



Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Southeast Myanmar Field Report: Military coup, protests, armed conflict and attacks, human rights abuses, and COVID-19, January to June 2021

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Introduction

This Field Report analyses information collected by KHRG field researchers during the period between January and June 2021.

The reporting period was most clearly marked by the military coup that took place on February 1st 2021. Claiming election fraud, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces, seized power just prior to the swearing in of members of parliament who had been elected during the 2020 general election. Elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of parliament. After a state of emergency was proclaimed, Min Aung Hlaing established the State Administration Council (SAC)¹ as the executive governing body, to which he appointed himself chairman.

The military coup immediately led to widespread protests throughout the country, including in KHRG's operational area. Civilians took to the streets to voice their opposition and thousands of government staff members left their jobs in an act of civil disobedience against the new military regime. Civilian opposition to the coup led to violent crackdowns by the SAC. Although the majority of violent crackdowns took place in urban areas, protesters in rural areas often faced barriers to attending and holding protests, including receiving threats and warnings by SAC soldiers and administrators. Some urban protesters and government staff participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)² fled to areas under Karen National Union (KNU)³ control in order to escape arrest and threats by SAC security forces. KHRG recently published an analytical report detailing the experiences of protesters and participants in the CDM.⁴

Military activity, including fighting and air and ground attacks by SAC forces,⁵ increased shortly after the coup, and has led to human rights violations and a highly critical security situation for villagers in Mu Traw (Hpapun), Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin), Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton), and more recently Dooplaya District. Tens of thousands of villagers in Southeast Myanmar have

¹ The State Administration Council (SAC) is the executive governing body created in the aftermath of the February 1st 2021 military coup. It was established by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on February 2nd 2021, and is composed of eight military officers and eight civilians. The chairperson serves as the de facto head of government of Myanmar and leads the Military Cabinet of Myanmar, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

² On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging.

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 KHRG, "[Military Atrocities and Civilian Resilience: Testimonies of injustice, insecurity and violence in Southeast Myanmar during the 2021 coup](#)", November 2021.

⁵ The term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces is Tatmadaw. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

been displaced due to SAC offensives since the beginning of the coup, often fleeing with little food and supplies, and having poor access to shelter and potable water, yet also unable to access humanitarian support. Many have built new makeshift bunkers in which to hide, and remain in constant fear of further attack. Whether they have fled or not, villagers across all Karen districts have expressed concerns about heightened insecurity. Movement is also more difficult as a result of the increased military activity and insecurity. This has brought about livelihood challenges since villagers are often unable to access their lands to harvest or work their farms. Education and healthcare have also been impacted, with schools and clinics damaged or destroyed, or forced to shut down as a result of the conflict and attacks.

There has also been an increase in what appears to be intentional shooting and killing of civilians by SAC forces. Instances of SAC soldiers shooting civilians on sight have been reported by KHRG and other agencies since the coup. Reports of forced labour, primarily portering and navigation, have also begun to emerge. There has been a resurgence in the planting of new landmines by both the SAC military and ethnic armed groups, which has in turn led to an increase in landmine incidents. Landmine clearance and warnings have remained insufficient in preventing injury and loss of life.

The military coup has also had wider impacts on education, healthcare and livelihoods. Teachers and medical staff have refused to work for the military government, making them targets of arrest and violence by SAC security forces. Schools have been unable to open for the start of the school year, and medical facilities are understaffed and, in some cases, have shut down. Unemployment is widespread, and the downturn in the economy is creating problems for farmers to sell their goods. It has also led to a rise in prices for basic necessities like rice and diesel fuel, placing further strains on the already fragile livelihood situation of villagers.

KHRG received few updates on the COVID-19 situation during the reporting period, with villagers stating that they thought COVID-19 was no longer a problem. This shift in understanding about the current state of the pandemic was tied to the SAC's lack of testing and reporting. The rise of a third wave of the pandemic in July can be attributed to the SAC's poor handling of the crisis since ousting the elected civilian government.

Part I. Major developments

A. Anti-coup protests in rural Southeast Myanmar

Public disapproval for the coup was expressed immediately, with civilians in urban and rural areas engaging in a variety of forms of protest. As protests continued and became more widespread, SAC security forces began violently cracking down on protesters. Although excessive violence against protesters was less common in rural areas than in the big cities, rural villagers often encountered barriers to attending protests in town and to organising protests in their local area.

i. Mu Traw District

In Mu Traw District, many protests were held in town, particularly Hpapun and K'Ma Moh (Kamarmaung) towns, and often included people from rural villages. Civilians from K'Ma Moh Town held protests every day from February 9th 2021 until February 13th 2021.⁶ On February 9th 2021, around 600 people from K'Ma Moh Town held a protest, marching from the Myanmar government kindergarten school to Kamarmaung Public Hospital. On the same day, local civilians in Hpapun Town held a protest that started from Hpapun High School and went around the town. Villagers from Koo Seik and Ma Htaung tried to go to Hpapun Town for this protest but were stopped by SAC Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs)⁷ #434, #340, #341 and Infantry Battalion (IB)⁸ #19. In response to the protests, these four battalions also released a statement that the local villagers were not allowed to bang pots and pans (a traditional form of protest) or go out between the hours of 6:00 pm to 6:00 am. On February 13th 2021, around 200 protesters marched through town, starting and finishing at Kamarmaung Basic Education High School.⁹

On March 5th 2021, local villagers from 100 villages from Ma Htaung, Htee Tha Blut Hta, Na Koh Hkee, K'Law Hta, Meh Hkoo, Meh Nyoo, Meh Klaw, Bwah Deh, Hkaw Poo, Pa Heh, Lay Hpoh Hta, Day Wah, Kyaw Pa, K'ter Tee, Meh Pree, and Htee Tha'Daw Hta village tracts participated in protests in the area. Civilians from both the western and eastern parts of Hpapun Town protested against the military coup.¹⁰ The village heads and elders took part as organisers for the protest, and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)¹¹ soldiers provided security for the protesters. Due to the number of people, they divided into several groups. Villagers from Ma Htaung, Htee Tha Blut Hta, Na Koh Hkee, and K'Law Hta village tracts marched and held a protest in Hpapun Town. Villagers from Meh Hkoo, Meh Nyoo, and Meh Klaw village tracts attempted to hold a protest in Way Mone village.¹² Villagers from Bwah Deh

⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-40-S1).

⁷ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. 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.

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⁹ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Villagers protest against the military coup in Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns, Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2021](#)", June 2021.

¹⁰ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Villagers protest against the military coup in Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns, Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2021](#)", June 2021; also unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-90-D2).

¹¹ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

¹² KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Villagers protest against the military coup in Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns, Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2021](#)", June 2021.

held a protest in their own village tract, while villagers from Hkaw Poo and Pa Heh held a protest on the Salween River bank. Finally, villagers from Lay Hpoh Hta, Day Wah, Kyaw Pa, K'Taing Tee, Meh Pree, and Htee Tha'Daw Hta village tracts held a protest in K'Ma Moh town. The protest in Hpapun Town was completed successfully without any blockades, however, the protesters in Way Mone were stopped about an hour after the protest began by SAC LIB #434 at the checkpoint near the southern part of their army camp. Fortunately, the protest organisers were able to negotiate with an officer from LIB #434 and were able to reroute the group to Hpapun Town in order to continue their protest. Even though the local villagers were confronted with obstacles during the protest, there were no lives lost.



