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Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: SAC military activities and travel restrictions, livelihood challenges, education, an armed clash, displacement and indiscriminate shelling by the SAC, April to May 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in T'Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi), K'Ser Doh and Ler Muh Lah townships, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between April and May 2022. The State Administration Council (SAC) conducted troop rotation, patrolled the area, and indiscriminately fired mortar shells into villages, which resulted in the displacement of villagers. Villagers from Pa Wa area in T'Naw Th'Ree Township have also been facing travel restrictions since the military coup, as SAC soldiers stop and investigate those travelling. Village leaders, appointed by the SAC, told students' parents not to send their kids to Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) schools and to only send them to SAC-run schools. On May 25th 2022, SAC soldiers fired at least 100 mortar shells into P'Na Mee village, P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, displacing villagers from P'Na Mee village. SAC soldiers also indiscriminately fired around 10 mortar shells, destroying a monastery, injuring a monk, and killing a villager, following the fighting that occurred between them and the combined forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and People's Defence Force (PDF) on May 10th 2022, between Kyaw Meh Taw village and Plaw Ner Moo village, K'Ser Doh Township.¹

State Administration Council (SAC)² military activities

Due to SAC [battalion number unknown] troop rotation and patrolling in the area, villagers from B--- village, Pa Wa area, T'Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi) Township were afraid and displaced to C-- village, Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, T'Naw Th'Ree Township. When they moved there, some villagers saw SAC soldiers [who were travelling along the road] and had to hide in the bushes beside the road. Villagers hid when they saw SAC soldiers because SAC soldiers usually ask a lot of questions when they encounter villagers. SAC soldiers also frequently beat villagers who they encounter if the villagers don't answer their questions.

¹ The present document is based on information received in May 2022. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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 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.

At around 11:30 am on April 23rd 2022, SAC soldiers [from an unknown battalion] indiscriminately fired one mortar shell into the village, injuring five villagers from C--- village. The names of the villagers who were injured is unknown and the other villagers do not know where they received treatment. Villagers could also hear gunfire in the distance due to fighting between armed groups. Villagers displaced and had to hide in the forest as a result of the shelling. Villagers are still displaced and have moved from the forest to other villages. Some are staying with their relatives in other villages.

Travel restrictions

Travel restrictions have become stricter in [Pa Wa} area since the military coup. Villagers have been facing travel restrictions because SAC soldiers are stationed beside the road and are asking a lot of questions [to local villagers who are travelling]. SAC soldiers have been indiscriminately firing guns lately. Therefore the SAC closed the main road that goes through Pa Wa area and vehicles could not travel. There was however no official announcement that the road had been closed. As a result, it has been very difficult for villagers to travel to receive medical treatment, even when they become very sick. [The nearest clinic is two hours away by motorbike during the dry season. It takes even longer during the wet season.] It has also been challenging for some villagers who don't have a COVID-19 vaccination certificate. They are not permitted to travel, as SAC troops stationed at checkpoints prohibit their travel.

Food shortages

Due to travel restrictions [and resulting livelihood challenges], villagers have been facing food shortages. Since April 5th 2022, the SAC has increased its checkpoints, and SAC soldiers have been disrupting the transportation of food supplies to villagers. Some villagers, especially families who work as day labourers, have already run out of food [as of May 2022], and some are only able to have porridge for their meals. Villagers have not received aid and thus are sharing what they have with each other.

Education

In B--- area in T'Naw Th'Ree Township, some children wanted to go and study in Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) schools [as a new term was starting], but SAC soldiers threatened [told village leaders who were appointed by the SAC to threaten] students' parents by telling them that their children might join rebel groups if they went to study in KECD schools. As a result, some parents didn't allow their children to go and study in KECD schools. Some village leaders also told the students not to study in KECD schools and to study in SAC-run schools only. However, while some children stayed in SAC-run schools, some have chosen to go and study in KECD schools.

