



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

May 24, 2018 / KHRG #18-41-S2

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## **Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2018**

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District during the period between February and March 2018, including information about fighting, internal displacement, education, health and livelihoods challenges.*

- *The Tatmadaw have been reconstructing a military road in Karen National Union (KNU) territory between Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts since November 2017 without permission from local civilians or KNU authorities.*
  - *The Tatmadaw's road construction damaged local communities' lands, plain and hill farms and reserved forests without any prior consultation and compensation for those impacted.*
  - *Fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2018 and lasted until March 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, forcing 2,295 individuals from Ler Mu Plaw, Saw Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts to become internally displaced.*
  - *Civilian home guards were shot on sight by Tatmadaw soldiers and buffalos were killed and injured by shrapnel from mortar shells in March 2018.*
  - *Civilians urged the Tatmadaw to withdraw their troops and stop the vehicle road construction between Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts, Lu Thaw Township.*
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### **Situation Update | Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District (February to March 2018)**

*The following Situation Update was received by KHRG in April 2018. It was written by a community member in Hpapun 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.<sup>1</sup> This report was received along with other information from Hpapun District, including one other situation update, 24 incident reports, 23 interviews, 322 photographs and 33 video clips.<sup>2</sup>*

#### **Introduction**

This situation update describes events occurring in Kay Pu and Ler Mu Plaw village tracts in northern Lu Thaw Township [Hpapun District] during the period between February and March

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

12<sup>th</sup> 2018, including information on Tatmadaw activities, internal displacement, education and food security.

### Tatmadaw activities

From November 2017 until March 2018, the Tatmadaw<sup>3</sup> constructed a military road between Ler Mu Plaw village, [Ler Mu Paw village tract] and Hsaw Law Daw Hkoh area, Kay Pu village tract. The Tatmadaw have been constructing this vehicle road for military purposes in Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>4</sup> territory without permission from either local civilians or the KNU. The Tatmadaw personnel who have been building the vehicle road are from District #2 [Toungoo District] and District #3 [Nyaunglebin District]. The Tatmadaw soldiers based in the army camps [in Hpapun District] have been acting as security guards for the other Tatmadaw personnel who have been building the road. The Tatmadaw's road construction project damaged many civilians' plain and hill farms, lands and reserved forests in three village tracts: Saw Mu Plaw, Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts. As a result, clashes broke out between the Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]<sup>5</sup> on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2018 and civilians have been displaced from March 4<sup>th</sup> 2018 until now, March 12<sup>th</sup> 2018. The Internally Displaced People (IDPs)<sup>6</sup> are from Ler Mu Plaw, Htee Kheh Hkee, Yay Go Lo Der, Ler Mu Plaw village tract, Shoe Per Hko, T'May Hkee, Thay Thu Hkee, Bo Na Der and Taw Hku Mu Der, Kay Pu village tract, and Htee Lee Kha Hkee, Bee Hko Der and Blaw Hko villages, Saw Mu Plaw village tract. The table below displays information on the recorded number of IDPs in Lu Thaw Township (Between March 3<sup>rd</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> 2018).

No.	Village Name	Household number	Village tract	Total IDPs and gender		
				Female	Male	Total
1.	I---	35	Kay Pu	134	146	280
2.	J---	10	Kay Pu	47	37	84
3.	K---	38	Kay Pu	152	164	316
4.	L---	21	Kay Pu	83	74	157
5.	N---	19	Saw Muh Plaw	58	88	146
6.	O---	19	Saw Muh Plaw	64	63	127
7.	Q---	23	Ler Muh Plaw	107	102	209
8.	P---	13	Saw Mu Plaw	40	55	95
9.	M---	48	Kay Pu	168	169	337
10.	D---	50	Ler Muh Plaw	183	181	364
11.	Bb---	17	Ler Muh Plaw	97	83	180
Total:		293 households	Three village tracts	1,133 females	1,162 males	2,295 IDPs

Civilians who are in precarious situations are also preparing to flee from Htee Si Baw and Htee Bway Hkee villages, Kay Pu village tract, They Hkee and Hteh Has Hkee villages, Saw Mu Plaw village tract and Hser Htee village, Ler Mu Plaw village tract. There were 2,295 IDPs from these three village tracts and 604 civilians who were endangered between March 4<sup>th</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup> 2018.<sup>7</sup> The Tatmadaw also shot villager home guards<sup>8</sup> on sight whenever they encountered

<sup>3</sup> Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military throughout KHRG's 25 year reporting period. The Myanmar military were commonly referred to by villagers in KHRG research areas as SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) from 1988 to 1997 and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011, which were the Tatmadaw-proclaimed names of the military government of Burma. Villagers also refer to Tatmadaw in some cases as simply "Burmese" or "Burmese soldiers".

