and-rule policy and has no sincere intention to resolve the political problems and build viable peace and stability in the country.

Recently, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), the new ethnic alliance, composed of former cease-fire organizations and non-cessate-fire ones, sent a letter to the Thein Sein government and explained clearly the political aspirations and the kind of talks the UNFC would like to enter into for equality, justice, unity, peace and prosperity of the entire country. Instead of responding to the UNFC letter, President Thein Sein said that each ethnic armed group should deal with its respective local state government individually first, as if the question of peace in the country were a local issue.

We, the KNU, believe that to hold peace talks with a state government would be just a waste of time as all the state governments are subordinate to the Burma army commands in their own areas and have no power, according to the 2008 SPDC Constitution. Inside Karen State and the KNU area of Baik-Daweh District, nothing has changed, since the new government has been set up.

The Burma Army continues its military operations in the KNU areas and clashes between the KNLA and the Burma Army forces are a daily occurrence. There are still more than 100 Burma army camps in the KNU areas. Troops from these camps continue to perpetrate human rights violations and crimes against humanity on the civilian populations. As before, the Burma army troops continue to shell with mortars on the Karen populations in IDP locations.

We receive regularly reports on widespread human rights violations, which indicate that the Burma army is still committing all forms of human rights violations. The new regime is implementing the same policy of ethnic cleansing, using crimes against humanity and war crimes, just like the military regime it has succeeded. The types of human rights violations committed generally by the Burma army and its proxy the Border Guard Force (BGF) are:

1. Forced labored;
2. Intimidation with physical violence;
3. Extortion of cash and material possessions/properties;
4. Looting and stealing;
5. Restricting the villagers' movement and activities for livelihood;

6. Arbitrary arrest, torture and detention;
7. Extra-judicial executions;
8. Burning and destroying properties;
9. Using civilians, including pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers, as human shields and landmine sweepers;

As a result, the villagers in conflict zones have to live a life of constant fear, insecurity and misery.

In June, the Burma army Light Infantry Battalion 373 (LIB-373), led by Aung Min Soe, forced 32 villagers to act as human shields, including 19 women, one of whom was a breast-feeding mother, with her 10-month old baby, two of whom were in late pregnancy and 6 of whom were underage, who had to accompany their mothers. The same thing happened in another location with the army Infantry Battalion 81 (IB-81), where the operation commander forced 36 Karen civilians to go with them as human shields. Among this group, there were 23 women. It took place in Kawkareik (Dooplaya) District .

Forcing the villagers to give building materials, such as bamboo poles and roofing leaves, and restricting villagers' movement to their rice fields, farms and orchards took place in Papun, Toungoo, Thaton, Pa-an and Kawkareik (Dooplaya) Districts. When the fighting or clashes broke out, they accuse the villagers of supporting the Karen soldiers and arrest them for torture and intimidation.

In Toungoo District on July 7, LIB-374, led by company commander, Soe San Moe, forced 2 villagers Saw Pah, aged 48, and Saw Wah, aged 33, to go with the troops. When a clash took place near Serbalawkee village, the troops shot the 2 villagers to death.

On July 27, they sent for Klawmeedoe village head, the village committee secretary, 2 zone leaders and one teacher, altogether 5 villagers, and took them to Paletwa and detained them for 4 days. They accused the 5 villagers of supporting the KNU.

The Burma Army troops often arrest the villagers, accuse them of supporting the Karen army and torture and threaten them with death.

The Burma Army troops do not allow the villagers to go and spend the night in their farms and take rice with them an amount more than a measure of 2 condensed milk tins. If they are found in the farms, travelling on the way, or in the jungle, where they are not allowed to go, they are shot to death on the spot or executed without trial.

On August 3, 2011, IB-37 troops based in Shazeebo village, Tadabin Township of Toungoo District, arrested 3 Yeshan villagers, Saw Kayramoe, aged 35 (M), Naw Dahdu Thi aged 55 (F) and Naw Moo Paw Tha age 42 (F) without any reason. They took them to their army camp and detained them for 6 days, on the accusation of supporting the KNU. On the 9<sup>th</sup> they arrested the village head of Hplaysalo, without any reason, and beat him up and tortured him severely.