This photo was taken on March 5th 2021. It shows a protest against the military coup organised by villagers from over 12 village tracts in Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, Mu Traw District. The protest took place from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, uniting around 10,000 people who separated into multiple groups and marched to Hpapun and K'Ma Moh towns and Way Mone village in Mu Traw District. This photo shows protestors, as well as members of the KNLA who provided security for the protestors. [Photo: A local villager]

Protests also took place in rural villages. On February 23rd 2021, about 150 villagers from Pway Htaw Ru, Htee Law Shi Hta, Htee Th'Blu Hta, K'Taing Tee village tracts, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District held an anti-coup protest. The local villagers started marching from Pway Htaw Ru village to Tar Ghaw P'Li village at 8:00 am. The protest was organised by the V--- village head, U A---. They were however stopped by Border Guard Force (BGF)¹³ Battalion #1014 at 11:00 am and subsequently ended the protest.¹⁴

ii. Dooplaya District

Reports from researchers in March indicated that anti-coup protests were organised and held in every township in Dooplaya District.¹⁵

In some cases these protests brought together multiple villages. On March 3rd 2021, the local villagers from Nah Chaung village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District organised a protest that included the villages of Ah Leh Ywar, Tah Ta Oo, P'Ya Lay Seik, Kyor Win, Kya Dat Chaung, Kyor Seik, Wa Boe Kon, T'May Lit, Kyone Tan, Hsin Pok Ain, Kh'Raing Htaw, T'Nu, His Zon, Bayar Pok Toh, Nah Chaung Ah Leh, Nah Chaung Phar, Kyar Ain, T'Gay, and Mee Long Chaung. The villagers marched from Nah Chaung village to Paung Htaw Mu village, with over 400 people joining the protest. KNLA Company #2 Battalion #17 provided security for the local villagers and distributed water bottles to them. Two soldiers from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC),¹⁶ two people from the KNU Forestry Department, and one

¹³ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw.

¹⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-33-D1).

¹⁵ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021](#)", June 2021.

¹⁶ The KNU/KNLA-PC is an armed group based in the Htoh Kaw Koh village tract area, Hpa-an District. It split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in 2007, but refused to transform into a Border Guard Force (BGF) in 2010. It signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015.

person from the KNU Department of Mining participated alongside the KNLA soldiers in guarding the protesters and distributing water.¹⁷

On March 9th 2021, local villagers from Aw Hpa Hpa Doh village tract, Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District held a protest against the military on the Asia Highway. On March 22nd 2021, local villagers from Kaw T'Ree and Kruh Tuh townships held a protest, and told KHRG's researchers that they planned to hold more protests in the future. KHRG researchers were also notified about plans to hold protests in each of those townships on March 25th 2021. KHRG researchers noted: *"We heard that the SAC soldiers do not want the local villagers to hold protests. Therefore, we do not know what the situation will be on the days of the protests and we will have to monitor it. There are ongoing protests against the military because the local villagers are against military rule."*¹⁸

On March 9th 2021, around 500 villagers from Thay Baw Boe, Maw Hkee and Su Klee village tracts, Kaw T'Ree Township planned to hold a protest in Myawaddy Town. However, they were stopped by the DKBA [unclear which DKBA]¹⁹ and SAC soldiers on their way and could not hold the planned protest.²⁰



This photo was taken on March 9th 2021 on the Asia Highway near Kawkareik Town, Dooplaya District. It shows villagers protesting against the military regime. [Photo: KHRG]

iii. Mergui-Tavoy District

Protests in T'Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District were reported every day from February 7th to February 11th, February 13th to February 20th, and February 22nd to February 26th. Although February 28th was the largest day of protests up until that point, the killing of 18 protesters in various parts of the country made some fearful of resuming protests on March 1st.²¹

In an interview with KHRG from early March, an activist from Cc--- Town, T'Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District reported being followed by police, SAC soldiers, and on a few occasions by members of the Special Branch (Police Special Intelligence Department).²²

¹⁷ Unpublished data from Dooplaya District (21-114-S1).

¹⁸ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021](#)", June 2021.

¹⁹ In 1992, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) split from the KNLA over religious considerations. In 2010, the majority of DKBA troops transformed into BGFs, but one faction refused and changed its name to Democratic Karen Benevolent Army in 2012. They signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015. On January 16th 2016, a splinter faction of the DKBA established itself as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army led by chief of staff General Saw Kyaw Thet, vice chief of staff General Saw Taing Shwe (aka Bo Bi) and commander Bo San Aung. Therefore, confusingly, there are now two groups using the acronym DKBA: the main 'Benevolent' DKBA (Democratic Karen Benevolent Army) and the splinter faction 'Buddhist' DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army). The new splinter 'Buddhist' DKBA should not be confused with the original Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, which existed from 1992-2010. The 'Benevolent' DKBA has signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement but the new 'Buddhist' DKBA splinter faction has not. The latter are still actively engaged in armed clashes with the Tatmadaw in multiple areas in Karen State.

²⁰ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021](#)", June 2021.

²¹ KHRG, "[Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces intimidate anti-coup activists in T'Naw Th'Ree Township, February 2021](#)", March 2021.

²² Ibid.

He reported first joining protests in Dawei Town on February 3rd, and noted that over a thousand people from multiple ethnic groups had joined the protests on that day. The number of protesters increased throughout the month.²³ There was initially no violence, but that changed toward the end of February. On February 22nd, protesters in Dawei Town were exposed to tear gas by police. During protests on February 28th, police began firing warning shots at 8:30 am, followed by live rounds at 10:00 am. One man was shot and died before he could receive treatment.²⁴ Police used rubber bullets, live rounds, and tear gas on protesters, mirroring the increased violence reported during protests elsewhere in the country on February 28th. As a result of increased police violence, five people died in Dawei Town and another seven died in Myeik Town.²⁵

Arrests also began on February 28th, with police targeting young, active protesters for arrest during the evening.²⁶ The use of Section 505 of the Penal Code in making arrests was also reported in Mergui-Tavoy. Under Section 505, it is a crime to make, publish, or circulate any “statement, rumor or report” ‘with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, any officer, soldier, sailor or airman’ [...] ‘to mutiny or otherwise disregard or fail in his duty.’²⁷



KHRG received this photo on March 8th 2021. The photo shows around 1,000 local villagers from K'Moh Thway village tract, Ler Doh Soe Township, Mergui-Tavoy District holding a protest against the military junta. They are guarded by KNLA soldiers.

[Photo: A local villager].



This photo was taken on February 22nd 2021 in Tanintharyi Town, Mergui-Tavoy District. Villagers from T'Keh area are protesting against the military coup in Tanintharyi Town, Mergui-Tavoy District.

[Photo: KHRG]

Protests also occurred in K'Moh Thway area in Leh Doh Soh Township, Way Ta Eh and Paw Hkloh areas in K'Ser Doh Township, and P'law area in Leh Muh Lah Township.²⁸ However, on February 21st, Mergui-Tavoy District KNU leaders met with local KNU leaders in Kleh Muh Htee area, K'Ser Doh Township and advised Karen individuals not to join the protests, leading many to refuse to join the protests when asked to do so by protest organisers in their village. However, some civilians did still continue to join in the protests.²⁹

²³ KHRG, “[Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces kill peaceful anti-coup protestors in Dawei Town, February 2021](#)”, March 2021. The interviewee reported that 100,000 or more people joined protests at the end of February; however, KHRG was not able to independently verify this number.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ KHRG, “[Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces intimidate anti-coup activists in T'Naw Th'Ree Township, February 2021](#)”, March 2021.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “[Myanmar: Post-Coup Legal Changes Erode Human Rights](#)”, March 2021.

