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Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Dooplaya District Situation Update: Fighting, indiscriminate shelling, displacement, landmine injuries, travel restrictions and torture, December 2021 to February 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik), Noh T'Kaw (Kyainseikgyi) and Waw Ray (Win Yay) townships in Dooplaya District between December 2021 and February 2022, including fighting, indiscriminate shelling, displacement, landmine explosions and torture. Fighting and indiscriminate shelling have caused the death and injury of villagers and their livestock, property damage and prolonged displacement. IDPs are facing more challenges in their temporary shelters due to strong winds and heavy rain. The constant fighting and increased military activity have led to more livelihood challenges for the local villagers. A teenage boy stepped on an SAC landmine and lost one of his legs. A villager was tortured by State Administration Council (SAC) soldiers following fighting between the SAC and Karen National Liberation Army.¹

Noh T'Kaw (Kyainseikgyi) Township

Fighting and indiscriminate shelling

At around 8:00 am on December 31st 2021, fighting broke out between State Administration Council (SAC)² Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³ #432 and an unknown group in Than P'Yan village, Dali village tract⁴, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, and the fighting lasted for a few minutes. During the fighting, the SAC fired mortars into the village killing a female villager named Ma⁵ Thun Hla.

¹ The present document is based on information received in January and February 2022. It was provided by the community members in Dooplaya District who have been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

² The State Administration Council (SAC) is the executive governing body created in the aftermath of the February 1st 2021 military coup. It was established by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on February 2nd 2021, and is composed of eight military officers and eight civilians. The chairperson serves as the de facto head of government of Burma/Myanmar and leads the Military Cabinet of Myanmar, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

³ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. Most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers, yet up-to-date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁴ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

⁵ Ma is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.



These photos were received on January 1st 2022. The first two photos (top) show the houses damaged by SAC LIB #432 indiscriminate shelling into Than P'Yan village, Dali village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The last photo (bottom left) shows Ma Thun Hla who was hit by a mortar fragment and died. *[Photos: Local villagers]*

The SAC increased their activity in Noh T'Kaw Township since the first day of January 2022. Since January 1st 2022, SAC soldiers from LIB #432 have been shooting on a nightly basis. Although there have not been any injuries, it has created fear among the villagers. The villagers did not dare to go out at night because if they went out at night, they would have had to use a torchlight and they did not dare to use it [if villagers use a torchlight, they are at risk of being seen by SAC soldiers, who may shoot at them or arrest them]. They [the villagers] were also afraid to go and tap their rubber trees, which has created livelihood challenges for the villagers.

On January 4th 2022, the person who was in charge [commander] of SAC LIB #432 met with the Kyain village head and asked him to tell the People's Defence Force (PDF)⁶ not to attack them [SAC soldiers] when they enter the village.

On January 20th 2022, fighting occurred between the SAC and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁷ Battalion #18 in Aaw Hpa Lay village, Aaw Hpa Hpadoh village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. Approximately 354 villagers fled to B--- village, and other nearby places. On January 21st 2022, the SAC indiscriminately fired mortars into the local area. On January 22nd 2022, villagers continued fleeing to L--- and B--- villages, Yaw K'Daw village tract as the fighting continued. While fleeing for their lives, they faced food shortages and some were injured [during displacement].

⁶ The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

⁷ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

Indiscriminate shelling followed by torture

On February 9th 2022 at 5:00 am, before sunrise, 42 soldiers from SAC LIB #432, Column #1, based at Seikkyi Army Base and led by Battalion Commander Aung Naing Lin, patrolled along the road between M--- and K’Ra Nee villages, Noh T’Kaw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The local villagers reported that the SAC soldiers were not only patrolling on the road but also entered into Karen National Union (KNU)⁸-controlled territory. The SAC did not notify the local KNLA of this movement. When they reached the border marker between Noh T’Kaw and M--- villages at 6:40 am, fighting broke out between this patrolling SAC troop and KNLA Battalion #17, Column #2. The fighting lasted for around 10 minutes, resulting in the death of one SAC soldier and injury to three SAC soldiers. After the fighting, the SAC Artillery Unit in Seikkyi Army camp indiscriminately fired more than 10 artillery shells into M--- village, while SAC LIB #432 fired 81 mm and 120 mm mortar shells.

One of the mortars fell in front of the house of villager Saw⁹ Y--- in M--- village, killing one of his oxen. The ox was kept beside the rice straw bale storage area in his garden. Saw Y--- took photos of his dead ox and cut the head of the ox. After cutting the head and butchering the ox for meat [with two other villagers], SAC soldiers arrived at the house. The SAC checked Saw Y---’s phone and saw the photos he took during the Karen National Day [February 11th] [with some KNLA soldiers] as well as photos of the dead ox. Therefore, the SAC soldiers accused him of having communication with the KNU/KNLA. Then the soldiers made Saw Y--- lie face down on the ground, whereupon they kicked the side of his chest five times and hit his head twice with the butt of a gun. Then, the soldiers threatened him not to post photos of the dead ox online. Further suspicion was raised when SAC soldiers found medicine while searching his home. However, his wife is a nurse [which is why there was medicine in their home]. The SAC soldiers also destroyed Saw Y---’s DVD/CD media player and a guitar in his house. After this, the SAC soldiers looted two other houses in the village from which they stole three phones and 9,000 kyats [USD 5.06].¹⁰ One of the phones they stole belonged to a member of the Malaria Elimination Task Force [part of Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU)]. Moreover, the soldiers also threatened to burn the whole village and fire heavy weapons into the village if the KNLA ambushed and attacked them again near this village.

