



Situation Update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Htantabin Township, August to October 2017

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Htantabin Township, Toungoo District during the period between August and October 2017, including healthcare, education, villagers' livelihoods, gambling, Tatmadaw activities and location.

- *In the period between August and September 2017, the Tatmadaw based in Toungoo District is led by Military Operation Command (MOC) #13 and actively maintains at least two Tactical Operations Command and eight Light Infantry Battalions. Villagers report increased tensions after the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) refused to follow Tatmadaw orders to remove KNLA checkpoints in Shway Naung Pin village and Na Hsel Ta Maing area.*
 - *In August 2017, KNU Toungoo District administrators investigated and arrested U Kyaw U for committing a financial fraud and ordered two Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) soldiers who had allowed the fraud to take place to temporarily resign from their positions for six months.*
 - *As villagers in Thandaunggyi Township do not have a sufficient amount of available teachers, villagers have recruited recently graduated students and people from religious groups to be teachers.*
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Situation Update | Htantabin Township, Toungoo District (August to September 2017)

The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in November 2017. It was written by a community member in Toungoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Toungoo District, including 36 photographs.²

Introduction

This situation update describes events occurring in Taw Oo [Toungoo] District during the period between August 8th 2017 and October 31st 2017, including Tatmadaw activities, civilians' [livelihoods] situation, education, health and financial fraud.

¹ KHRG trains community members in southeast Burma/Myanmar to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, community members are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeastern Burma/Myanmar, 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 website.

Tatmadaw camps location and activities

Active Tatmadaw soldiers patrolling in Taw Oo [Toungoo] District are led by Military Operation Command³ [MOC] #13.

- Tactical Operations Command [TOC] #1 is based in P'Leh Wa Tatmadaw camp and led by Lit. Colonel Soe Moe Kyaw.
- TOC #2 is based in Bu Hsa Hkee camp and led by Colonel Htoo Hlaing.
- Light Infantry Battalion⁴ [LIB] #358 is based in Taing Pu camp, Way Tan Hkwon camp and Nat Tha Mi Taung hill camp and led by Colonel Myo Min Htun and Lit. Colonel Thaing Tan.
- LIB #555 is based in Way Tho Kyi and Maung Taing Kyi army camps and led by Colonel Mo Kyaw U and Captain Hsan U.
- LIB #557 is based in Htin Shu Taung camp and led by Lit. Colonel Way Pwo Aung and is also based in Bu Hsa Hkee camp and led by Captain Zay Ya Htwun.
- LIB #558 is based in Hkay Pu camp and led by Lit. Colonel Kyaw Myo Taik and Major Zay Ya So.
- LIB #559 is based in Maung Nwe Gye camp and Nan Chein Hkwin camp and led by Lit. Colonel Ye Win Aung and is based in Leik Pwa Lay camp and led by Colonel Myo Min Hton.
- LIB #561 is based in Kyi Chaung camp and led by Major Zaw Nyein and is based in Lay Hsel Shit Maing camp and led by Major Kyaw Lwin Hein.
- LIB #585 is based in Ta Hsel Chauk Mee La, Na Hsel Mee La, Pa Leh Wa, Pwaung Tho and Thit Say Taung camps and are led by Lit. Colonel Kyaw Zaw Ya and Major Nyi Nyi Hton.
- LIB #603 is based in Leik Tho Town camp and patrols in Leik Tho area.



This photo was taken by a KHRG community member on October 28th 2017 in Shway Nyaung Pin village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. This photo shows a Tatmadaw truck returning after transporting soldiers and artillery to set up their army camp near the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA] checkpoints in Shway Naung Pin village and Na Hsel Ta Maing area. They recently ordered the KNLA to remove their checkpoints, but the KNLA rejected it because of KNLA policy to keep the checkpoints in that areas. [Photo: KHRG]

The Tatmadaw based in Taw Oo [Toungoo] District rotate and send rations once every four months. Villagers from A--- [village] reported that the Tatmadaw have also been sending more soldiers and ammunitions [during the period between August and October].

