



Situation Update

November 2nd, 2020 / KHRG # 19-27-S1

Mu Traw District Situation Update: Tatmadaw artillery shelling caused the displacement of local villagers in Lu Thaw Township, January to November 2019

This situation update describes events that occurred in Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District beginning in January 2019. As of November 2019, the situation was still critical. While constructing roads and transporting rations to their army camps Tatmadaw¹ soldiers shelled artillery into Ta Koo Der and Kuh Day villages in Hpla Hkoh village tract. Because of the artillery shelling, villagers were afraid to work in their farms, and even had to flee their villages at one point. The shelling also killed some villagers' livestock. Since then, the villagers from Ta Koo Der and Kuh Day were too afraid to return to their villages.²

Tatmadaw soldiers' activities

The KNU [Karen National Union]³ authorised Tatmadaw soldiers to transport rations by truck, but only to the Paw Khay Hkoh army camp. Tatmadaw soldiers were not authorised to transport rations by truck to other army camps located further along the road. They were only allowed to transport rations to their other army camps by horse and on foot. However, after constructing a vehicle road on January 18th 2019 from Paw Khay Hkoh and Kuh Hkoh army camps to Hpla Hkoh army camp, Tatmadaw soldiers used the constructed road to transport rations by truck to their other army camps. The [Tatmadaw soldiers serving as] road security guards trespassed into KNU-controlled areas. Because of that, the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]⁴ fired at the Tatmadaw trucks transporting rations to their army camps. In retaliation, the Tatmadaw soldiers fired large amounts of artillery into villagers' farms close to Kuh Day and Ta Koo Der villages.

¹ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

² The present document is based on information and oral updated received in March 2019 and November 2019, respectively. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw 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. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG staff.

³ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

⁴ The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

Displacement caused by Tatmadaw soldiers' shelling

On January 25th 2019, the Tatmadaw soldiers transported rations to Paw Khay Hkoh, Hpah Ghaw Loh, Keh Deh Kyoh, Kuh Hkoh, and Hpla Hkoh army camps by [military] truck. The Tatmadaw road security guards fired large amounts of artillery that fell close to where Ta Koo Der villagers live in Htee Daw Hta village tract. To escape the artillery, 29 people from 4 households fled to Boo Day Forest. They returned on February 18th 2019.

On February 19th 2019, the Tatmadaw soldiers again fired artillery into villagers' farms, this time close to where Kuh Day villagers live in Maw Hsah Hta [Place].⁵ 341 people from 44 households fled to Theh Loh Kloh Nee [a local river] in Htee Kleh Htah Forest. They returned on February 22nd, 2019.

Other consequences of the Tatmadaw artillery shelling

In early 2019, heavy artillery shelling took place from January 18th to 20th, January 25th to 26th, and then again on February 19th 2019. The mortars that fell into villagers' lands on February 19th resulted in the death of five buffaloes and the injury of two buffaloes. The five buffaloes that were killed belonged to five different villagers from Ta Koo Der, Tah Paw Der, and Tee Thoo Der villages. Only one of the injured buffaloes was found; the other injured buffalo is still lost. No one knows to whom the injured buffalo [who is still lost] belonged. Villagers were also afraid to look for their buffaloes since the Tatmadaw have still not retreated from the area.

Impact on education

When the Tatmadaw soldiers in Hpla Hkoh and Kuh Day fired artillery on February 19th 2019, forcing villagers to flee to Theh Loh Kloh Nee [river] in Htee Hkleh Htah Forest, students were unable to return to their village for their exams so had to sit [take] their final exams in the forest.

Conclusion [Background information from the researcher]

Since 1975, the Tatmadaw soldiers have been based in Hpyah Ghaw, which caused some villagers who lived nearby in Hpla Hkoh village tract to flee from their village. At that time, they left their work and farms behind. In 1999, the Tatmadaw soldiers occupied more places and built army camps, which again caused villagers to flee from their homes. Villagers fled because they were afraid of the Tatmadaw activities. Even though the NCA [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement]⁶ was signed between the Myanmar government and the KNU, the villagers do not dare return to their primary lands. Therefore, the villagers living there want the Tatmadaw soldiers' army camps to move out of the area.

⁵ Place refers to the name given by local communities to a specific location.

⁶ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups, 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 Karen National Union. It was followed by the adoption of a Code of Conduct by the signatories in November 2015. In February 2018, two additional ethnic armed groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

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

- [“Mu Traw District Situation Update: Anti-Tatmadaw demonstrations and skirmishes between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA, December 2019 to January 2020”](#), (September 2020).
- [“Mu Traw District Incident Report: Child rape by a BGF soldier in Dwe Lo Township, June 2020”](#), (July 2020).
- [“Mutraw District Incident Report: A villager and his daughter injured by a Tatmadaw mortar shell in Dwe Lo Township, June 2020”](#), (July 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

