



Interview

December 14th, 2020 / KHRG # 19-27-A1-I1

Mu Traw District Interview: Tatmadaw artillery shelling caused displacement of villagers, on-going fears and an inability to return home, 2019

This interview describes villagers' fears of living in A--- village, Hpla Hkoh village tract,¹ Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District. Naw² B--- explained that the villagers from A--- village had to flee their village because of the artillery shelling by the Tatmadaw.³ Because the Tatmadaw soldiers stand guard all along the roads, the villagers are afraid to go to work on their farms and are now facing livelihood problems.⁴

Interview | Naw B--- (female, 42), A--- village, Hpla Hkoh village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Animist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

How many people are in your family?

There are six people in our family.

How old is your oldest child?

My oldest child is 16 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

My youngest child is two years old.

Can you tell me about the livelihood situation in your village? Are you facing any barriers?

Currently, we are afraid to work on our farms because Tatmadaw soldiers are approaching [trespass on our lands]. [...]

¹ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

² Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

³ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

⁴ The present document is based on information received in March 2019. It was provided by a community member in Hpapun district who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers disturb villagers when they were transporting rations [to their army camps]?

We do farming and we raise chickens in our farm. We are now afraid to go and get them [the chickens] from our farm. When we go, we will have to confront security [inform security that they are going to their farm]. If not, we dare not go.

Did security accompany you to your farm when you went to inform them?

They [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁵ soldiers] went ahead of us and we followed them. That was disturbing to us.

Is your farm located close [to your village]?

Yes, it is close and located next to the motorway. That is why when they [the Tatmadaw] sent rations, we were afraid to go.

Did they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] threaten villagers when they transported rations [to their army camps]?

Yes, they threatened us. So we went to our farm with security [the KNLA soldiers in charge of security for the villages]. We went to our farm in fear.

How did the Tatmadaw threaten you?

When the soldiers were at their army camps, they would fire off artillery. That was threatening to us. My older son used to go and sleep at our farm. When the Tatmadaw soldiers sent rations to their army camps, they fired artillery at night. My older son had to run in the dark. My heart was pounding. On the next day, the artillery shelling fell very close to our farm.

Were you in your hut when the shelling occurred?

No, my older son was in our hut [located close to A--- village in Hpla-Hkoh village tract] when the shelling occurred. At the time, I was staying in the village.

Were you afraid to stay in your village when they fired the artillery?

We stayed in our house, but in fear. We were afraid to go and stay in our hut.

Have you ever fled when they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] fired artillery?

We had to run every time they fired artillery. Sometimes, with our children and stuff [our belongings], we could not flee. We just stayed in our village. But we were told to flee from our village. Therefore, we went to stay in the forest.

When did you leave your village?

We left our village on January 25th 2019.

Where did you flee to?

We fled to D--- [a river] which is next to C--- and A--- villages.

How far is that from your village?

It is around five minutes [on foot] to go there from my village.

How many days did you stay there? And, when did you come back to your village?

We stayed there for 15 to 16 days. After that, we came back to our village.

Were you able to come back to your village to fetch food when you fled?

Yes. I came back to my village in fear. I came back to my village to take care of my livestock.

Have all the villagers come back to the village now?

⁵ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

Yes.

How many houses are there in your village?

There are only four houses in our village.

How many people are there in your village?

There are 38 people in our village.

Did all the villagers flee from your village?

Yes. We all had to run.

Did only people in your village flee or did people from other villages flee as well?

Not only people from our village but also villagers from D--- village.

Where did D--- villagers flee to?

They fled to the western part of the village. They fled to avoid the danger of artillery shelling.

Were there any health problems facing you and other villagers?

We did not face any health problems at the time that we fled.

Were there any casualties, including people and villagers' livestock, at the time of the shelling?

No casualties of people in the shelling. But there were casualties of villagers' livestock.

What sorts of livestock were injured?

Buffaloes.

What kind of injuries to the buffaloes?

There were two buffaloes injured. That is all I know.

Who is the owner of these two buffaloes?

Thara⁶ E--- is the owner of these two buffaloes.

How much is a buffalo worth in Thai baht?

One buffalo is worth 15,000 baht.

When did the shelling occur?

I do not remember the date.

Did they shell just one day or over many days?

