



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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A Karen Community Leader, Saw O Moo, Was Murdered by Tatmadaw forces in Hpapun District, April 2018

This News Bulletin describes the murder of the indigenous Karen community leader Saw O Moo by Tatmadaw forces in Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. On April 5th 2018, Saw O Moo was murdered by Tatmadaw forces on the edge of Htee Hsee Hta Plaw [also known as T'Ree Plaw] farm area, Ler Mu Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township. He was on his way back home from a meeting to organise humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs). Until now, the Tatmadaw has refused to allow his family to retrieve his body and bury it according to the traditional Karen way.¹ This News Bulletin will pay tribute to the important work that Saw O Moo did for his community, and will analyse how his murder violated the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) Code of Conduct.

Introduction

An indigenous Karen community leader, Saw² O Moo was murdered by Tatmadaw forces on April 5th 2018. According to information received by KHRG, he was shot and killed by Tatmadaw Southern Command Headquarter (SCH) Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³ #351 when he arrived at Wah Klo Hta place, on the edge of Htee Hsee Hta Plaw [also known as T'Ree Plaw] farm, Ler Mu Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township. He was on his way back home by motorbike from a meeting to organise humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs)⁴. At the time of his murder, Saw O Moo was riding with Saw Hser Blut Doh, a Battalion Deputy Commander from Karen National Defence Organisation [KNDO]⁵ Battalion #1, Company #2. The Battalion Deputy Commander had asked Saw O Moo to drive him to Ler Mu Plaw.

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It summarises information from two situation update and tow interview received by KHRG in April. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast 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.

² Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

³ 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.

⁴ IDP refers to an internally displaced person.

⁵ The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

During the incident, Saw O Moo was shot dead. Until now, the location of his body is unknown. The Battalion Deputy Commander escaped, leaving four mortar shells in the area where the incident took place. Saw O Moo's motorcycle was damaged and his motorcycle battery was stolen by Tatmadaw.

When Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]⁶ soldiers approached at the incident place, they only saw Saw O Moo's blood on the ground and his damaged motorcycle. Because Saw O Moo's body has not been found, local community members are afraid that he might have been tortured until his death. They believe that the Tatmadaw might have buried his body secretly.



These photos were taken on April 13th 2018 in Htee Hsee Hta Plaw [also known as T'Ri Plaw] farm area, Ler Mu Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. The first picture shows Saw O Moo's motorbike where he was shot by the Tatmadaw forces of the Southern Command Headquarter (SCH) LIB#351. The Tatmadaw did not take his motorcycle, but they damaged it by cutting off the motorcycle wire and stealing the motorcycle battery. The second picture shows his blood on the ground and the bamboo, which was damaged by Tatmadaw bullets. [Photos: KHRG]

About Saw O Moo

Saw O Moo is an indigenous man from Ler Mu Plaw area and he was 42 years old. He was survived by his wife and his seven young children. His youngest child is only ten months old. According to a documentary by the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network [KESAN]⁷, Saw O Moo was a defender of Karen indigenous rights, of their ancestral territories, traditions, cultures, and environment. He was actively engaged in community work and development as an indigenous Karen community leader. He worked for community development for Salween Peace Park and Luthaw Paw Day. He was passionate about education, environmental conservation and wildlife protection. KHRG has received other reports of Tatmadaw shooting at civilians on motorbikes in the morning of April 5th, 2018.⁸

Saw O Moo's murder: A Violation of NCA Code of Conduct and of International Human Rights

Saw O Moo's wife, Naw⁹ Paw Tha, explained why her husband was still travelling during the conflict period: he believed that the Tatmadaw will not shoot civilians because of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement [NCA]¹⁰ Code of Conduct. Prior to his death, the Tatmadaw put letters on

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

⁷ For detail information about Saw O Moo's case see "[Saw O Moo: Defender of Indigenous Karen Territories, the Environment and Way of Life](#)", KESAN, May 2018.

⁸ This information is taken from unpublished report received in May 2018.

⁹ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

¹⁰ 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,

civilian roads to explain the purpose of their military operation and build better relations with the local community. The letters deposited in the area stressed that the Tatmadaw would not harm civilians.

Despite this, Tatmadaw forces from Southern Command Headquarter (SCH) LIB #351 did not keep their word and shot Saw O Moo, an unarmed civilian. Although the Deputy Commander he was travelling with had two guns and four grenades on him, the killing of Saw O Moo is a violation of the NCA Code of Conduct.

By killing Saw O Moo, the Tatmadaw violated the following Chapter 3, Section 9 (b) of the NCA Code of Conduct, where they agreed to *"avoid acts violating a person's dignity, violence, extrajudicial detention, kidnapping, torture, inhumane treatment, imprisonment, killing or otherwise causing the disappearance of the individual."* They also violated Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR],¹¹ that states that *"everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."* The murder of Saw O Moo by Tatmadaw forces is also a war crime, since it violates Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which prohibits the murder of civilian populations.¹²

The Tatmadaw released a statement regarding the incident on True News Information Team,¹³ in which they denied wrongdoing and claimed that Saw O Moo ran away when they ordered him to stop. In this statement, the Tatmadaw claimed that the two civilians that they shot at were suspected of being involved in sabotage attacks and planting mines. They also captured one of the men dead with evidence of his wrong-doing. This statement was also mentioned in The Irrawaddy news report¹⁴.

Regarding the Tatmadaw statement, Naw K--- responded that she strongly believed that her husband would not have run away during the incident because his blood was found on the ground where the incident took place, as well as on surrounding trees and bamboo.