²⁸ KHRG, “[Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021](#)”, May 2021.

²⁹ Ibid.

Another report from T’Naw Th’Ree Township indicated that SAC soldiers searched for and arrested civilians who were known to be regular protest participants. Protest participants were then afraid to sleep in their houses at night, so they hid and slept elsewhere for their own safety.³⁰

iv. Other districts

Civilians living between Bilin Town and Thaton Town, Doo Tha Htoo District planned to hold an anti-military coup protest supporting the National Unity Government (NUG)³¹ on April 23rd 2021. They planned to march separately and then meet at W--- village. The KNLA from Brigade 1 Battalion #2 planned to provide security for the protest. The KNLA shut down the highway between Bilin and Thaton towns and took control of the road between Lay Kay village and Kyaik Kaw Town. During the preparation for the march, fighting broke out between KNLA Brigade 1 Battalion #2 and a SAC military trainees’ battalion at Naw Baw for about 10 minutes. However, the KNLA told the villagers they should carry on with the planned protest and not let the fighting deter them.³²

Some protesters from Kya Maing village tract, Leik Tho Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District were followed and threatened. One protestor had a warrant placed on them and fled, while others were arrested by the SAC for their participation in the protests.³³

B. Civil Disobedience Movement

Since the coup first occurred on February 1st 2021, government workers throughout Myanmar have joined the CDM to show their opposition to the military coup, with many fleeing to areas under ethnic armed organisation (EAO) control due to threats of arrest by the SAC and general insecurity. In mid-February, the KNU released a statement offering to provide protection for all civilian protesters and government staff who joined the CDM.³⁴ Other support for the CDM ranged from providing participants with shelter, food and basic supplies to “distributing three-finger salute stickers to locals” to encourage others to join the movement, as stated by a civil society activist in Myeik Town, T’Naw Th’Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District.³⁵

KHRG researchers reported in early March that many CDM participants were fleeing to KNU-controlled areas in Dooplaya District in order to escape arrest or persecution by the SAC. Researchers noted that by March 7th 2021, 1,310 government staff participating in the CDM had fled to KNU areas of Dooplaya District.³⁶ Those who fled to Dooplaya District were from Ayeyarwady Region, Kawkaik, Mawlamyine and Hpa-an towns and used to work for the following agencies: the Ministry of Health and Sports; the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock

³⁰ In-process (as yet unpublished) data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-175-S1).

³¹ The National Unity Government (NUG) was formed by the acting cabinet of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) on April 16th 2021, following the February 1st military coup. U Min Wyint was retained as President, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as State Counsellor, both still under detention by the State Administration Council (SAC) military. The NUG claims to be the legitimate government of Myanmar, and has sought international recognition as such. The NUG cabinet is composed primarily of lawmakers elected in the 2020 election, along with other key ethnic figures. As the military junta has declared the NUG illegal, it is operating as a government-in-exile. Further information can be found at the NUG website: <https://www.nugmyanmar.org/en/>.

³² Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-154-D1).

³³ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-69-D1).

³⁴ "[KNU Offer Anti-Coup Protesters’ its Protection – Karen Civil Society Alliance Calls for Ethnic Armed Groups to Unite and Foreign Embassies Denounce Military Coup](#)", *Burma News International* February 2021.

³⁵ KHRG, "[Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces intimidate anti-coup activists in T’Naw Th’Ree Township, February 2021](#)", March 2021.

³⁶ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021](#)", June 2021.

and Irrigation; the Ministry of Home Affairs (Myanmar Police Force, Fire Service Department); the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Construction; the Ministry of Electricity and Energy; the Ministry of Transport and Communications; the Ministry of Social Welfare and Resettlement; the Ministry of Defence (SAC military); the Ministry of Justice; and the Myanmar Economic Bank. There were also municipal employees, township-level staff, and village administrators (from the General Administration Department).³⁷ Another 80 participants in the CDM arrived in X--- area during the first week of April. They were originally from Yangon [probably other cities as well] and had recently fled to Kawkaik Town. Since there was no security for them, they approached the KNU and finally settled in X--- area. They were all kept in KNU/KNLA buildings.³⁸ By the end of May, there were 3,000 CDM participants taking refuge in Dooplaya District, according to KHRG reports.³⁹

Beginning on March 3rd, CDM participants began arriving in Y--- area, Mergui-Tavoy District. According to a KHRG researcher, by June 24th there were 50 CDM participants, including teachers, police officers, protest organisers, healthcare workers, and even some representatives from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (parliament), in the Y--- area, under KNU control. Even after reaching KNU-controlled territory, some of these individuals who stayed in the jungle or in more rural areas suffered from health issues or lack of food, and were also not receiving their salaries.⁴⁰ CDM participants also arrived in Z--- area and Aa--- area, T'Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District beginning March 3rd. All of them were originally from Tanintharyi Region but had been working in Yangon city. They came to take refuge in KNU-controlled areas.⁴¹

According to a KHRG researcher from Dooplaya District, KNU authorities have been keeping lists of those involved in the CDM.⁴² In some cases, these lists have allowed the KNU to provide support to those whose salaries or livelihoods have been lost due to their involvement in the movement. However, there could be more CDM participants than currently known in KNU areas. Some name lists have not yet been sent to KNU authorities, so there is no clear record. Some CDM participants are hiding in villages but the village heads have not yet sent their names to KNU authorities.⁴³

C. Militarisation and armed conflict

Although conflict had been ongoing in some areas of Southeast Myanmar even prior to the coup, fighting, attacks and other military activity have increased since February 2021. Aside from ground activity, there have also been airstrikes, which had not occurred in the area for over two decades.

i. Airstrikes: First round in March

On March 27th 2021, KNLA Brigade 5 attacked and scorched an SAC military outpost along the Salween River manned by SAC LIB #349 soldiers in Thee Mu Hta, near Meh Nuh Hta

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (update to 21-135-D1).

³⁹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-194-S1).

⁴⁰ KHRG, "[Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops \(March to June 2021\)](#)", September 2021.

⁴¹ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-93-D2).

⁴² KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021](#)", June 2021.

⁴³ Ibid.

village, Pah Heh village tract, Bu Tho Township.⁴⁴ Ten Tatmadaw soldiers were killed during the attack, and at least eight were taken captive by the KNLA. One KNLA soldier also died.

In what seems to have been a direct response to this attack, the SAC military carried out a series of airstrikes against both KNLA and civilian targets in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts from March 27th to April 1st, killing at least 16 people and injuring 25. Airstrikes were in most cases preceded by reconnaissance flyovers by SAC drones or helicopters. These airstrikes led to the displacement of at least 15,000 villagers.

a. Day Bu Noh area, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District

On the night of March 27th to 28th 2021, SAC fighter jets bombed the Day Bu Noh area, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, which is seven miles from the Thai border where the KNLA Brigade 5 headquarters are located. The bombing started on March 27th 2021 at around 7:45 pm and ended at around 9:00 pm before starting up again at around 12:45 am on March 28th. The airstrikes resulted in civilian casualties, including children, as well as in the destruction of several buildings in Pay Kay village tract, including the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)⁴⁵ No. 1 Day Bu Noh High School in Day Bu Noh village, as well as 12 villagers' houses in the area.