In October 2017 the Tatmadaw ordered Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA] soldiers based at the KNLA checkpoints in Shway Naung Pin village and Na Hsel Ta Maing area to take down their checkpoint, but the KNLA refused to follow the Tatmadaw order. As a result, the Tatmadaw set up bases for soldiers from the Battalions under Military Operations Command [MOC] #13 next to the KNLA checkpoint.

Healthcare

Healthcare services in Taw Oo [Toungoo] District are insufficient, especially in villages under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government in Per Htee area, Htaung Ta Htoo [Htantabin]. The

³ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

⁴ 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.

most prevalent illnesses afflicting villagers in Taw Oo District are diarrhoea, malaria, stroke and stomach aches. There are some Burma/Myanmar government midwives [Mother and Child Care] in Lay and Sha Say Bo villages, but due to a shortage of medical supplies, villagers must travel to the Htoe Lwee Wah [Karen Department of Health and Welfare] clinic when they are sick.

Villagers' livelihoods

After the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement [NCA] was signed [between the KNU and the Burma/Myanmar government in November 2015], the livelihoods situation for villagers in Taw Oo District has improved. Thus, villagers can travel to their farms and plantations safely without being attacked [by the Tatmadaw]. Villagers in Htaw Ta Htoo [Htantabin] and Daw Hpa Hko [Thandaunggyi] Townships are working on plain farms, plantations and some villagers work selling fruits [such as cardamom] to secure their livelihoods. In August 2017, villagers' cardamom plants were attacked by wild pigs and other insects so plantation owners face livelihood challenges [because they earn insufficient money from their crop].



This photo was taken by a KHRG community member on October 12th 2017 in Maw Hkoo Der village, East Klay Wa area, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. This photo shows villagers' cardamom plantations attacked by wild pigs. Villagers are also concerned about a drop in the price of cardamom.
[Photo: KHRG]

Financial fraud

In Htee Pu Khee village, Htee Tha Hkaw also known as Htee Tha Saw area, Daw Hpa Hko [Thandaunggyi] Township a financial [scheme] known as *Ah Leh Kya Gnway Hto Yu Mu Laung Tan Ka Sa* was led by a rich 50 year old villager, U⁵ Kyaw U who lives in Ah Mat Chaung She Thon, Hkay Ma Thi road, Section #7, Hpwa Po Town. His father's name is U Myint. He [U Kyaw U] first met with a Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA] soldier named Saw⁶ Chit Sa Ya in Kwun Pin village, who then took him [U Kyaw U] to meet the KNLA Battalion #5, Company #2 Commander Saw Wah Htoo. They then discussed the proposed financial scheme and Saw Wah Htoo gave permission to U Kyaw U to proceed with the financial scheme on May 2nd 2017. After KNLA Township and [Toungoo] District level leaders received information about the financial scheme issue, they requested organisers and participants in the financial scheme to attend a meeting with them, but the organisers and participants in the financial scheme did not meet with them. Nevertheless, representatives of the Township and District level KNLA researched into the financial scheme and concluded that the scheme cheated the villagers of their money and should be considered financial fraud. According to the financial fraud, each participant was [initially] requested to contribute 1,000 kyat (US \$0.75)⁷ to U Kyaw U, with the promise of potentially getting back up to 10,000 kyat (US \$7.52). U Kyaw U would take approximately 30% of the money for himself and give approximately 70% of the money to one random contributor that he selected. Due to potential of a high payoff, many villagers participated. Some participating villagers even sold their land [that their family rely on to secure their livelihoods]. Consequently, after KNU Taw Oo District leaders investigated this issue, they took action against the people organising the financial fraud and the local authorities who permitted the fraud to be implemented in the community. KNLA Battalion #5, Company #2 Commander Saw

⁵ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

⁶ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁷ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the January 25th 2018 official market rate of 1,326.11 kyats to US \$1.

Wah Htoo and KNLA soldier Saw Chit Sa Ya were accused of abusing their power and the rule of the [KNLA] army so they [Saw Wah Htoo and Saw Chit Sa Ya] temporarily had to resign from their positions for six months as punishment. On August 22nd 2017, KNU Taw Oo District administrators held a consultation meeting with villagers in Hta Pu Hkee village to discuss and gather villagers' perspectives regarding the KNU taking action to halt the financial fraud.