On August 19, LIB-346 troops, led by Min Tet, arrested Pah Klaw Po, aged 39 (M), a villager from Lerhkaw village of Kawkareik Township. The next day, on August 20, they executed him, without even questioning, on the bank of Kyaw Ta.

On August 27, LIB-540 troops under Military Operation Command 9 (MOC-9) and having a camp on Mawchi motor road, while on patrol shot 2 villagers to death on sight, who were working in their orchards. The two were Saw ----, aged 32 (M) and Saw Gaw, aged 23 (M) from Hsawwadoe village, Tandabin Township, Towngoo District.

The restriction on movement creates a wretched situation for the villagers, because they could not go out to work on their farms for their livelihood. The lives of the civilians in these areas are under constant threat, particularly the women and children. They do not have the right to refuse or negotiate. They have no choice, even though they know that it is a high risk living. Some of them secretly leave their villages and go to the IDP areas.

### **The Border Area Situation**

#### **DKBA**

The DKBA troops led by Saw Ler Bweh, who have rejected transformation to BGF, have reached understanding and worked along with the KNLA in Kawkaeik District to fight against the Burma army aggressors in their respective areas. The KNU welcomes them as they made the right political decision not to become the BGF. The KNU has 2 main points to settle, with regard to the DKBA groups.

The KNU believes that it is the best way for the DKBA to rejoin the KNU and be totally under the command of the KNLA as a unit of one Karen army. The existence of two Karen armies causes confusion to the Karen population.

The other issue the KNU has to be conscious of is the previous involvement of the DKBA in the drug business, on encouragement and support of the Burmese military regime. The KNU has to make sure that the DKBA is no longer involved in drug business before unification, since the KNU has consistently upheld an anti-drug policy and regarded involvement in the business as a crime against humanity.

About 500 active DKBA combatants and 123 families have rejoined the KNU. It has become a heavy responsibility of the KNU to take care of the families.

#### **Border Guard Force**

At the end of July 2011, the BGF Battalion 1012, under the command of Major Saw Bee, split from the BGF and attacked the Burma Army camps in Kama Maung Township, Papun District. Shells landed in the nearby villages, destroying houses and a bridge. Men from the areas fled to escape forcible recruiting of porters by the Burma army. The fighting between the splinter group and the Burma army/BGF caused shells to land also in the nearby villages in Hlaingbwe area, Pa-an District. Fourteen schools had to be closed down.

There are less clashes in the KNU/KNLA areas due to rain, which is heavier in this year than the others, but still small clashes keep occurring. The split in the BGF has caused its soldiers to come back to the KNU in larger number. More than 200 BGF members have re-joined the KNU/KNLA. Some of them chose to become ordinary civilians. Those who had families brought them when they deserted the BGF, because their families would be arrested

and mistreated if they were left behind. As more and more BGF members return to the DKBA and the KNLA, the Burma Army's control on the border area has weakened.

In Pa-an Township and Thaton District, 550 BGF and their family members have defected to KNU. In the KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade area of Pa-an District, the number of the BGF members who have defected is 157.

Currently, the Burma army commander of Eastern Military Command has tasked Chit Thu (a former DKBA general) to lead a military offensive against the KNLA 5, 6 and 7 brigade areas. According to one of the leaders of the defectors, Kyaw Than (a former DKBA general) one of the advisors to the BGF, has been assigned to Naypyidaw to lead the operation for the assassination of the KNU/KNLA leaders by using the BGF members, who are still loyal and fully subservient to the Burma army. Chit Thu is given the authority to engage in business to acquire funds for providing material support to the families of the BGF members. He is also authorized to deal with business companies to implement the so-called border development projects, consisting of contract farming, rubber and oil palm plantations and mining minerals in the areas under the KNU control. He will become the principal tool to implement the Burmese government projects in Kawthoolei.

