



## News bulletin

April 9<sup>th</sup> 2020 / KHRG # 20-1-NB1

---

## **Mu Traw District: Tatmadaw soldiers killed a Karen community leader and a KNU forest ranger in March 2020**

---

*This News bulletin describes two cases of killing perpetrated by the Tatmadaw in Mu Traw (Hpapun) District in March 2020. On March 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, soldiers from LIB #338 shot dead a Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>1</sup> forest ranger in Dwe Lo Township. On March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, soldiers from IB #30 opened fire on two groups of villagers in Lu Thaw Township, killing local community leader Saw<sup>2</sup> Theh Mee. So far, no action has been taken against the perpetrators.<sup>3</sup>*

---

### **First Incident: Tatmadaw soldiers killed a KNU forest ranger in Dwe Lo Township**

On March 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #338 killed a KNU forest ranger in Meh Way village, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District.<sup>4</sup>

According to the KNU Secretary for Mu Traw District, the soldiers opened fire on two KNU forest rangers who were travelling by motorbike near their army camp. One of them, Saw Maw Aye Than, sustained one gunshot wound in the abdomen and three more on his left leg. Due to the gravity of his injuries, he died while being transported to the KNU Mu Traw District office.

The forest ranger who survived the incident explained that they were travelling to perform their regular duties. They did not expect to be attacked because they always use that road. On the day of the incident, the Tatmadaw soldiers were standing about 200 yards [183 metres] outside their camp. They fired around 20 rounds at the two rangers.

The Tatmadaw alleged that its troops acted in self-defence after being shot at by the two rangers, but the KNU rejected that explanation.<sup>5</sup> According to the KNU, the LIB #338 established army camps near local villages and along roads used by the villagers. The KNU asked the Tatmadaw to withdraw from or reduce their presence in the area, without result.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> The present document is based on information received in March and April 2020. It was provided by community members in Mu Traw District who have 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.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Information Center (March 2020), “[သစ်တောဌာန လုပ်သားတစ်ဦး တပ်မတော်၏ ပစ်ခတ်ခြင်းခံခဲ့ရဟု KNU ပြော](#)”.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*.

## Second Incident: Tatmadaw soldiers killed a Karen community leader in Lu Thaw Township

On March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, Tatmadaw soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) #30 opened fire on two groups of local villagers who were carrying food and supplies for their families in Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township. On that day, IB #30 soldiers from the Wa Klay Too army camp were transporting rations to their base. Some of them were on watch duty along the road to protect the convoys.

Local villagers are usually escorted by Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>6</sup> soldiers when travelling in the area to ensure their security. On March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020 at 6:10 AM, 11 villagers, escorted by KNLA soldiers, crossed the road in Saw Nweh Plaw (also known as Htoh Koh Hta Plaw), Saw Muh Plaw village tract. When the IB #30 soldiers saw the group, they fired several rounds at them. The villagers fled and had to leave all their belongings behind, including food and 20 litres of gasoline. They had bought this gasoline ahead of the rainy season for their farming machines, because they were worried about a potential lockdown or future travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Around 6:50 PM, another group of five villagers, escorted by one KNLA soldier, tried to cross the road again in the Htoh Koh Hta Plaw area despite fears arising from the earlier incident. IB #30 soldiers saw them crossing the road and opened fire on them, killing Saw Theh Mee, a local community leader.<sup>7</sup> The other members of the group, including Saw Theh Mee's wife, were able to escape.

Saw Theh Mee was in his fifties. He lived in A--- village, C--- village tract, Lu Thaw Township.<sup>8</sup> He served as community leader, deputy chair of the Kaw Thay Ghu Judicial Committee and committee member for the Salween Peace Park, a local community forest.<sup>9</sup> On that day, he had gone to the Pa Kaw Hta market, Mu Theh Town, Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District together with his wife. When both were fleeing from the gunfire, his wife heard him scream: *"I have been hit by a bullet."* She could not look back as she was also trying to run for her life. She had to leave behind around 2,000 betel nuts and food that they had bought earlier. The other four villagers were able to flee with their groceries because they were carrying light loads.

KNLA soldiers and villagers were afraid to retrieve the body of Saw Theh Mee because Tatmadaw soldiers were still operating in the area. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, KNLA soldiers observed his body from a distance with binoculars, and saw Tatmadaw soldiers standing next to it. On April 6<sup>th</sup> 2020, KNLA soldiers saw that the body of Saw Theh Mee was not there anymore. They assumed that the Tatmadaw might have buried him somewhere near their camp. The Karen Information Center was unable to reach Tatmadaw spokesmen Colonel Zaw Min Htun and Colonel Maung Maung Hla for comments on this case.<sup>10</sup>

Saw Theh Mee leaves behind a wife and five children.

---

<sup>6</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Information Center (April 2020), "[တပ်မတော် ပစ်ခတ်၍ ဒေသခံ လူထုခေါင်းဆောင်တစ်ဦး သေဆုံးဟု KNU ဖြော](#)".

<sup>8</sup> Network Media Group (April 2020), "[တရုတ်နယ်မြေအတွင်း အရပ်သားတစ်ဦး ပစ်ခတ်ခံရပီပြင်ဆေးမှအပေါ် မေးမနိုးချက်။](#)".

<sup>9</sup> Karen Peace Support Network (April 2020), "[Burma Army Kills Karen Community Leader Shopping for Food](#)".

<sup>10</sup> Karen Information Center (April 2020), "[တပ်မတော် ပစ်ခတ်၍ ဒေသခံ လူထုခေါင်းဆောင်တစ်ဦး သေဆုံးဟု KNU ဖြော](#)".

## Conclusion

Both incidents amount to a violation of sections 5(a) of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)<sup>11</sup> and 8(A) of its corresponding Code of Conduct, which state that signatories shall not carry out armed attacks in ceasefire areas. The second incident also amounts to a clear violation of sections 9(b) of the NCA and 7(B) of the Code of Conduct, which forbid the signatories from killing civilians in ceasefire areas.

This News Bulletin shows that the Tatmadaw continues to target and kill civilians and KNU personnel in Southeast Myanmar, in violation of the ceasefire terms. In the past, similar cases involving soldiers on duty were met with total impunity. As an example, the Tatmadaw soldiers who killed Karen community leader Saw O Moo in April 2018 have yet to be brought to justice.<sup>12</sup> KHRG is therefore deeply concerned that these two killings will also go unpunished.

The Myanmar government should therefore, as a matter of urgency, take the necessary steps to take disciplinary action against members of the security forces responsible for violating the NCA, including bringing them to justice in cases of serious human rights abuses.

Further background reading on killings perpetrated by the Tatmadaw in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Dooplaya Incident Report: Two Tatmadaw deserters killed seven civilians in Win Yay Township, April 2019”](#), (June 2019)
- [“A Karen Community Leader, Saw O Moo, Was Murdered by Tatmadaw forces in Hpapun District, April 2018”](#), (June 2018)
- [“Two separate killing incidents committed by Tatmadaw soldiers in Shwegyin Township, Nyaunglebin District \(March and May 2017\)”](#), (September 2017)

## 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](http://www.khrg.org).

---

<sup>11</sup> 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 armed ethnic groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

<sup>12</sup> Karen Human Rights Group (June 2018), [“A Karen Community Leader, Saw O Moo, Was Murdered by Tatmadaw forces in Hpapun District, April 2018”](#).

# Mu Traw (Hpapun) District:

Tatmadaw soldiers killed a karen community leader and a KNU forest ranger in March 2020

