



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Tatmadaw mortar shelling and other military activities in Hpapun and Toungoo districts, December 2013

This News Bulletin describes the military activities of Tatmadaw forces in Lu Thaw Township in Hpapun District and Thandaunggyi Township in Toungoo District during December 2013. Local villagers reported that despite the 2012 ceasefire between the Karen National Union and the Burma government, ongoing Tatmadaw military activities including mortar shelling close to civilian areas mean that after decades of displacement, they still do not feel it is safe enough to return to their homes. In Toungoo District, the Tatmadaw fired heavy weapons while they were transporting rations and ammunition to a military base in order to deter attacks by the Karen National Liberation Army. This has caused feelings of insecurity among local villagers who, despite the ceasefire, perceive these activities as preparation for war.¹

Karen Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, reported that since the Karen National Union (KNU) and Burma government signed a preliminary ceasefire agreement in January 2012,² they had not seen the Tatmadaw launching attacks on villagers. However, they reported ongoing militarisation activities by the Tatmadaw, such as the repair of bases and vehicle roads used by the military, the transportation of rations and mortar shelling close to their communities. As of December 2013, they remained unable to return to their old villages and were living in hiding from the Burma armed forces.³

A KHRG community member who documents human rights violations in Hpapun District reported a number of incidents of shelling by the Tatmadaw. These incidents are likely intended to deter attacks by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) during re-supply exercises. On December 7th 2013, the Tatmadaw's Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #404, which is based on Paw

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun and Toungoo districts who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It summarises information from three incident reports and one situation update from Hpapun District received in March 2014, as well as one incident report and one situation report from Toungoo District received by KHRG in October 2013. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's redesigned Website.

² On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma government in Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State. The exact terms for a long-term peace plan are still under negotiation. For updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website](#). For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014.

³ For excerpts of complaint letters written by some of these IDPs, see "[Ongoing militarisation prevents Lu Thaw IDPs from returning home.](#)" KHRG, February 2014.

Khay Hkoh Hill and is under the command of Military Operations Command (MOC)⁴ #8, fired six mortars into an area close to H--- village and the K--- IDP community in Lu Thaw Township. The inhabitants of H--- fled their original homes in 1975 following attacks by the Tatmadaw, and the nearby community of K--- is made up of IDPs who fled to the area at a later date. Again, on December 8th 2013 the Tatmadaw fired four mortars and on December 9th they fired 18 mortars in the same area. On December 18th, Tatmadaw troops based at Hpla Hkoh army camp fired three mortars into an area close to H---, and on December 21st, Tatmadaw troops from LIB #405, which is based on Kuh Hkwah Hkoh Hill, also fired three mortars into an area close to H---. None of these incidents led to injuries of villagers.

When a KHRG community member met with H--- village head, Saw C---, and vice village head, Saw E---, they explained that, *“Since we fled from our [old] village on September 11th 1975, we have not been able to go back and live in our village. Now, even though it is a ceasefire period, we dare not go back as the Tatmadaw are based in [nearby] Hpla Hkoh [army camp] and they have repaired [reinforced] their place [army base] and their vehicle road, and are being sent rations. Also, they still fire mortars. On December 18th 2013, they [Tatmadaw troops at Hpla Hkoh] fired three mortars [close] to H---, but, because they did not reach the village and the plantations, villagers were not injured.”* Other villagers from H--- and K--- also raised their concerns about the situation in the area; they remain fearful and mindful.

Additional incidents of Tatmadaw mortar shelling were reported in Toungoo District. The Tatmadaw troops that are based in Thandaunggyi Township in Bayinnaung army base have a military training centre there, Burma government Military Training Centre No #2. They perform military training there every four months, during and after which they fire small arms and mortars, both as part of the training and as a celebration to mark its completion. Mortars are often fired into villagers’ plantations, damaging plants and crops. According to a KHRG community member, this is disturbing for local villagers and makes it difficult for them to tend to their plantations. The Tatmadaw have warned the villagers that they will not be held responsible for any casualties. According to a KHRG community member in Toungoo District, the mortar shelling happens every year.⁵ He also added that, on December 1st to 3rd 2013, the Tatmadaw fired mortars in the forest for three consecutive days.⁶

In another report from Toungoo District, villagers explained that, on December 1st 2013, the Tatmadaw’s LIB #377 based in Thandaunggyi Township transported rations and ammunition on the road that villagers use for traveling from Thandaunggyi Town to Maung Nweh Gyi village. The troops did not disturb the villagers as they have done in the past, but the local Tatmadaw MOC fired heavy weapons to deter attacks by the KNLA, causing fear among local villagers. An officer in charge of security during the supply exercise said at the time that the process would take at least two weeks. Local villagers believe that the Tatmadaw is supplying its base with more food and ammunition than necessary during the ceasefire, leading to fears that the war will start again.

Further background reading on the situation in Hpapun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, February 2013

⁴Military Operations Command. Comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁵ [“Toungoo Situation Update: Tantabin and Than Daung Townships, September to December 2012,”](#) KHRG, March 2013.

⁶ This information is from the situation update written by a KHRG in Toungoo District received by KHRG in December 2013.

- Hpapun Short Update: Ongoing Militarisation And Displacement In Lu Thaw Township, December 2013
- “Coercive land appropriation and KNLA landmine incident surrounds construction of a BGF army base in Hpapun District,” (July 2014)
- “Hpapun Short Update: Ongoing militarisation and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2013,” (July 2014)
- “Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire,” (July 2014)

Further background reading on the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire,” (July 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Motorbike accident kills villager in Thandaunggyi Township, August 2013,” (June 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Tatmadaw transport rations and ammunition in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013,” (May 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Sexual assault in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013,” (May 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Villagers request improved communication between KNU and local community, Htantabin Township, September 2012,” (May 2014)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



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Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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