They shelled many days. However, I do not remember the exact [number of] days.

Do you know the Tatmadaw battalion number and the name of its commander?

I have no idea. I only know where they are staying.

From where did the Tatmadaw soldiers fire artillery?

From army camps in Kyah Ghaw Loo, Kher Der Kyoh, Kuh Hkoh and Hpla Hkoh village tracts. Tatmadaw soldiers fired artillery at areas close to the villages.

Did they all engage in shelling at the same time?

Yes, they did. When the Tatmadaw soldiers from one place fired artillery, the Tatmadaw soldiers from another place also fired artillery. They were firing from the two different places.

⁶ Thara (male) or tharamu (female) is a Karen term used for any teacher, pastor, or any person to whom one wishes to show respect.

Did they [the KNLA soldiers] fire shells where the enemy [the Tatmadaw soldiers] were staying or into villagers' farms?

They fired at the enemy. They just fired at the road to warn the Tatmadaw soldiers not to send their rations.

Have the Tatmadaw soldiers been based at their army camps for a long time?

Yes, they have been based at their army camps for a long time.

Do you know when they settled in their army camp?

I have no idea.

How long does it take you to get to the Tatmadaw army camp from your village?

It takes half an hour to get to F--- from our village. It is very close. I guess it will take just 20 minutes to get there. However, if we go to D--- from our village, it will take half an hour.

Do you know why they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] fired artillery when they sent rations to their army camps?

They were worried that they would be disturbed by other people [KNLA soldiers] while they sent rations to their army camps. So they fired shells to avoid being disturbed by others.

How did they send rations [to their army camp]?

They sent rations by [military] truck as well as on foot. When they sent rations on foot, there was less firing. When they sent rations with more than ten [military] trucks, they fired artillery constantly. There were up to 20 trucks [per day] sending rations [to their army camps].

Have the Tatmadaw soldiers finished sending rations?

No. At this time, they are sending rations on foot. They are continually sending rations to their army camps.

In Pwah Ghaw Plaw, are the Tatmadaw soldiers still standing guard?

Yes, the Tatmadaw soldiers are still guarding the road. Since they were sent to stand guard, they have not yet returned. We are afraid that if they occupy the place, it will be close to the village. Then we will be more afraid living and working in our village.

Did they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] say that they would occupy certain places?

I heard from G--- [a villager from A---] that the Tatmadaw soldiers will occupy places in Lu Thaw Township. We are not sure whether this will happen or not.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers fire every time they sent rations to their army camp?

Yes, they did.

How many times did they send rations to their army camps?

They sent rations by truck every day. But, they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] were told not to send rations by truck. They ignored the warning. Because of that they were attacked [by KNLA soldiers]. When they sent the rations on foot, nobody attacked them. They even fired when no one was attacking them. When the rations were sent to their army camps, the trucks were kept there for as long as a month. We don't know how many times they sent rations in a day. What we know is that they fired a lot.

What was the original village established in this area?

The area was called H---. [When we came here] there was no village already settled here. People came to live here because of the critical situation they were facing.

What is the name of this place?

It is called I--- [a field].

Do you dare go back to live in your village?

No, I don't. That place is far.

How many years have you been living here?

I have been living here for three years now.

[...]

Do you think you will be able to live here if the Tatmadaw soldiers continue their activities [sending more soldiers and rations] in the future?

It will not be easy if the Tatmadaw soldiers are still here.

Are you satisfied with the situation now?

No, I am not. If they [the Tatmadaw] retreat from our village, that will satisfy us.

What do you want?

I want them to retreat from our place. I want to have my own country so that we can work and live in freedom. That's what I really want.

You want the Tatmadaw soldiers to retreat?

Yes, I want all the Tatmadaw soldiers' army camps to retreat to their own place. If they all retreat, that will make us really happy.

Further background reading on human rights violation committed by the Tatmadaw in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: Arbitrary detention and indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw in Bu Tho Township, May 2020"](#), December 2020.
- ["Mu Traw Interview: Two villagers were shot by Tatmadaw soldiers in Wa Tho Hkoh village, January 2020"](#), November 2020.
- ["Mu Traw District Interview: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and impact of militarisation on local communities, May to June 2020"](#), November 2020.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khrq.org.

Mutraw (Hpapun) District

