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Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, Mu Traw District from March 28th to April 5th 2021. The Tatmadaw indiscriminately fired mortar shells at several localities, resulting in displacement and unexploded ordnance contamination. The shelling occurred in a context of renewed fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA following the February 2021 military coup.¹ Local civilians are now afraid for their security. New landmines were also planted in certain areas and now pose a security threat to local communities. On April 5th 2021, a civilian sustained injuries after stepping on a landmine in Na Koo Hkee village tract, Dwe Lo Township.²

Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships

Between March 28th and April 5th 2021, Tatmadaw's³ Infantry Battalion (IB)⁴ #19 and Light Infantry Battalions (LIB)⁵ #341, #434 and #340 indiscriminately fired mortars shells at the villages [and localities] around their army camps. These battalions are based near Hpapun Town, along the boundary between Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships. They [Tatmadaw] fired mortars rounds because they received information about the presence of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁶ troops near their army camps.

¹ On February 1st 2021, the Burma Army deposed the democratically elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military proclaimed a year-long state of emergency and transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces. Based on unproven fraud allegations, the Tatmadaw invalidated the landslide victory of the NLD in the November 2020 General Election and stated it would hold new elections at the end of the state of emergency. The coup d'état occurred the day before the Parliament of Myanmar was due to swear in the members elected during the 2020 election. Elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

² The present document is based on information received in April 2021. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw 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.

³ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

⁴ An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) 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.

⁵ A Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, 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.

⁶ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

Mortars landed in the following locations:

- Section 3, Section 4 and Ah Naunt Hpeh Kan Section, Hpapun Town
- Hkler Hkoh village, Ma Htaw village tract,⁷ Dwe Lo Township

According to a civilian from Hpapun Town: *“On April 3rd [2021], the Tatmadaw indiscriminately fired mortars into the community. One of the mortar rounds exploded next to my house. Some of them landed in the monastery compound. Some of them did not explode.”* Although there were no casualties, all the local civilians were afraid and worried for their security. They worry that the situation might get worse in the future, but they do not know where to flee to: *“We cannot access social media so we do not have access to any update [about the] situation. Therefore, I want to know: where should we flee to? What is the best place to go?”*

On April 4th 2021, the KNLA attacked the Koo Seik Tatmadaw camp, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township. KNLA soldiers also blocked the military road with logs and landmines. In response, the Tatmadaw indiscriminately fired mortar rounds at nearby villages. Local civilians now live in fear of shelling and landmines. They also face travel restrictions [they do not dare to travel because of the security risks associated with the presence of Tatmadaw soldiers and landmine contamination].

On April 5th 2021, LIB #341 fired mortar rounds at K--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, prompting local villagers to flee to M--- village, Klaw Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township. LIB #341's commander ordered the M--- village administrator to tell local villagers to report any IDPs staying at their houses. He also ordered the village administrator to make two separate lists: a list of the villagers who did report hosting IDPs to the village administrator; and a list of the villagers who did not. [The commander did not specify why he needed these lists.]

On April 5th 2021, a civilian from Hpapun Town stepped on a [newly-planted] landmine at Nga Inn Su junction in Na Koo Hta village, Na Koo Hkee village tract, Dwe Lo Township. He was taken to the clinic in LIB #434's camp for treatment. Local villagers do not know how badly he was injured. [KHRG was not able to obtain more information regarding this case.]

⁷ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

Further background reading on the consequences of fighting between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)"](#), May 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.
- ["Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmish between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA in Kaw T'Ree Township, February 2021"](#), March 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 Myanmar. 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.

Mutraw (Hpapun) District