This photo was taken on April 10th 2021 at Day Bu Noh village, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. It shows the Day Bu Noh High School that was destroyed in the SAC airstrike on March 28th 2021. The school was newly built and opened in 2017. The school building, toilets and materials were all destroyed. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on April 8th 2021 in Day Bu Noh village. It shows damage to homes and the surrounding environment from the SAC airstrike on March 27th 2021. [Photo: KHRG]

⁴⁴ [KHRG, "A Worrisome Escalation: Tatmadaw airstrikes kill at least 16 villagers, displace thousands in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts, March 2021", May 2021.](#)

⁴⁵ The Karen Education and Culture Department is the education department of the Karen National Union. Its main goals are to provide mother tongue education services to rural Karen populations in Southeast Myanmar, as well as to preserve the Karen language, culture and history. Despite being an important education provider in the region, it is not officially recognised by the Myanmar government.



KHRG received this photo on April 19th 2021. It was taken in Ab--- village, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township. This photo shows what is left of a villager's motorbike that was destroyed in an airstrike. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken in April 2021. It shows the casing of a bomb that was dropped by SAC aircraft in Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District during the airstrikes on March 27th 2021. [Photo: KHRG]

On March 28th 2021, at 11:45 pm, SAC fighter jets bombed several villages in the Day Bu Noh area again, injuring three villagers. Two houses were destroyed in the airstrikes, and some farming equipment was damaged.

On March 29th, at 1:00 am, two SAC fighter jets dropped two bombs on the KECD Ser Thweh Thaw School, Hto Htee Per Hkoh village, Pay Kay village tract. No casualties were reported.

A total of 2,490 villagers from 15 villages in Pay Kay village tract fled their village and settled temporarily in nearby forests because of the airstrikes. They could not take any belongings or food with them, but some villagers managed to retrieve rice from their villages in the morning. According to a KHRG researcher, every villager in Pay Kay village tract eventually fled to the forest. The villagers who were injured in the airstrikes on Day Bu Noh area could not access proper healthcare services at the displacement site. Some of them were eventually sent to Thailand for treatment on March 30th 2021 [KHRG was not able to establish how many]. A KHRG researcher reported that, as of March 31st 2021, there were over 7,000 IDPs in Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District.⁴⁶



KHRG received this photo on April 19th 2021. It shows a villager injured by an airstrike in Day Bu Noh village area. He, along with other villagers, was hiding in the forest without access to healthcare treatment or proper shelter. [Photo: KHRG]

⁴⁶ Ibid.



KHRG received this photo on April 19th 2021. It shows the displaced villagers from Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District hiding from the airstrike after the SAC attack on March 27th 2021. 2,490 villagers from 15 villages fled during that first airstrike. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on April 9th 2021, in Day Bu Noh area, Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. It shows a temporary shelter made by displaced villagers from Day Bu Noh village as they fled from SAC military air attacks. [Photo: KHRG]

b. Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District

On March 29th 2021, at around 1:00 pm, two SAC jets dropped five bombs on the KECD No. 3 Daw Koo Hta High School in Ler Htoo Poe village, Mae Thu village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. Five children were injured in the bombing, and two of them sustained serious injuries. The school was completely destroyed.⁴⁷

Another two bombs were dropped on Meh K'law and Khaw Hpoh Kyi villages, Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District on March 30th 2021.⁴⁸ The bombs destroyed or damaged six houses, two rice barns, 175 baskets of rice, one motorbike and one tractor in Meh K'law village. Two villagers died, and four others were injured. The attack also resulted in damage to three houses in Khaw Hpoh Kyi village. Free Burma Rangers (FBR)⁴⁹ also reported that Saw Hpa Loh Hpoh, a 76-year-old villager from Meh K'law died as a result of the airstrike.⁵⁰

According to a KHRG researcher, as of early April, the airstrikes had led nearly 5,000 villagers from Dwe Lo Township to flee their village.

c. Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District

A KHRG researcher reported that the SAC military also carried out two airstrikes in Pah Heh village tract on March 28th 2021, killing one villager and injuring three others. The bombs damaged the KECD Thee Kaw Hta school and a clinic in Thee Kaw Hta Place, Paw Kah Der village, as well as some villagers' houses in Lay Ther Hkoh village.

⁴⁷ Free Burma Rangers, "[Children Killed and Wounded by Daily Airstrikes from Burma Military, 12,000 People Now Displaced in Karen State](#)", March 2021.

⁴⁸ This information was taken from the [Facebook page of the KNU Department of Organising and Information](#) posted on March 30th 2021 (accessed on May 12th 2021).

⁴⁹ Founded in 1997 in response to Tatmadaw offenses, Free Burma Rangers (FBR) is a multi-ethnic humanitarian relief organisation that specialises in providing emergency health care, shelter, food and clothing to civilians in war zones and prioritises assisting IDPs. In addition to their relief activities the FBR also conducts capacity building trainings (sometimes jointly with KHRG), documents human rights violations and advocates regularly on the situation in Burma/Myanmar. There are currently 71 active FBR teams that go on 2-4 missions a year.

⁵⁰ Free Burma Rangers, "[Civilians Killed in Their Homes in Burma Army Attacks](#)", April 2021.

On the same day, at around 3:30 pm, the SAC military carried out two airstrikes on Khoh Kay village, Pah Heh village tract, Bu Tho Township. There were no casualties because local villagers had already fled to a safe location at around mid-day.

People in Ei Tu Hta IDP camp, located 21.5 kilometres from where the airstrikes had occurred on March 28th, heard rumours about an SAC plan to carry out airstrikes against the camp.⁵¹ Therefore, over 3,000 persons living in Ei Tu Hta and surrounding villages, including women, children, elders and persons with disabilities, fled the area and crossed the Salween River (which marks the border between Thailand and Myanmar) by boat later that day.⁵² Some of the IDPs could bring their belongings with them, but others could not bring anything.

A few hours after reaching Thailand, they were forced to return to Myanmar by the Royal Thai Army. Some elderly IDPs did not return right away and stayed in Thailand for 2-3 days, after which they were deported. Although Thailand is not party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the actions of the Royal Thai Army amount to refoulement. Thus, they failed to meet the country's legal obligations under customary international law.

d. Kler Lwee Htoo District

On March 30th 2021, two SAC military jets bombed the Moe Aung gold mining site located in Meh Theh Hkee place near Htee Hpa Doh village, Meh Yeh Hkee village tract, Hsaw Htee Township. Nine people were killed, mostly mine workers, and two others were injured.⁵³ This was the only airstrike in Kler Lwee Htoo District, however, since March 28th 2021, after the airstrikes on Day Bu Noh village, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District, SAC jets and drones have been flying regularly over Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, presumably on reconnaissance missions. Local villagers, including IDPs, have thus been afraid that the SAC military will carry out airstrikes in their area like they did in Day Bu Noh village since airstrikes are usually preceded by reconnaissance flyovers.⁵⁴

ii. Airstrikes: Second round in April

A month after the first airstrikes in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts, SAC forces carried out a second round of airstrikes that began on April 27th in Mu Traw District.⁵⁵ SAC forces also continued surveillance through drones and helicopters in KNU-controlled areas.

On April 27th 2021, SAC fighter jets dropped five bombs on Toh Nyoh Hta, Pwah Poo, Pway Day, and Paw Hta villages in Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. On that same day, SAC fighter jets also dropped two bombs on Bu Ah Der village, Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township.