<sup>4</sup> The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government

<sup>5</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the KNU.

<sup>6</sup> Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs are individuals or groups who are forced to flee their homes but do not travel across international borders, and thus do not fall under the definition of a 'refugee' as defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

<sup>7</sup> The number of IDPs and endangered civilians are estimates from the period between March 3<sup>rd</sup> and March 16<sup>th</sup>, and have changed since this situation update was written.

them, and fighting broke out [between the Tatmadaw and KNLA] one to two times per day. No villager home guards were killed, but one home guard was seriously injured [by a Tatmadaw bullet]. One villager's buffalo was killed and another villager was also injured by the Tatmadaw's shrapnel from a mortar explosion in March 2018 in Ler Mu Plaw village tract.



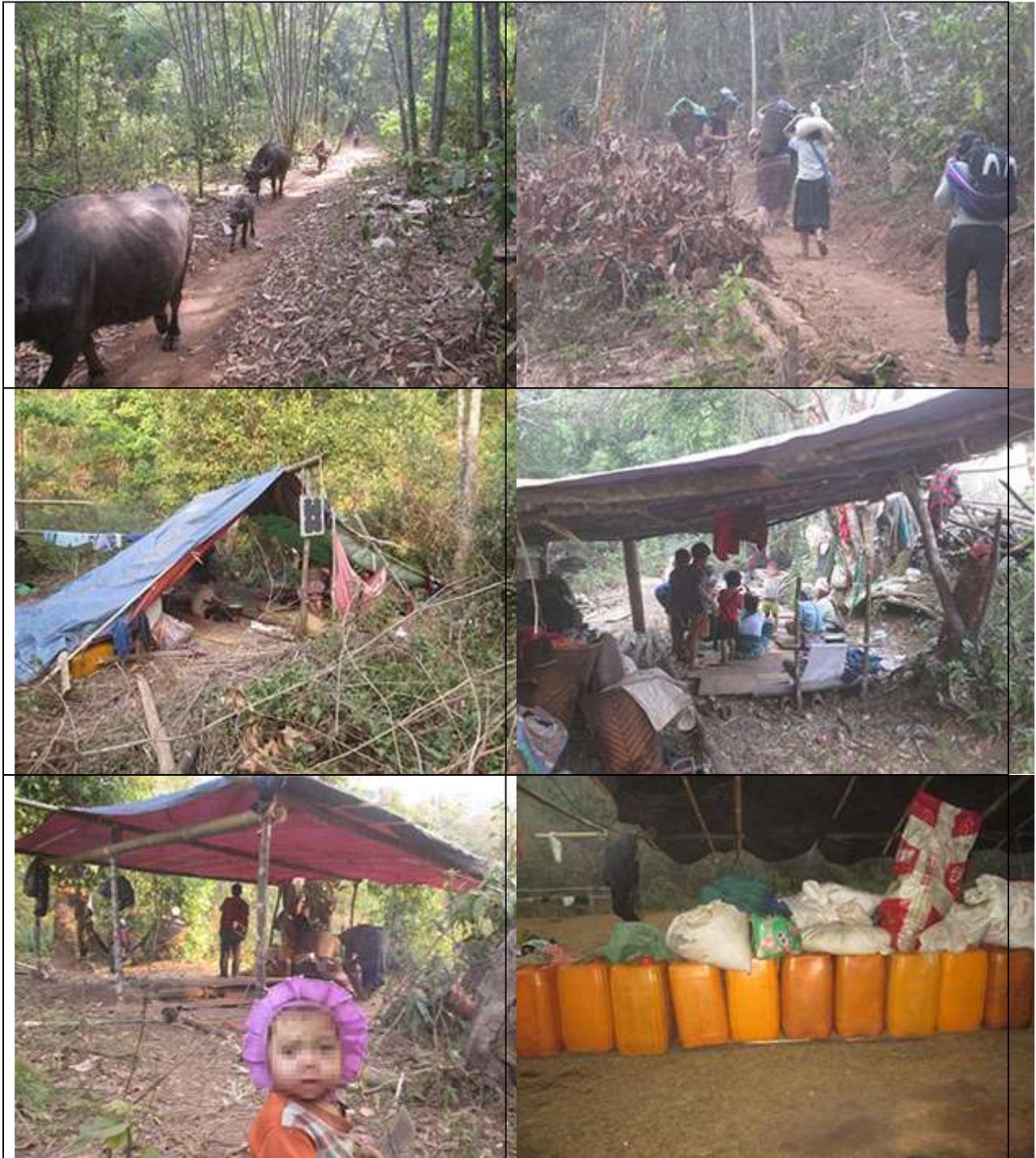
These photos were taken on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018 in Saw Mu Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. These photos show the Tatmadaw camp in Saw Muh Plaw village tract and the military road that they constructed. [Photos: KHRG]

