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Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: Violation of the right to information, travel restrictions, torture, increased SAC activities and displacement in Ler Doh and Moo Townships, August 2021 to February 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) and Moo (Mone) townships, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District between August 2021 and February 2022, and includes information on human rights violations committed by the State Administration Council (SAC). Local villagers experienced suppression of the right to information, travel restrictions and torture. Military activities also increased, and included indiscriminate shelling, the transportation of 8,750 sacks of rice to frontline army camps and the sending of about 400 more soldiers (five battalions) to the frontline. As a result, local villagers are facing increased security risks and livelihood challenges, and some have been forced to displace without access to humanitarian support or healthcare.¹

Right to information and travel restrictions

On August 22nd 2021, villagers from Htee Toh Loh village, Paw Pee Der village tract², Moo (Mone) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District were prohibited by the State Administration Council (SAC)³ from watching [television] from Skynet (PSI) [satellite service provider]. They [the SAC] said that if they watched movies [news] from Skynet, they would come [enter the village] and arrest people in their houses.

On August 25th 2021, they [SAC] set up checkpoints beside the public road outside of Aaw Law See village, T'Hkaw Pwa village tract and inside Kyon Pin Hseik village, Kone Ni village tract, Moo Township. They also set up checkpoints in Yay Ao Sin village, Ton Taw village, and Mone Town, Moo Township. Villagers had to carry recommendation letters [from the village administrator] with them whenever they passed these checkpoints.

¹ The present document is based on information received between January 24th 2021 and March 7th 2022. It was provided by a community member in Kler Lwee Htoo District who has 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 A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

³ 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 Burma, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

On January 25th 2022, a villager from Htee Toh Loh villager, Paw Pee Der village tract, Moo Township was stopped on the road near Yay Ao Sin village by SAC soldiers at 7:30 pm. They told him that they would punish him if they saw him again [the reason for the threat is unclear]. They also told him that no one would be able to bring prosecution against them if they hurt him. He had been returning to his village after going to Mone Town. As a result of this incident, villagers were afraid to travel and they faced difficulties because they couldn't do anything even when they had things that needed to be taken care of [in another area]. Some of the villagers also faced food scarcity and they no longer dared, for instance, to go out to hunt rats at night [for food]. The information above is about the challenges that villagers in Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District have been facing, such as food shortages and travel restrictions.

At 5:30 pm on January 28th 2022, [the SAC] village head and SAC soldiers announced a curfew so that no one could go out [of their house] from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am. Also, no one is allowed to use a VPN [virtual private network], watch VOA [The Voice of America] or BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] news, or have any type of connection with the People's Defence Force (PDF)⁴. If anyone was caught using any of these [prohibited services] or had connections with the PDF, [SAC soldiers threatened to] take legal action against them [it is unclear what type of legal action was being referred to].

Torture

On October 8th 2021, a bomb exploded sometime between 7:30 pm and 8:00 pm in Mone Town, Moo Township. After the explosion, SAC soldiers from Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs)⁵ #599 and #590 came [to the incident place], checked people on the road, and beat people who were travelling [on the road]. [During this SAC operation], one of the local car drivers was shot [by the SAC]. He did not die, but he had to be admitted to the hospital.

Starting from November 10th 2021, SAC soldiers from LIB #590 at Yay Ao Sin army camp and LIB #599 at Kon Daw army camp began entering into [patrolling in] nearby villages such as Htee Toh Loh village, Paw Pee Der village tract, Kyon Pin Seik village, Kone Ni village tract and Aww Law See village, T'Hkaw Pwa village tract, Moo Township at night. They stopped any people they saw [during patrolling] and beat those people.

SAC activities and security concerns

At around 8:00 pm on January 18th 2022, SAC soldiers from LIB #590 entered Htee Toh Loh village, Paw Pee Der village tract, Moo Township making everyone in the village afraid. People who left government jobs [CDM participants] as well as young and single people [probably villagers who were 15 years old and older] had to hide and sleep on their farms. Since SAC military oppression has been increasing, villagers have been living in greater fear so there is no more safety for life [the lives of civilians].