On April 28th 2021, the SAC military carried out several airstrikes and shelling in Dah Hkway (Dagwin) area, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. At 10:08 am, two fighter jets dropped two bombs and fired machine guns several times into Khoh Loh Kyoh and Wa Baw Kyoh villages, Dah Hkway area. At 10:10 am, jets dropped two more bombs and fired machine guns

⁵¹ “[စစ်ကောင်စီတပ်မှ KNU တပ်မဟာ \(၅\) နယ်မြေတွင်း လေယာဉ်ဖြင့် ထပ်မံပစ်ခတ်](#)”, *Karen Information Center*, March 2021.

⁵² “[အီတူးထာ ကျေးရွာမှ ရွာသား ၃,၀၀၀ ထက်မနည်း ထိုင်းဘက်ခြမ်းသို့ ထွက်ပြေးတိမ်းရှောင်](#)”, *Karen Information Center*, March 2021.

⁵³ [KHRG, “A Worrisome Escalation: Tatmadaw airstrikes kill at least 16 villagers, displace thousands in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts, March 2021”](#), May 2021.

⁵⁴ [KHRG, “Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Increased militarisation and fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA prevent IDPs from returning home in Ler Doh Township, March to May 2021”](#), May 2021.

⁵⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (see NB 21-5-NB1).

into Dah Hkway area. At 10:38 am, a helicopter shot three missiles into Mae T'Ree Kloh, Dah Hkway area. At 1:10 pm, the fighter jets dropped four bombs in Wa Ka Kyoh and Khoh Law Hta villages. At 4:10 pm, two fighter jets dropped five bombs again in the Dah Hkway area.

On May 2nd at 11:40 am, two fighter jets dropped four bombs in Blar Lay Pwar's forest near Toh Nyoh Hta village, Bu Ah Der village tract, Bu Tho Township but one of the bombs did not explode. No casualties were reported during these airstrikes since villagers had already fled to a safer place. That same day, from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm, the SAC military conducted reconnaissance over Lu Thaw

Township with two jet fighters, causing displacement in Yeh Muh Plaw village tract, Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Saw Muh Plaw village tract, Hplah Hkoh village tract, Hkay Poo village tract and Naw Yoh Hta village tract, Lu Thaw Township.

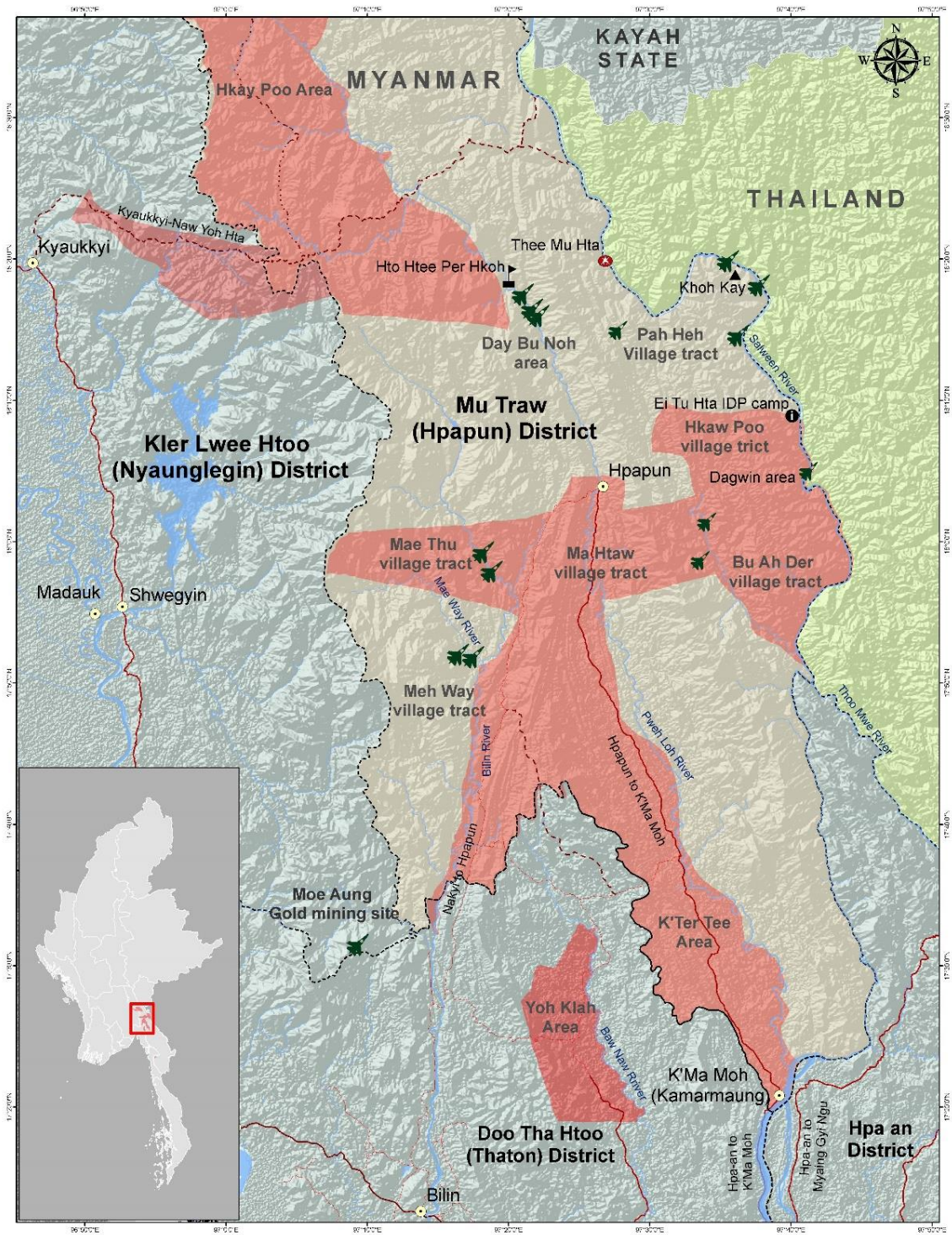
On May 7th 2021 at 11:43 am, the SAC military carried out an additional airstrike in Wa Lu Place near Wa K'Mar Hta village, Pa Hkae village tract, Bu Tho Township.

A KHRG researcher reported that between April 27th and May 2nd, the SAC military also conducted surveillance by helicopter on areas in Doo Tha Htoo District. It was reported as well that SAC drones and helicopters flew over Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District from March 28th 2021 until late April.