After approximately one hour, the SAC met with the village head and told him that they had come twice to M--- village and they were attacked each time. Now, they said they would return to their base and no one should attack them, or else they would burn down the entire village. On the evening of February 9th 2022, the local villagers reported that the patrolling SAC troops continued to stay in M--- village for a few days. [As of February 12th], the SAC troops continued to stay in the village. It was assumed [by local villagers] that the SAC troops aimed [stayed in order] to identify those who had attacked them.

Some villagers, including men, women, elderly and pregnant women fled from the village because they feared for their security. Some even fled to the Thai border area. The situation in M--- village area became more unstable because fighting recently broke out in this area as well. The fleeing local villagers also reported that they were threatened and questioned by SAC soldiers on the road. On the same day after the incident happened, a woman in Ka Lee Hkee village was driving to Seikkyi Town, she encountered SAC soldiers in M--- village. The SAC

⁸ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

⁹ Saw is a S’gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person’s name.

¹⁰ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the March 29th 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.56 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

soldiers pointed a gun at her and intimidated her for travelling during the fighting. Local villagers around the incident area are afraid that more fighting will break out between SAC and KNLA as tensions increase.



This photo was taken on February 9th 2022 in M--- village, Noh T’Kaw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the villager’s ox that was killed by the SAC indiscriminate shelling. [Photo: Local villager]



This photo was taken on February 10th 2022 in M--- village, Noh T’Kaw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the guitar and DVD/CD player that were damaged by the SAC soldiers. [Photo: KHRG]

Landmine explosion

Local people heard the news that on January 6th 2022, a landmine was planted inside the school’s compound in T’Hka Kloh village, T’Hka Kloh village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township and it exploded at around 8:00 pm on the same day. No students or villagers were hurt from this explosion. However, the school compound suffered some damage. Local villagers do not know who planted the landmine.

On February 5th 2022 at 2:00 pm, 16-year-old Maung T--- from K--- village, T’Hka Kloh village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township stepped on a landmine in the forest [in SAC-controlled territory] while he went to cut bamboo along with two other friends. The landmine was planted by SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)¹¹ #284 [according to KHRG’s researcher, due to the fact that the landmine was planted in this battalion’s area of operation]. As a result of the explosion, he lost one of his legs. After Maung T--- stepped on the landmine, his two friends who were with him went back to the village and informed his grandfather. He was taken by ambulance to the 300-bed military hospital in Mawlamyine. The SAC Operations Commander from IB #284 told Maung T---’s grandfather that he [that is, the SAC] would take care of all the costs for the treatment. On February 6th 2022, the grandfather informed the K--- village head that he was afraid because his house was located near the SAC military base. The grandfather was afraid that he would be called by the SAC to meet them [and might be harmed] if news about the landmine explosion spread.

SAC soldiers used to warn the local people not to enter the territory where they planted landmines. However, Maung T--- was not aware of the location of landmines because he had recently moved to K--- village. He is originally from Yangon and he only moved to K--- village

¹¹ An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up to date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

three years ago. He is currently living with his grandfather. He was a Grade 10 student, but since the February 1st 2021 coup, he has not studied in school.

Waw Ray (Win Yay) Township

Troop movement and fighting

Starting from January 1st 2022, SAC troop movements increased in KNLA Battalion #16's area in Waw Ray Township and they camped in Lah Shoh village. As a result, villagers are highly concerned for their security to go and work in their plantations near the stream. SAC ground movement and air reconnaissance are threatening villagers' security.

On January 24th 2022, fighting broke out between the KNLA and SAC in Lay Naw village, Lay Naw village tract, Waw Ray Township, Dooplaya District, causing villagers to be afraid and flee.

Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township

Injury and death due to indiscriminate shelling and fighting

On January 8th 2022 at 8:30 am, the SAC shelled artillery indiscriminately. Mortars landed in Myo Haung village, Kaw Nweh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. The shelling damaged the monastery, villagers' houses and injured six female villagers and one male villager in Myo Haung village. According to a KNU Facebook post, one of the injured elderly female villagers is in critical condition.¹²

On February 5th 2022, SAC LIB #355 fired mortars into Ywar Kalay village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. Six shells fell into the village, injuring a pregnant woman, a 4-year-old boy, and a teenage girl. Three civilians' houses were also damaged.



¹² Information taken from a [Karen National Union \(KNU\) Facebook](#) post dated January 7th 2022, last accessed June 23rd 2022.