SAC military transport rations and increase the number of their troops in the area

On November 20th 2021, the SAC military [battalion numbers unknown, but likely LIBs #351, #124, #589, #598, and Infantry Battalion (IB)⁶ #440] transported rations to Than Bo military camp, and

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

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army bases in the north-eastern part of Ler Doh Town, Kler Lwee Htoo District. On December 4th 2021, they [SAC troops] also started transporting rations to their army camps along the Mu Theh vehicle road, namely, Mu Theh army camp (also known as Koh Thay Soh military camp), Ler Doh Township, as well as other military camps such as Hpwa Gaw army camp in Mu Traw District. Within one month, they were able to finish sending rations to Mu Theh army camp. In total, 8,750 sacks of rice were transported to their frontline camps [in Ler Doh Township]. In the meantime, they [SAC] also sent five new battalions to Ler Doh Township: LIBs #351, #124, #589, #598, and IB #440, numbering approximately 400 troops in total. These five new battalions are temporarily based along Mu Theh vehicle road. IB #75, [already] based in Mu Theh military camp, provided security [for the transportation of the troop rations]. Min Tin Aung, the [SAC] operations commander of the six battalions [the five new battalions plus IB #75] was in charge of managing the transportation of the rations.



This photo was taken on March 28th 2022 in Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The photo shows the Mu Theh vehicle road that the SAC uses to travel from Ler Doh Town to Mu Traw District. [Photo: KHRG]

SAC indiscriminate shelling

On December 7th 2021 at about 7:00 pm, soldiers from the KNLA and KNDO ambushed the SAC's rations store [in Mu Theh army camp]. In retaliation, SAC soldiers [from Mu Theh army camp] fired mortars into H--- village, Kheh Ka Hkoh village tract, Ler Doh Township. As a result of the shelling, three villagers were injured and some villagers' houses were damaged. The three injured villagers are Saw⁷ A--- (age 25), Saw B--- (age 11), and Naw⁸ C--- (age 11).



These photos were taken on January 12th 2022 in Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. These photos show H--- villagers who fled into the forest in Kheh Der village tract due to SAC firing mortars into their village on December 7th 2021 while they were transporting rations. The villagers are still facing displacement. [Photos: KHRG]

come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁷ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁸ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

On December 12th 2021, when [SAC] LIB #124 troops returned from Brigade 5 [Mu Traw District] to Ler Doh Township, they saw two villagers harvesting crops on their farm at Thay Nweh Hta place. The soldiers shot an M79 grenade launcher more than 10 times near the two villagers, frightening them. The two villagers, Naw R--- and Saw W--- (mother and son) from Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, did not sustain injuries.

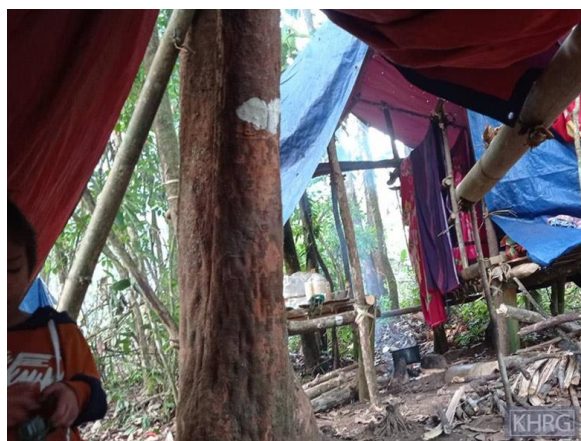
On December 18th 2021, another attack occurred in Mu Theh village, Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township at 7:40 pm when SAC troops fired mortars into the village. The village church and some of the villagers' houses were damaged as a result of the shelling.