This photo was taken on May 1st 2021 in Ac--- village, Meh Thu village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. The photo shows an SAC military observation jet flying over Mu Traw District. *[Photo: local villager]*

Map : Fighting and airstrikes in KNU-defined Karen State



Legend

Town	School	Sub-Road	KNU-Defined Kawthoilei Boundary
Airstrike location	Village	River	Thailand Boundary
SAC army camp	Tatmadaw Road	Areas of heavy fighting	
IDP Camp	Major Road		

0 5 10 20 Kilometers

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Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

i. Ground attacks and conflict

Fighting in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts had already been taking place prior to the military coup. However, ground attacks and fighting increased significantly beginning in March, not only in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo, but in Doo Tha Htoo District as well. In Dooplaya District, an increase in conflict has been more recent, with the majority of reports occurring in June. No fighting or shelling was reported for Taw Oo (Toungoo), Mergui-Tavoy and Hpa-an districts.

a. Mu Traw

Lu Thaw Township

Following demonstrations in December 2020 by villagers in Lu Thaw Township demanding the withdrawal of troops from the area, Tatmadaw troops began firing mortars into villages and farm areas.⁵⁶ On January 1st 2021, soldiers fired 43 rounds of mortars along with gunfire at civilian areas in Hplah Hkoh village tract, destroying the homes of several villagers. Further shelling in Hplah Hkoh village tract continued through the beginning of February.⁵⁷ Shelling in Ler Muh Plaw village tract also began in January, with the first incident reported on January 23rd. Shelling increased in Ler Muh Plaw village tract during February and March, and continued through April, with SAC soldiers firing into villagers' fields. On April 30th, at 9:00 am, SAC soldiers from Htaw Mu Pleh Meh army camp shelled mortars into Yo Farm near Yoh See Law Plaw destroying civilians' rice barns.⁵⁸ Shelling also increased in Tay Muh Der village tract from mid-February through mid-March, as well as in Saw Muh Plaw village tract from mid-March to mid-April. Military activity, including the transport of rations and patrolling, also took place in Hkay Poo village tract.⁵⁹ Shelling in Cd--- village, Hkay Poo village tract, conducted by SAC Military Operation Command (MOC)⁶⁰ #4, Light Infantry Battalion #704 based at Bu Pho Lu army camp on April 11th, resulted in the death of one villager, Saw B---, 42 years old.⁶¹

Bu Tho Township

Shelling in Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township also began prior to the coup. On January 30th, six rounds of mortars were fired around Ad--- village, destroying a villager's hut, killing one buffalo and injuring another.⁶² Shelling continued through the months of February and March, leading to further property damage and the displacement of multiple villages. A total of 396 villagers from Ad--- and Ae--- villages were displaced due to shelling on February 23rd and March 6th. KHRG believes that another 634 villagers from eight other villages were impacted by the shelling and were in danger as well.⁶³ The primary SAC battalions involved were LIB #434 under Battalion Commander Myint Zaw Oo and MOC #8, LIB #410 under Battalion Commander Htun Lin Mya, as well as MOC #8, LIB #401.

Shelling continued into the months of April and May. On April 2nd 2021, SAC LIB #408 under MOC #8 shelled three mortars into Ler Day Kaw village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho

⁵⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-152-D1).

⁵⁷ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw results in displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2020 to February 2021](#)", June 2021.

⁵⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-153-D1).

⁵⁹ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw results in displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2020 to February 2021](#)", June 2021.

⁶⁰ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

⁶¹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-152-D1).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-95-S1 and 21-152-D1).

Township, Mu Traw District. This shelling killed one villager, Naw Mu Htoh, 55 years old and injured her husband Saw Mya Aung, 56 years old.⁶⁴ On April 4th 2021 at 7:20 am, fighting broke out between SAC LIB #405 under MOC #8 and BGF Battalion #1014 in Ler Day Hkaw village, Htee T'Daw Hta group, Bu Tho Township.⁶⁵ On April 8th 2021, SAC LIB #434 soldiers undertaking road security at Way San village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township indiscriminately fired several rounds of mortars. The mortars fell into Af--- village, Meh Klaw village tract. One of the mortars landed on a villager's house, while another that fell into the village remained unexploded. A 17-year-old boy was also mildly injured by the shelling and treated by the Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)^{66,67} During the entire first week of May, villagers in Meh Klaw village tract experienced more fighting and heavy shelling on the part of SAC LIB #434. Ag---, Ah---, and Ai--- villages, totaling 1000 people, were the most heavily impacted. Some of these villagers fled to nearby areas, but others stayed, hiding themselves in makeshift bunkers.⁶⁸

Dwe Lo Township

Indiscriminate shelling occurred in Lay Hpoh Hta village tract in the early part of April (every day from April 7th to 12th), and resulted in injuries to multiple civilians.⁶⁹ On April 7th 2021 at 8:00 am, SAC soldiers fired mortars into Aj--- village, Lay Hpoh Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. Four villagers were injured from the shelling; 48-year-old Saw E---, his 33-year-old wife (Naw F---) and 11-year-old daughter (Naw G---), and 31-year-old Saw H---. Another villager from Aj---, Lay Hpoh Hta village tract was injured in the foot on April 11th due to the shelling. On April 12th 2021 at 8:00 am, 15-year-old Saw I---, who lives in Ak---, was wounded from indiscriminate shelling by the SAC military while going to K'Ma Moh Town by motorcycle to buy some goods for his family. SAC Light Infantry Battalion #405 and #408 and BGF #1014 (led by Bo⁷⁰ Maung Chit) were likely responsible for the shelling as they operate in the surrounding areas.

222 households, totaling 1598 people, from four villages in Lay Hpoh Hta village tract fled as of the end of May:

- Aj--- - villagers (70 households)
- Al--- - 304 villagers (50 households)
- Am--- - 275 villagers (42 households)
- An--- - 536 villagers (60 households)⁷¹

Fighting and shelling in Ma Hta village tract started at the end of March and has continued through the end of the reporting period.⁷² On April 4th 2021, the KNLA attacked the Koo Seik SAC military camp, Ma Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, and blocked the military road with logs and landmines. In response, SAC troops indiscriminately fired mortar rounds at nearby villages.⁷³ On April 10th 2021, villagers from Ao--- village, Ma Hta village tract fled

⁶⁴ Free Burma Rangers, "[Civilians Killed in Their Homes in Burma Army Attacks](#)", April 2021.

⁶⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (see NB 21-5-NB1).

⁶⁶ Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is an organisation that provides health care and medical assistance to displaced civilians inside Burma.

⁶⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (see NB 21-5-NB1 and 21-128-D1).

⁶⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-148-D1).

⁶⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-127-D1, 21-152-D1 and 21-180-D1).

⁷⁰ Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer'.

⁷¹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-180-D2).

⁷² [KHRG, "Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021", May 2021](#); also, unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-127-D1, 21-148-D1, 21-152-D1, 21-153-D1 and 21-180-D1).

⁷³ [KHRG, "Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021", May 2021](#).

from their village. After villagers fled, SAC forces burned two houses, one owned by J--- (the Ao--- village head) and the other by K---. All livestock were left behind in the village and villagers were worried that the SAC soldiers would eat their livestock. In Ao--- village, there are 50 households and a population of about 300 people. About 21 to 22 households fled to nearby IDP camps and were provided food by the KNU.⁷⁴

On April 30th, at 1:53 pm, the SAC troops based in Hpapun Town fired 13 mortars at Bu Tho mountain. The mortars fell into Ap--- village, Ma Htaw village tract. On the same day, SAC MOC #8, LIB #408 based in Koo Seik indiscriminately fired mortars into the village causing 13 households to flee to Aq--- village, Meh Klaw village tract in Bu Tho Township.⁷⁵ On May 1st 2021, at 10:28 am, SAC MOC #8, LIB #408, based in Koo Seik, fired six mortars into civilians' livelihood areas in Wah Tho Kyo forest. On May 1st, villagers from both Ar--- village and As--- village fled due to fighting and shelling. There are 600 villagers (60 households) in Ar--- village, and about 200 of them (40 households) fled. In As--- village, there are 60 households, for a population of 350, all of whom fled.⁷⁶

From March 27th 2021 to April 3rd 2021 SAC soldiers from LIBs #19, #340, #341 and #343, along with Hpapun-based Strategic Operation Command (SOC) #1, under whom all four LIBs operate, indiscriminately fired mortar shells every day around their army camps near Hpapun Town, along the boundary between Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships. The SAC military fired mortar rounds because they received information about the presence of KNLA troops near their army camps. Villages to the west of town were asked to move by SAC troops due to the shelling. Villagers were sent to four locations: two in Hpapun Town, one in Dwe Lo Township, and the other in Bu Tho Township.⁷⁷

ii. Doo Tha Htoo District

From the beginning of March, fighting ignited in each of the five townships of Doo Tha Htoo District, although primarily in Bilin, Tha Htoo (Thaton), and Hpa-an townships.

