



Situation update

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Hpapun Situation Update: Militarisation, extortion and gold mining activities harming villagers in Dwe Lo Township, June to July 2019

Between June and July 2019, the Tatmadaw¹ increased its activity in Dwe Lo Township, including troop rotations and the transport of rations and weapons. Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion #96 also took villager's property, crops, and livestock without compensation while stationed at the Kay Koh army camp. The Chinese Ho Chan Company has also been carrying out gold mining in Bu Lo Klo Traw, Ma Lay Ler, and Mae Way village tracts since 2018. Mining activities have had negative impacts on the villagers' lands, livestock and the natural environment, leading to concerns among the local population.²

Militarisation and extortion by the Tatmadaw

June and July 2019 have seen an increase in militarisation by the Tatmadaw compared to the previous three months. In June 2019, troop rotations occurred in Kay Koh village, Ma Lay Ler village tract, Dwe Lo Township, where the Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #96 is stationed at the Kay Koh army camp. Zay Ya Thun is the commander of the battalion and current head of the army camp. Villagers reported that the IB transported rations and weapons to the camp, and occasionally asked for their help in transporting them with their trucks.

While stationed there, Tatmadaw soldiers took the villagers' property, crops, and livestock without compensating them. They cut the villagers' palm leaves, wood, bamboo, and chili plants. The soldiers also killed and ate three of the villagers' pigs that wandered into the army camp without informing the owners.

Raw material taken from villagers was used to reinforce and expand the Kay Koh army camp. Villagers who experienced this first hand said: "*Tatmadaw soldiers get their salaries so why don't they buy it [crops, raw material, and livestock] from villagers?*" Some villagers reported the incidents to the Karen National Union³ (KNU) village tract and Township authorities, but no action has been taken.

Gold mining by the Ho Chan Company

In 2018 and 2019, the Chinese Ho Chan Company carried out gold mining activities in Bu Lo Klo Traw, Ma Lay Ler, and Mae Way village tracts, Dwe Lo Township. The project was

¹ 'Tatmadaw' refers to the Myanmar military.

² The present document is based on information received in August 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.

³ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

implemented with permission from the KNU and will last for 15 years. Most villagers in the three village tracts are affected by the mining activities. No consultation meetings were held and their free, prior and informed consent was not obtained. Villagers are worried that the mining activities will affect their lands and livelihoods.

In 2018 [exact date unknown], villagers from Mae Way village, Mae Way village tract put up a sign asking the Ho Chan company to halt mining activities. However, mining was carried out nevertheless. During the reporting period, some of the villagers' animals were affected as they got sick or died after drinking from the river polluted by the gold mining activities. When the villagers reported the case to local authorities, officials from the Karen National Liberation Army's⁴ Battalion #102 responded that the company helps and benefits the KNU as well. Consequently, no action was taken.

In October 2018, the company started mining in Bu Lo Klo Traw village tract, Dwe Lo Township. The gold mining site is located very close to the villagers' houses and villagers raised their concerns that their lands could be damaged if the mining project lasts for many years. They are also worried that it will negatively impact the environment and natural resources in the area. At the time of documentation, villagers in the area reported that the rivers were polluted and that they were experiencing challenges farming their lands. The company dug up the soil on the villagers' lands while mining and, although they promised to return the soil to the earth thereafter, this promise remains unfulfilled. Villagers are afraid they might lose their lands due to these mining activities and fear that their livelihoods may be in danger, especially if fighting between armed groups breaks out again.

Between May and June 2019, the Ho Chan Company also carried out large-scale gold mining activities from Ma Lay Ler village to Mae Toh Hta village in Ma Lay Ler village tract, Dwe Lo Township. Some villagers also went to the mining site to look for gold and were asked to give the company 80,000 kyats (USD 53.11 as of November 28th 2019) and 16.329 grams of gold for every hour and every day they looked for gold, respectively. If they do not manage to mine at least 49.987 grams of gold, they will be in debt and will not even have enough money to buy rice.

The company compensated villagers from Ma Lay Ler village with the following amount for each acre of land they bought: 7,000,000 kyats (USD 4,647.10 as of November 28th 2019) for land with paddy and between 3,000,000 kyats (USD 1,991.61 as of November 28th 2019) and 2,000,000 kyats (USD 1,327.74 as of November 28th 2019) for land with other crops, depending on their density. Villagers were not compensated for their plantation land beside the river. Most villagers did not want to sell their lands as the amount offered was not a fair compensation but felt compelled to do so. Villagers feel that the mining project only benefits wealthy individuals and armed actors.

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



These photos were taken on July 28th 2019 in Ma Lay Ler village, Ma Lay Ler village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Hpapun District. They show the detrimental impact of gold mining activities on local lands.

Further background reading on the issues of militarisation and the impact of gold mining activities in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“*Toungoo Situation Update: Increasing militarisation and land issues in Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships*”](#), (September 2019)
- [“*Nyaunglebin Situation Update: Logging and gold mining activities threatening community livelihoods, land confiscation by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Mone and Shwegyin townships*”](#) (August 2019)
- [“*Dooplaya Situation Update: Theft of civilian property by Tatmadaw soldiers, land confiscation and drug-related human rights abuses in Win Yay, Kawkareik and Kyainseikgyi townships*”](#) (August 2019)

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.khrg.org.