These photos were taken on August 22nd 2017 in Hta Poo Hkee village, Leik Tho area, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. These photos show KNU Toungoo District leaders holding a consultation meeting with the local villagers to discuss the KNU decision to halt the financial fraud. The meeting was also an attempt to build a stronger understanding between KNU Toungoo District leaders and local civilians. [Photos: KHRG]

Education

After the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement⁸ [NCA], Klay Wah Mu area, Daw Hpa Hko [Thandaunggyi] Township, Taw Oo [Toungoo] District has not received any educational support from the Burma/Myanmar government. This area is located in a KNU area so they are able to access some support from the Karen Education Department [KED].⁹ The schools [in Klay Wah Mu area] only go up to Standard Four¹⁰ so some students who finished Standard Four have to continue their studies at KNU Daw Hpa Hko [Thandaunggyi] and Htaw Ta Htoo [Htantabin] Township schools. Some students attended Htoe Lwee Wah high school and Burma/Myanmar government schools in towns such as Thandaunggyi Town.

Villagers also face the challenge of not having enough available teachers. Consequently, many students' educations are interrupted so students' parents had to internally recruit villagers who

⁸ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups and on-going conflicts in ethnic regions, a [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement \(NCA\)](#) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the KNU, see "[Myanmar signs ceasefire with eight armed groups](#)," Reuters, October 15th 2015. The signing of the NCA followed the January 12th 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement between the KNU and Burma/Myanmar government in Hpa-an. For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the preliminary ceasefire, see [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, May 2014, "[Ongoing militarisation in southeast Myanmar](#)," KHRG, October 2016 and "[Dooplaya Field Report: A quasi-ceasefire? Developments after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, from January to December 2016](#)," KHRG, September 2017.

⁹ The Karen National Union's Education Department. The main goals of the KED are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture. During the civil war in Burma/Myanmar the KED became the main organisation providing educational services in the KNU controlled areas in southeast Burma/Myanmar. The KED also previously oversaw the educational system in the seven refugee camps along the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border, however in 2009 these activities were restructured under the Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE). See "[Conflict Erupts over Govt teachers deployed to KNU areas](#)," Karen News, August 20th 2013 and the KRCEE website: "[About](#)," accessed July 21st 2015.

¹⁰ A standard refers to a school year in the education system of Burma/Myanmar. The basic education system has a 5-4-2 structure. Primary school runs from Standard 1 to Standard 5, lower secondary school is Standard 6 to Standard 9, and upper secondary school is Standard 10 to Standard 11.

finished high school to be teachers, pay some teachers' salaries and help teachers' work [on teachers' farms].

Conclusion

The information reported above reflect the incidents I [KHRG researcher] have witnessed. Students' parents are struggling to locally recruit teachers in order for their children to access education and support their children's education. Students' parents from Ya Lo village, Maw Nay Pwa area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District are uneducated, but nonetheless work very hard to improve their children's educations by recruiting teachers from religious groups. Regarding healthcare, villagers who face illnesses usually treat them[selves] with herbal medicine, but when they face serious illnesses they have to go to hospital in towns such as Toungoo Town. Nevertheless, villagers who can read and write were sent on behalf of their village to attend basic healthcare training organised by the KNU health department [KDHW]. Many village representatives attended the KNU health department medical training in 2016 and 2017 at the [KNLA] Battalion #6 office. Those representatives will return to their villages and distribute their knowledge into the village regarding healthcare.

After the NCA was signed in 2015, the Tatmadaw do not follow the [NCA] agreement and instead patrol wherever they want to go without informing the KNU [KNLA]. Civilians are concerned that this behaviour may negatively affect the peace process. Civilians request that all Tatmadaw soldiers remove their army camps from areas near villages.

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

- "Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, February 2017," (January 2018)
- "Toungoo Situation Update: Thandaunggyi Township, March to May 2017," (December 2017)
- "Toungoo Interview: Naw Ka---, October 2016," (June 2017)
- "Toungoo Interview: Saw A---, January 2016," (February 2017)
- "Toungoo Interview: Naw A---, November 2015," (February 2017)