Hpa-an Township

In Hpa-an Township, fighting initially broke out on March 9th between the KNLA and SAC at the army camp located near Kler Kheh village, Boo Prer village tract, as a result of SAC soldiers entering the village without informing the local KNLA in advance. Although there were no casualties, villagers were forced to flee. As a result of the fighting, the KNLA moved elsewhere in the area and BGF soldiers occupied the KNLA army camp.⁷⁸ Since that time, fighting has continued between the KNLA and the SAC and BGF (in and around Meh Leh Hkee village, Thay Lah Baw village, and Guh Bee Htwee Place).

KHRG researchers also noted an escalation in tension, resulting in frequent skirmishes during the month of June. Following a skirmish on June 9th between the KNLA and BGF, the BGF attacked the KNLA army camp at Htee Kyaw Hkee area and burnt down all of the camp buildings (the KNLA soldiers were not present at the time). In addition, the BGF threatened the villagers, saying they would burn down the village if they were attacked by the KNLA

⁷⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-148-D1).

⁷⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-153-D1).

⁷⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-148-D1).

⁷⁷ [KHRG, "Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021", May 2021](#); also unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-116-D1).

⁷⁸ KHRG, "[An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)](#)", May 2021.

again.⁷⁹ On June 20th and 21st 2021, six skirmishes took place over the course of these two days.⁸⁰ On June 20th, one skirmish took place at Thay Kon area close to Thay La Baw village, T’Kaw Poe village, T’Kaw Poe village tract, and then later at Kler Hkeh DKBA army camp. On June 21st, there were four skirmishes: the first and second occurred near Meh Poo village; the third and fourth took place along the vehicle road when BGF from Guh Bee Htwee army camp were sending rations to their camps, and then upon their return. There were multiple deaths and injuries involving soldiers, but no civilian casualties. And although some villagers were forced to flee, most of the fighting took place outside of village areas.

Tha Htoo Township

Fighting in Tha Htoo Township also began on March 9th in multiple locations. No other incidents of fighting were reported until April 2nd when fighting and shelling took place in T’La Aaw Hpoh Klah village, Neh Hpaw Hta village tract, resulting in damage to people’s homes and other buildings in Lay Gher Kler village, including the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) clinic. People were still inside the clinic when it was hit, including one woman who was injured while breastfeeding her baby. Many villagers were forced to flee.⁸¹

On April 23rd 2021, an unidentified villager from Myaink Teh Su section, Kyeik Kaw Thein Seik Town, died during a skirmish between the KNLA and SAC troops beside the vehicle road near Chaw Bee Na and Kaw Ler villages, Kaw Ler village tract, Tha Htoo Township. He had been stopped on the road by SAC soldiers and forced to transport them (to an unspecified location), whereupon they were ambushed by the KNLA. He was caught in the crossfire.⁸²

That same day, April 23rd 2021, at around 8:00 am, fighting broke out between the KNLA and an unknown SAC unit from Thaton army camp, along the highway between Thaton Town and Yangon Town. Local civilians were holding a protest in support of the NUG under the protection of KNLA soldiers. Fighting broke out after SAC soldiers arrived at the protest location.⁸³

Bilin Township

In Bilin Township, initial skirmishes took place in early April in Tar Paw village, Tar Paw village tract and Lay Kay village, P’yah Raw village tract, both locations where SAC and BGF troops are based.⁸⁴ Troop movements by BGF Battalion #1014 led by Bo Tin Way and Battalion Commander Bo Maung Chit between April 27th and May 3rd 2021 led to increased fighting.⁸⁵ The troops also fired mortar rounds indiscriminately when arriving and leaving their camps to clear the road and surrounding areas of KNLA soldiers. In addition to injuries and property damage, there are also now a number of unexploded ordnances (UXO) in the area since several of the mortars did not explode upon impact.

On April 23rd 2021, SAC Artillery Unit #314 based in Htee Hpoe Nya Lee Hkee army camp, near Kyaw T’Raw village, Shway Yaw Pya village tract, Bilin Township also began indiscriminately firing mortar rounds at nearby villages, especially those located in areas controlled by the KNU.⁸⁶ The shelling has been quite constant since that date. One At---

⁷⁹ KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\)](#)”, November 2021.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ KHRG, “[An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)](#)”, May 2021.

⁸² KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo Situation Update: Fighting and indiscriminate shelling by SAC forces, April to May 2021](#)”, June 2021.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ [Ibid.](#)

villager, Saw L---, sustained a shrapnel injury to his leg. About 3,000 villagers from the surrounding area have fled their villages since April 27th. Villagers who do not have relatives in towns or in other places have been forced to hide in the forest near their villages.

iii. Kler Lwee Htoo District

As in Mu Traw District, conflict had already been taking place prior to the coup. According to the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), the SAC military resumed its road construction activities between Hsaw Mee Loo and Mu Theh areas, Ler Doh Township on December 11th 2020 (this road connects the Than Bon, Hsaw Mee Loo, Hkoh Hplah Lay Hkoh, K'Baw Soh and Mu Theh army camps). They did not consult with local civilians nor obtain permission from the local KNU authorities in advance which led to multiple skirmishes between SAC troops and the KNLA. According to a KHRG researcher, villagers in Hsaw Mee Loo village tract, Ler Doh Township could hear gunfire and mortar shell explosions almost on a daily basis from December 28th 2020 until mid-January 2021. The road construction cuts through an area that contains not only a number of KNLA army bases, but also many IDP hiding sites. According to CIDKP, as of January 28th 2021, there were already 1,195 IDPs in Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township and Saw Kar Der village tract, Moo (Mone) Township.⁸⁷

KHRG began receiving new reports of shelling in late March, when SAC soldiers started indiscriminately shelling KNU-controlled villages (Than Lae village and Myay Nee Kone Place) in Ler Doh Township from their army camps. The shelling lasted from March 27th to March 30th 2021.⁸⁸

According to a KHRG researcher, the SAC military sent reinforcements to Ler Doh Township from February 1st to February 15th 2021. In total, 51 SAC military trucks were seen travelling throughout the township over this period.⁸⁹ Beginning in early April, SAC troops based in Ler Doh army camp also began sending more soldiers, as well as military supplies and ammunition to Mu Traw District's frontlines. These reinforcements usually travelled on foot on the military road between Ler Doh and Muh Theh villages in Ler Doh Township.⁹⁰ This activity also led to increased conflict. On May 18th 2021, fighting between the KNLA and SAC troops broke out at Eee Tha Plaw Place, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. On May 23rd, Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)⁹¹ Battalion #3 attacked SAC troops at Htee P'Na Nay Plaw Place, beside the SAC military road between Ler Doh and Muh Theh villages. On May 24th, KNDO Battalion #3 attacked the SAC troops who were approaching Mu Traw District at Eee Tha Plaw Place before they arrived at the SAC army camp area near Muh Theh village. On the next day, May 25th, at 8:30 am, KNDO Battalion #3 again attacked the SAC troops who were marching to Mu Traw District at Eee Tha Plaw Place. In some instances, SAC troops also indiscriminately shelled into villages as they passed by. Local civilians who

⁸⁷ KHRG, "[“Where should I flee next?": Fighting and displacement in Doo Tha Htoo, Kler Lwee Htoo and Mu Traw districts, December 2020 to January 2021](#)", April 2021.