In July, the Burma army and loyal BGF troops cooperated in the military operation of shelling 6 villages with mortars. The villages were Hteelaneh, Yawboo, Maeh, Tamorya, Maezeit, Maelah and Hteepanah, which were located in areas between Pa-an and Papun Districts. They forced the villagers to move to Kawtaw Myaingyi Ngu, which was once headquarters of the DKBA. However, most of the villagers fled into hiding and to the villages nearby. The Karen Buddhist monks in those villages also had to move to the other villages for their safety. The shells landing in Hteelaneh village killed one woman.

## **KNU/KNLA**

A few leaders stay and work, on a temporary basis and in low profile, in some border towns for communication and liaison with the international organizations and as well as with the ethnic and democratic alliance forces. All our remaining military commanders and officers are living and working inside KNU controlled areas, in their respective districts and brigades.

Since a brigade of DKBA and a battalion of former BGF have turned against the Burma army and stopped fighting against the KNU, we can now coordinate with them for better understanding, peace and unification. We are winning back more areas particularly in Pa-an and Thaton Districts. We are able to re-organize more than 30 villages, which were once under total control of the Burma army and the DKBA allied to it. Most of the KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade areas in the border, which were occupied at one time in 2009, by the DKBA allied to the Burma army and later the BGF, have now returned to the KNU control.

The challenge for the KNU, since the return of the DKBA and some of the BGF, has been the task of taking care of families of the members. The KNU is networking with the Karen people resettled abroad regularly by sharing and updating them on the political, human rights, IDP, refugee as well as the DKBA and BGF situation. The Karen people within the

country and outside the country wish to see the reunion of the DKBA and Karen BGF with the KNU and it is politically correct that they are willingly to support the reunion.

The KNU still welcomes, with open-door policy, dialogue to resolve the political problems in Burma. The KNU has always believed that it cannot resolve the political problems by itself alone, as the problems are related to the issues of the rights of all ethnic nationalities and democratization in the entire country. The KNU strongly believes in the alliance with the ethnic forces as well as with the democratic forces for bringing positive and lasting changes to Burma.

The KNU is one of the member organizations of the United Nationalities Federal Council formed recently in February 2011, with the aim of building up unity among the ethnic forces for legitimacy and political reorganization for the establishment of the country as a democratic federal union. The KNU believes that it is important to form a strong political voice of the ethnic nationalities and go to negotiation table with one voice. It is necessary to strengthen our political will as well as the force for resistance to bring positive and lasting changes.

### **Conclusion and Call for Action**

It is important for the international community not to be misled again by the charm offensive launched by the military-backed Thein Sein government. It is still taking orders from former military dictators, Than Shwe and Maung Aye.

All peace and justice-loving countries of the world, for the sake of stopping widespread and gross human rights violations, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, religious persecution, narcotic drug production, human trafficking and environmental destruction, must support at the United Nations and at other international venues for:

1. Formation of Commission of Inquiry on Burma (Myanmar) as called for by the UN Special Rapporteur, Tomás Ojea Quintana;
2. Release of all political prisoners, most of whom are sentenced fraudulently to imprisonment under most repressive and unjust laws;
3. Freedom of thought and expression, and media freedom for bringing out true aspirations and situation of the people;
4. Freedom of movement, organization and assembly for political parties and mass organizations;
5. More effective investment, economic, trade and financial sanctions;
6. International arms embargo including embargo on the sales of military explosives, gun powders and machinery, materials and chemicals for producing weapons of mass destruction;
7. International inspection of nuclear programs, facilities and reactor sites;
8. Ceasefire against ethnic resistance forces and holding meaningful political dialogue with the ethnic and democratic forces, under UN mediation;

9. Withdrawal from ethnic areas and punishment of troops, committing human rights violations and crime against humanity;
10. Support for refugees and IDP.