An armed clash and displacement

After receiving the news that SAC soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB)³ #433 [based in Kyauck Me Taung village] who went to Plaw Ner Moo village, Hkay Hta small area in Paw Hkloh large area, K'Ser Doh Township were coming back to Kyauk Me Taung village, K'Ser Doh Township by foot on May 10th 2022, Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)⁴ Company #2 and

³ 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 NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁴ 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

People's Defence Force (PDF)⁵ fighters prepared to conduct an ambush on that day. (It takes approximately 45 minutes by foot to travel between the two villages.) The SAC had arrived at Plaw Ner Moo village on the morning of May 10th 2022 and left the village in the afternoon. When SAC soldiers were on their way back from Plaw Ner Moo village to Kyauk Me Taung village on May 10th 2022, they were attacked by the combined forces of the KNDO and PDF between Kyauk Me Taung village and Plaw Ner Moo village. [They were attacked just outside of Plaw Ner Moo village.] Fighting started at 3:40 pm and it ended at around 5:00 pm. When the fighting stopped, SAC soldiers [unknown battalion number] currently based at the Kyauk Me Taung police station⁶ indiscriminately fired around 10 mortar shells into K'Ser Ther Pler village [Taung Thon Lon village], destroying a monastery, injuring a monk, and killing a villager. The injured monk initially received treatment at Hsa Doh Wah clinic in K'Moh Thway area [Ler Doh Soh Township]. He was injured on the waist and was later sent to Yangon Hospital. Villagers have not heard anything since.

While SAC soldiers were in Plaw Ner Moo village, villagers were afraid to leave their houses. When fighting happened after they [SAC soldiers] left [the village], Plaw Ner Moo villagers were afraid and fled from the village. Some of the villagers fled to their plantation fields, some fled to the forest, and some fled to [nearby] E--- village, Paw Hkloh area, K'Ser Doh Township.

Due to the fighting outside of Plaw Ner Moo village, villagers from E--- village heard that SAC soldiers were coming, and so they [women and children] left their village. E--- village is located approximately one mile from Plaw Ner Moo village. SAC troops did not pass through this village but villagers were concerned that SAC soldiers would go to their village [after the fighting near Plaw Ner Moo]. Only men stayed behind in the village. Some of the villagers went to sleep at their plantations [outside of the village] and some went to stay in their hiding places in the forest. Although E--- villagers who had fled, returned to their village on May 12th 2022, villagers from Plaw Ner Moo village have still not dared to return to their village. Some villagers who had to displace went to F--- village, K'Ser Doh Township and G--- village in Ler Doh Soh Township. Some men returned to the village to check on their livestock, but they only returned during the day and then left the same day. They did not sleep there.

SAC indiscriminate shelling

On May 25th 2022, SAC soldiers from LIB #285 [indiscriminately] fired mortar shells into P'Na Mee village, P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, the whole day. They started shelling at around 9:00 or 10:00 am and the shelling did not stop until 8:00 pm. They fired at least 100 mortar shells. There were no injuries or damage from the shelling.

Due to the SAC mortar shelling, village leaders sent P'Na Mee villagers, especially elderly people, women, and children to a more secure place. Villagers were not able to take food with them when they left the village [as they had to leave in a hurry]. Village leaders had to arrange transportation to send food to them later. Some villagers returned to the village but elderly people and children continue to seek refuge in H--- village, P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township. According to local authorities, villagers across the area are now living in fear and they are worried that the situation in their local area might become worse in the future.

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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Since the 2021 coup, the SAC has been placing their soldiers at police stations.

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

- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Fighting and displacement, property damage, deaths caused by landmine explosion, travel restrictions, and the COVID-19 situation, December 2021 to February 2022”](#), June 2022.
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: SAC militia shoots teenage villager, CDM and protester protection, SAC troop movement, arbitrary taxation and livelihood, healthcare and education challenges, March 2021”](#), January 2022.
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops \(March to June 2021\)”](#), September 2021.
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K’Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021”](#), May 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.

Mergui-Tavoy (Tanintharyi) District