These photos were taken on February 5th 2022 in Ywar Kalay village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photos show the damages to houses and vegetation when SAC LIB #355 fired mortars into the village. *[Photo: Local villager]*





These photos were taken on February 5th 2022 in Ywar Kalay village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The first photo (top left) shows the injured pregnant woman, the second (top right) shows the injured teenage girl and the last photo (bottom left) shows the injured 4-year-old boy. These villagers were injured in the indiscriminate shelling by SAC LIB #355. *[Photo: Local villager]*

On February 18th 2022 at about 9:00 am, fighting occurred between KNLA and SAC troops in Ta Maing Kone village, Maung Ma Ywar Thit village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. Mortars were indiscriminately fired into the village during the fighting [villagers could not specify which armed group fired the mortars]. A 41-year-old villager named Naw¹³ Pu Tin was hit by shrapnel on her right arm while she was at the back of her house; she died immediately. By the time fighting began, almost all villagers had already fled Ta Maing Kone village; only a few older people stayed in the village while fighting took place between the two armed groups.¹⁴



This photo was taken on February 18th 2022 in Ta Maing Kone village, Maung Ma Ywar Thit village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. The photo shows a 41-year-old villager named Naw Pu Tin who was hit by shrapnel on her right arm while she was at the back of her house; she died immediately. *[Photo: Local villager]*

Displacement and ongoing fighting and shelling

Local villagers in the Kawkareik and Lay Kay Kaw areas have been facing prolonged displacement since the fighting and air strikes took place in mid-December 2021.¹⁵ Many of the displaced persons set up temporary shelters along the Thai-Burma border. The IDPs faced shelter issues when unexpected rains came [heavy rains and wind hit Thailand and Burma in February and March 2022]. In February 2022, 106 households, comprising 373 people, in Oo Kray Hta village displaced to the banks of the Waw Lay River. They built temporary shelters out

¹³ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

¹⁴ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Short Update: A woman was killed by mortar shrapnel during indiscriminate shelling by armed groups, February 2022](#)", March 2022.

¹⁵ KHRG, "[Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations, July to December 2021](#)", March 2022.

of bamboo. On the night of February 4th 2022, heavy rain damaged their temporary shelters. Therefore, the displaced villagers, including children and women, went back to their village, despite the high security risk. The IDPs that settled near Thay Baw Boh village in Kaw T'Ree Township also had their shelters damaged by the rain. They were forced to repair their shelters the next morning.



These photos were taken on February 5th 2022 in an IDP displacement site near Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. On the night of February 4th, heavy rains hit the area. Due to the heavy rain, the IDPs' temporary shelters were damaged. These photos show them repairing their shelters the next morning. [Photos: KHRG]

On February 15th 2022, more sporadic fighting and shelling happened in areas around Lay Kay Kaw, including P'Loo village, Meh Wah Hkee village and May Leh Pan village, Kaw T'Ree Township. On that day, several households from these villages fled, fearing that the fighting and shelling would get worse.

Most villagers living in P'Loo village, especially children, elderly, and pregnant women had already fled from the village. On the morning of February 16th 2022, those villagers who had stayed in the village, were forced to hide in makeshift bunkers due to the ongoing sporadic fighting and shelling in the area. On February 16th at 2:42 pm, two SAC helicopters conducted air strikes for about 15 minutes in P'Loo village, causing the rest of the villagers hiding in the village to flee.¹⁶

¹⁶ More information about air strikes in Dooplaya District since January 2022 can be found in a forthcoming KHRG newsbulletin.

U¹⁷ H--- was seriously injured while he was fleeing to escape from the air strikes (the victim is unsure whether he was injured from the air strike or indiscriminate shelling). He was sent to a hospital in Thailand where his right foot was amputated due to injuries from the attack. A church and several houses in P'Loo village were also damaged due to the indiscriminate shelling and air strikes.

As of February 18th 2022, there are about 1,000 IDPs from 350 households from P'Loo village who have become displaced. The IDPs sheltered along the banks of the Moei River, building their shelters with bamboo and tarpaulins. Some of the IDPs sheltered at the X--- Monastery along the Moei River. They did not have enough tarpaulins to make a roof and a floor. When the rain came on February 18th 2022, their shelters were not able to protect them from the rain. Many of them, including children and older people, got wet and cold. They do not have medicine to provide them relief from catching cold or enough clothes to change [into new clothes].

In addition, there is no guarantee of security for the IDPs at the displacement sites. They always have to stay alert and relocate whenever they hear the sound of fighting and shelling. On February 17th 2022, two SAC helicopters conducted reconnaissance over Min Leh Pan village. A helicopter fired three bullets from their machine guns into the Moei River. One mortar also fell into the Moei River, very close to the IDP site.

Further background reading on the security and human rights situation in Dooplaya District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations, July to December 2021"](#), March 2022.
- ["Dooplaya District Short Update: A woman was killed by mortar shrapnel during indiscriminate shelling by armed groups, February 2022"](#), March 2022.
- ["Dooplaya District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling, fighting, forced labour, peace talks, and the COVID-19 pandemic, August to September 2021"](#), February 2022.
- ["Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021"](#), January 2022.
- ["Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmishes between armed groups and indiscriminate shelling result in displacement, casualties and destruction of villagers' property \(October 2021\)"](#), December 2021.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrg.org.

¹⁷ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

Doooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