Saw Hser Blut Doh who was travelling with Saw O Moo reported that, *"When I saw the Burma Army soldiers, I immediately jumped off from the motorbike and ran. Saw O Moo could not stop his motorbike immediately, so the soldiers shot him. I could hear gunshots as I ran into the forest."*, as reported by Burma Link¹⁵.

Contested Military Road Reconstruction led to clashes and displacement

Since November 2017¹⁶, there has been tension in this area between the Tatmadaw and the KNU. The Tatmadaw have been reconstructing a road used for military purposes between Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu village tracts. The Tatmadaw personnel who constructed the military road are from Toungoo District (which is Tatmadaw Southern Command Headquarter) and also show

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. Karen civilians and the KNU have more recently expressed their concerns about the lack of progress in moving from a ceasefire towards genuine political dialogue. See, [KNU Chair Highlights Weaknesses In The NCA During Anniversary Celebrations](#), Karen News, October 2017 and [NCA signatories urge govt to reboot peace process](#), DVB, October 2017. In February 2018, two additional armed ethnic groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

¹¹ See ["Universal Declaration of Human Rights" UDHR, December 1948](#).

¹² See ["Practice Relating to Rule 89. Violence to Life" UCRC, 1949](#).

¹³ For more detail information please see ["Military news group"](#), Tatmadaw Defence Services Office, April 2018.

¹⁴ For more detail information please see ["Tatmadaw Claims Killed Karen Community Leader Was a Plainclothes Fighter"](#), The Irrawaddy, April 2018.

¹⁵ For more detail information please see ["A Tribute to Saw O Moo – Karen Environment and Social Action Network"](#), Burma Link, April 2018.

¹⁶ See ["Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2018"](#), KHRG, May 2018.

in Burma Link¹⁷ that the Tatmadaw Southern Command had issued prior notification to the KNLA and Nyaunglebin District. This road is in Karen National Union (KNU) territory and local civilians use it to travel. It would also cross the farm land of local communities and indigenous Karen reserved forest without having prior permission from either local civilians or the KNU authority. Local civilians are in risk to travel for their livelihoods because of Tatmadaw activities against them such as shoot on sight. The murder of Saw O Moo by Tatmadaw is an example of how dangerous military roads can be for local communities.

The Tatmadaw soldiers based in the army camps in Hpapun District have been providing security for the other Tatmadaw personnel who have been reconstructing the military road. The Tatmadaw's operation road reconstruction project has 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. Despite the land confiscation and land damage, there have been no consultations or compensations to the local population impacted by this road construction. Because the Tatmadaw military road construction was planned in the KNU control area without the permission from KNU authority, the Tatmadaw abused the NCA Code of Conduct Article 8 Section B, which states that "movement of armed troops in the areas controlled by the other is allowed only after obtaining prior agreement".

Saw O Moo's wife Naw K--- reported that local civilians did not consent to the Tatmadaw reconstruction of their military road, because civilians wanted to construct a road that would serve their transportation needs. As a result, clashes broke out between Tatmadaw and Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA] on March 5th 2018, which led to the displacement of more than 2,000 civilians who fled into the forest, including Saw O Moo's family.

Impact on Saw O Moo's family

When KHRG researcher interviewed his wife Naw K--- and she reported that, *"Even if I ask them [Tatmadaw] to resurrect my husband, they cannot do it so I strongly urge all of the Tatmadaw to withdraw from my area [Mu Traw District] and I don't want any compensation for my dead husband case. I am happy to pay compensation back to them for their leaving my area. This is my biggest dream and calling for the Tatmadaw to go back [to their place]"* She calls to stop the Tatmadaw defeating indigenous people. She urges the Tatmadaw to withdraw from indigenous Karen community is just she is passionately desiring for genuine peace for her children and local civilians in order they will be able to return to their village and work in their farms. Saw O Moo's family is currently displaced and hiding in the forest due to conflicts between Tatmadaw and KNLA. Being displaced has been a challenge to their livelihoods. Saw O Moo's wife Naw K--- has to overcome this problem alone. She has to manage family issues without her husband, such as securing her family's



This photo was taken on April 13th 2018 in Ler Mu Plaw area, Ler Mu Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Hpapun District. This photo shows Saw O Moo's wife, Naw K---. She is [censor for security] years old. She reported the details of her husband's murder by Tatmadaw forces. She also reported her opinion regarding the statement released by the Tatmadaw denying being responsible for the murder of Saw O Moo. She explained the challenges her family now faces. [Photo: KHRG]

¹⁷ For more detail information please see ["Tatmadaw Claims Killed Karen Community Leader Was a Plainclothes Fighter"](#), The Irrawaddy, April 2018.

livelihood, and ensuring her seven children's health and education. This is a huge burden for a woman to deal with alone in a conflict zone. She added that, *"I am currently displacing into the forest because of the Tatmadaw activities so the biggest problem that I am facing now is food and health problems."*

Conclusion

Saw O Moo's murder by Tatmadaw forces is a violation of human rights, as well as a violation of the NCA Code of Conduct. His death profoundly affected his wife and children, who face livelihood challenges and are worried about their future. In Karen culture, a father is the main shelter of the lives of his wife and children. His death is a great loss to the Karen community, which has one fewer indigenous leader advocating for their rights.

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, September 2017 and February 2018", (June 2018)
- "Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2018", (May 2018)
- "Attacks on villagers, ongoing fighting and displacement in Hpapun and Toungoo districts from January to April 2018", (May 2018)
- "KHRG tribute to Saw Oh Moo", (May 2018)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District



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