After the fighting in Mu Theh village in early December 2021, villagers from Mu Theh village had to flee to other villages, to their farm huts or into the forest. Some of the IDPs' family members had to go back to their houses to feed their livestock and then return to their hiding places. On December 30th 2021, a Mu Theh villager [an IDP] named Saw O--- was shot at by a [unknown] SAC soldier with an EMER K-3 assault rifle [a type of assault rifle made in Burma by the Electrical Mechanical and Engineering Corps] when he came back to his village to feed his pigs. However, he managed to flee from the SAC soldier without getting hit.

On January 1st, February 16th, February 18th and March 6th 2022, SAC LIB #590 from Yay Ao Sin army camp fired guns about three to fifteen times on each of the three days [in the area near their army camps]. It frightened many people so villagers from Yay Ao Sin, Htee Toh Loh, Sin Pin Than and Mone Shan Paing villages, Moo Township were afraid and felt unsafe to travel.

Fear and displacement

Beginning in November 2021, the SAC engaged in increased military activities in Ler Doh Township. The SAC not only sent more troops, but they also used aircraft and helicopters to make it easier [and safer] for their troops to transport their rations to Mu Traw District. The helicopters were mainly used to conduct reconnaissance so the rations could be safely transported. Due to the increased number of SAC troops in the local area, local villagers were in fear; at night, villagers had to go hide and sleep in the forest, their farm huts, or in other villages and then would return to their village in the morning. Some of the villagers, especially villagers from Kheh Ka Koh village tract and Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, have fled to other places.



These photos were taken on March 28th 2022 in V--- village, Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. These photos show shelters that displaced villagers constructed in the forest due to the fear of airstrikes. [Photos: KHRG]

On February 22nd 2022, at 3:00 pm, two SAC helicopters came to Kheh Ka Hkoh village tract, Ler Doh Township. One of the helicopters landed at Mu Theh army camp and picked up their [SAC] injured soldiers, and another helicopter conducted reconnaissance over the Karen National

Defence Organisation (KNDO)⁹ Battalion #3's territory. [On the same day] at 5:00 pm, all villagers in X--- and Z--- villages, as well as many other villages in Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, left their villages and fled to safer places due to fear that airstrikes might take place in their villages.

Since the military coup, civilians in Ler Doh Township have been facing many challenges due to the SAC military's oppression [operations against ethnic minorities], and some of the villagers had to flee from their village. Some of the villagers cannot return to their village and they are still fleeing in the forest. Currently, there are around 1,589 displaced people. Civilians across Ler Doh Township are currently in a constant state of fear [of airstrikes] because SAC aircraft/helicopters frequently conduct reconnaissance in the local area. As a result of SAC reconnaissance operations, villagers have to sleep in the forest and it causes challenges for the villagers to regain their livelihood. The things [humanitarian support] that villagers are currently in need of are food, healthcare supplies, and security.

Healthcare

During December 2021, the SAC's oppression of villagers in the local area of Ler Doh Township has increased. As a result, there has been an increase in displacement, so local villagers face more challenges in areas such as healthcare. Villagers also face a shortage of supplies, including healthcare supplies. Also, there are no clinics, and only one health worker team - the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)¹⁰ - operates in the local area, so many villagers cannot access healthcare services.

Further background reading on the security situation in Kler Lwee Htoo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: SAC troops fired mortars into a village, injuring three villagers, December 2021"](#), January 2022.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: Arbitrary arrest of civilians by SAC military in Moo Township, August 2021"](#), January 2022.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo Short Update: Arbitrary arrest and killing, July 2021"](#), August 2021.
- ["Where should I flee next?: Fighting and displacement in Doo Tha Htoo, Kler Lwee Htoo and Mu Traw districts, December 2020 to January 2021"](#), April 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.khrq.org.

⁹ The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

¹⁰ Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is an organisation that provides health care and medical assistance to displaced civilians inside Burma.

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District