### **Situation of villagers**

In response to the fighting, villagers dug deep holes in the ground to burrow and protect themselves from the shooting. They also set up bamboo stake fences around their areas, recruited more home guards, and relocated to other areas for safety. There are currently 2,295 IDPs [at the time this report was written] from Ler Mu Plaw, Saw Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts. The IDPs could not carry enough food [rice] with them when they were fleeing, so they had to return to their villages to retrieve food [from their hiding places] during the night while home guards guarded villagers for their security. In March 2018, villagers from E--- village, Kay Pu village tract who returned to their villages and retrieved food [rice] with home guards were shot at by the Tatmadaw. Some IDPs could not return to their villages, so they had to borrow food [rice] from their neighbours who could return to their villages. In addition, there were four schools where students were not able to complete their final exams because the schools closed [during the fighting] and because the students [and teachers] had to flee to different locations. The four schools impacted by fighting were Cc--- Dd---, Bb--- and D--- schools. Also, the weather during this period [between February and March] was still cold, so IDPs faced health challenges because they did not have any access to healthcare services. IDPs contracted illnesses, including cough and malaria. Lastly, IDPs had to carry elderly people who were unable to walk long distances, so this was another problem facing civilians during the conflict.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen State to address Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that *gher der* were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable. For more on the *gher der* see: "[Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State](#)," KHRG, August 2010



These photos were taken on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 in Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District. These photos show villagers fleeing from the Tatmadaw attack carrying packages of rice and taking their buffalos with them into the jungle. The villagers stored rice in the orange gallons displayed in the last picture in order to protect the rice from insects and water when they buried the rice gallons under the ground. [Photos: KHRG]

The IDPs [in Lu Thaw Township] started fleeing from their villages on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2018 due to the fighting between the Tatmadaw and KNLA in Lu Thaw Township. The Tatmadaw from District #2 [Toungoo District] and District #3 [Nyaunglebin District] have been reconstructing a military road from Ler Mu Plaw village, Ler Mu Plaw village tract to Hsaw Law Daw area, Kay Pu village tract.

As a result, villagers [IDPs] had to retrieve food [rice from their villages or secret rice stores] during the night in fear. Civilians who had motorcycles helped their neighbours carry rice from the villages to their hiding sites. There are about 30 villagers who own motorcycles in Ler Mu Plaw village tract, and they were able to do this only when the situation seemed secure. Similarly, villagers in Kay Pu village tract also did this, though some villagers had to carry [rice] by themselves. Villagers whose villages were situated close to the Tatmadaw patrolled areas [Tatmadaw army bases or roads] could not get rice from their villages.

Villagers are concerned about their livelihoods in the upcoming year. If they cannot return to their villages and work on their plain and hill farms, they will face major problems [food shortages]. Thus, villagers urge the Tatmadaw to retreat [withdraw from their army camps in Hpapun District]. If they do not remove their camps from our area, the conflict might happen again and may be worse than the current conflict. During the past few years, since the ceasefire, villagers worked as daily labourers and earned income so they could buy tractors, rice mills and sugarcane mills so they could work on their farms in both the rainy season and the winter. Some villagers could sell [their crops] and share [crops or vegetables] with their neighbours. Villagers bought and sold food, as well as cows and buffalos in their communities. [Compared to the past], there has been some development in the [Lu Thaw Township] community.

Now [in March], villagers have to hide their belongings [food, clothes, etc...] in secret locations, and as a result, some of their clothes were damaged by mice and ants. In addition, whenever the Tatmadaw found villagers' hidden belongings, they destroyed them. Some villagers' zinc boxes where they stored clothes were rusted [damaged]. These problems caused civilians to become concerned and worried [for their future] so they decided to recruit more home guards and buy more walkie-talkies for communication. Civilians reported to KHRG that, *"We will not displace to other countries and we will die in our [indigenous] land. We also would like to inform the Karen people and other people in foreign countries to help us and give us suggestions [on how to respond the Tatmadaw attack]. We urge you [Karen people and others people in foreign countries] to pressure the Burma/Myanmar government and Tatmadaw who are currently oppressing [attacking] us to [remove their army] and stop their road construction project from our area."*

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

- "Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township and Dwe Lo Township, July to September 2017," (March 2018)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Dwe Lo Township, 2016 to February 2017," (August 2017)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, July 2015," (April 2017)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw B---, October 2016," (March 2017)
- "Hpapun Interview: Saw A---, March 2016," (January 2017)
- "Hpapun Field Report: January to December 2015," (December 2016)

## Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)