



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Situation Update**

23 January 2019 / KHRG # 18-63-S1

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**Hpapun Situation Update: Tatmadaw road construction activities results in skirmishes with the KNLA and displacement in Lu Thaw Township**

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District, between March and May 2018.<sup>1</sup> Tatmadaw soldiers entered areas under KNU control in Lu Thaw Township with the intention of building a road. This led to skirmishes with the KNLA. The Tatmadaw occupied and fired mortars in several villages, which caused the displacement of 3,088 persons. This situation threatened the livelihood of local people, as well as their access to education, food and healthcare.*

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**Territorial Skirmishes**

On 4 March 2018, Tatmadaw soldiers entered into areas under KNU control in Lu Thaw Township to build a road. Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) #20, #351, #439 and #598 (Strategic Operations Command (SOC) #2, Southern Command Headquarters (SCH)) built a road from Ler Muh Plaw to Moh Kyoh Hkoh. Infantry Battalions (IB) #60, #53, #48 and #350 (SOC #3, SCH) also started building a road from Hsa Law Kyoh to Paw Nah Kyoh under the supervision of SOC #3 commander Yang Pyay.

SOC #2 soldiers from Htaw Muh Pleh Meh military camp occupied the Ler Muh Plaw cemetery on 4 March 2018. On 5 April 2018, they occupied land in Htee Hse Hta and Ler Kaw Hkoh. They went back to their base on 11 April 2018, before occupying more land in Baw Htaw Kyoh on 4 May 2018. On 5 May 2018, they started road excavation activities in Ler Muh Plaw, and fired mortars at Ler Muh Plaw and Ta Baw Meh Plaw. On 7 May 2018, they occupied Ler Kaw Hkoh, Sho Day, Sho Peh Hkoh and Moh Kyoh Hkoh.

SOC #3 soldiers from Hsa Law Kyoh military camp occupied land in Paw Nah Kyoh and Way Day Kyoh Hkoh on 4 March 2018, which resulted in skirmishes with the KNLA. In these two locations, the Tatmadaw fired mortars at local farms, causing the population to flee. The soldiers retreated to their camp on 26 April 2018, but came back to Paw Nah Kyoh on 30 April 2018. On 4 May 2018, they arrived at Paw Nah Kyoh with an excavator. The excavator subsequently joined SOC #2 soldiers and reached Wa Day Hkoh (6 May 2018), Ler Krah (13 May 2018), Sho Peh Hkoh (14 May 2018) and Bway Day (16 May 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information provided by a community member in Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground.

[On 17 May 2018, national media reported that a KNU delegation met with the Tatmadaw chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. He agreed to postpone road construction activities and to halt military deployment in the Ler Mu Plaw Area.]<sup>2</sup>

On 18 May 2018, the KNU ordered the KNLA soldiers not to disturb the Tatmadaw's retreat. On 19 May 2018, the SOC #2 soldiers retreated to Sho Peh Hkoh before going back to Htaw Muh Pleh Meh military camp on 20 May 2018. On 21 May 2018, KNLA soldiers destroyed the Tatmadaw temporary camps. The KNLA reported that Tatmadaw soldiers took rice, goats and chickens from the villagers. Nine landmines planted by the Tatmadaw were also found by the KNLA. Both of these actions are violations of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Code of Conduct, which states that the Tatmadaw should cease the laying of mines, and avoid forcibly taking property from civilian populations.

### **Widespread Displacement**

Overall, the Tatmadaw's road construction activities and associated skirmishes caused the displacement of 3,088 civilians, or the entire population of 17 villages in Saw Muh Plaw, Ler Muh Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts.

Because of this displacement, local farmers had to interrupt their field clearing activities in March 2018. This situation threatened the livelihood of entire communities who rely on agriculture as their main source of income. People from Ler Muh Plaw had to wait until the SOC #2 soldiers retreated to Htaw Muh Pleh military camp on 11 April 2018 to resume their agricultural activities. Those from Kay Pu had to wait until 26 April 2018, when the SOC #3 soldiers retreated to Hsa Law Kyoh military camp. However, the soldiers came back on 30 April 2018, causing the villagers to flee again.

Some displaced villagers reportedly suffered from fever, running nose, malaria, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Local leaders tried their best to provide health care services. The staff from the clinic covering Ler Muh Plaw and Saw Muh Plaw relocated to Khaw Wah Plaw and kept providing services to displaced villagers. Others were able to access healthcare at P'Na Aay Per Koh and Kay Pu clinics. The KNU Lu Thaw Township authorities also provided healthcare services and medicines to displaced villagers in Maw Peh Koh, in cooperation with the NGO Free Burma Rangers (FBR).

The Tatmadaw's activities caused seven schools to close (Ler Muh Day middle school, Loh Koh, Sho Peh Koh, K'Baw Khee, Thay Thoo Khee, Boh Na Der and Taw Ku Muh Der primary schools), forcing some displaced villagers to build temporary schools. On 17 May 2018, the Karen Education Department's (KED) secretary for Hpapun district, Saw Hpyah Saeh, met with the KED supervisor for Lu Thaw Township, Saw Wah Htaw. They discussed the best location to build a school for displaced children and how to assist the villagers in building it.

Further background reading on the Tatmadaw road construction activities in Hpapun District can be found in the following KHRG report:

[“Hpapun Incident Report: Tatmadaw road construction results in the indiscriminate firing of mortars and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, March 2018”](#), (June 2018)

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<sup>2</sup> The Irrawaddy (May 2018), [“Tatmadaw Agrees to Halt Contentious Road Project in Karen State”](#).