⁸⁸ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-110-D1).

⁸⁹ KHRG, "[“Where should I flee next?": Fighting and displacement in Doo Tha Htoo, Kler Lwee Htoo and Mu Traw districts, December 2020 to January 2021](#)", April 2021.

⁹⁰ KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Increased militarisation and fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA prevent IDPs from returning home in Ler Doh Township, March to May 2021](#)", May 2021.

⁹¹ 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.

live close to the military road between Ler Doh and Muh Theh have been at high security risk so they did not feel safe to work on their farms, and the IDPs did not feel safe to return yet.⁹²

iv. Dooplaya District

Although there were no reported cases of fighting or shelling immediately after the coup, villagers in Dooplaya District said they were concerned because they noticed that SAC soldiers were taking security at night, hiding in the bushes, and engaging in more military activities like transporting soldiers and reinforcing their army camps. Villagers would see them at night when they were going to extract the latex from the rubber trees.⁹³ In Kyauk Hkee village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, after seeing SAC soldiers in Kheh Hkoh, a place where villagers go to collect T'la aw leaves,⁹⁴ the local villagers became afraid to go and collect the leaves.⁹⁵

The first report of fighting in Dooplaya District was on February 26th 2021, when skirmishes between KNLA Brigade 6, Battalion #18, Company #3 and SAC IB #230 and IB #231, MOC #12 broke out in the area between Ywar Thit Kone village and Thar Yar Kone village, Yay Kyaw Gyi village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. SAC soldiers had entered a KNU-restricted area without permission from the KNLA. According to the KNLA Brigade 6 operations commander, the SAC called the KNU township administrator and told him that they would patrol KNU-controlled areas to look for and arrest teachers and doctors who joined the CDM and anti-coup protests. The KNU denied them permission and warned them that fighting would break out if they do, but the warning was ignored.⁹⁶

On the evening of March 26th 2021, several mortar rounds were fired at Au--- village, Kaw Nweh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District presumably by SAC forces. A local villager and his five-year-old son both sustained injuries to their legs after a mortar shell exploded in front of their house. They were taken to the hospital for treatment and were able to return home shortly afterward. As a result of this shelling, local villagers became worried that fighting would resume in their area, so they dug makeshift bunkers under their houses for protection.⁹⁷

Beginning April 30th 2021, villagers noticed an increase in troop movement.⁹⁸ The SAC military troops based in Th'Waw Thaw village, Taw Naw Mu Hta area, Kaw T'Ree Township had retreated and joined the troops from Chu K'Lee army camp. DKBA Battalion #909 led by Battalion Commander Pah Yo Khay also went to stay at Th'Waw Thaw army camp. The SAC military troops from Maw Tu army camp temporarily joined the troops from Au Kray Hta in April and engaged in burning of the forest at the time they were there. There is nothing left now. On May 19th 2021, SAC troops found a planted landmine not far from Kyainseikgyi Hospital so they increased security and checked the motorbikes and cars that were travelling around town. The SAC military troops sent three cars of soldiers to Htee Hta Baw village, Kyoe Doe

⁹² KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Increased militarisation and fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA prevent IDPs from returning home in Ler Doh Township, March to May 2021](#)", May 2021; also unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-181-D1).

⁹³ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-37-S1).

⁹⁴ T'la aw trees are teak-like trees with large leaves, which are traditionally collected by villagers and used to make thatch shingles for the roofs of houses.

⁹⁵ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Civil Disobedience Movement, military activity and anti-coup protests, March 2021](#)", June 2021.

⁹⁶ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmish between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA in Kaw T'Ree Township, February 2021](#)", March 2021.

⁹⁷ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Incident Report: Two villagers injured in the explosion of a mortar shell in Kaw T'Ree Township, March 2021](#)", April 2021.

⁹⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-194-S1).

Township. These cars were not military vehicles and the soldiers did not wear the uniforms, therefore, people did not realise that they were the SAC military troops.

On June 1st 2021, in Kaw T'Ree Township, fighting between the BGF, SAC military and DKBA splinter group resulted in the displacement of villagers.⁹⁹ Multiple villages were affected, but primarily Av--- village, wherein over 400 people from that village alone were forced to flee. In addition, more than ten villagers' houses along with a school were destroyed during the fighting and indiscriminate shelling. Some villagers fled and were able to cross into Thailand. Others took refuge at the Thai-Myanmar border, in forests and on the river banks. Although displaced villagers who were not able to cross over to the Thai side of the river did not receive any support, the 500 villagers who were able to cross the river received emergency support from local CSO/CBOs in Thailand who worked in conjunction with village heads and local residents from Thai villages in the area. They received food, clothes, sleeping mats, blankets, drinking water, hygiene supplies, and masks. On June 5th 2021, the displaced villagers were able to return home.

On June 2nd 2021, more fighting broke out in Aw-- village, Maw Hkee village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township between the KNDO and the SAC military after KNDO soldiers attacked an SAC police station.¹⁰⁰ The fighting caused local villagers to flee to the Thai-Myanmar border. The villagers were displaced in 2009 once, but had not had to flee again until now.

More fighting broke out on June 2nd 2021 in K'Neh Lay village, Taw Naw Mu Htaw area, Kaw T'Ree Township and again on June 4th 2021 in Kler T'Koh, Waw Ray Township. Fighting occurred again on June 6th 2021 in K'Neh Lay village. SAC helicopters were also surveilling the areas once every two days, generally in the evening or at night.¹⁰¹



This photo was taken by a displaced villager on the border between Aw--- village and Thailand on June 2nd 2021. Some villagers from Aw--- village, Kaw T'Ree Township fled to Thailand due to the fighting occurring near their village. The photo shows villagers crossing the Waw Lay River to Thailand. The displaced villagers were not allowed to enter the villages on the Thai side due to COVID-19 and were only allowed to stay along the riverbank. [Photo: A local villager].

D. COVID-19

Due to the military coup, KHRG received few reports on the COVID-19 situation. Testing and reporting of COVID-19 cases by the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) greatly curtailed immediately following the coup. One week after the coup, daily testing had dropped from more than 17,000 a day to about 2,000 a day. The number of cases found was just four - compared with an average of 420 a day in the last week of January.¹⁰² Regional information about positive cases was also no longer available from the MoHS. Reports from the field indicated that screening checkpoints had been abandoned¹⁰³ and that villagers were less concerned about COVID-19 than the military

⁹⁹ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Interview: Fighting between SAC troops and other armed groups resulted in villagers' displacement, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District, June 1st 2021](#)", July 2021.

¹⁰⁰ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Interview: Recent fighting and displacement in Kaw T'Ree Township, June 2021](#)", July 2021.

¹⁰¹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-194-S1).

¹⁰² "[Coronavirus testing collapses in Myanmar after coup](#)", *Reuters*, February 2021.

¹⁰³ KHRG, "[Left Behind: Ethnic Minorities and COVID-19 in Rural Southeast Myanmar](#)", May 2021.

takeover.¹⁰⁴ A KHRG researcher in Dooplaya District reported in mid-February: “We do not hear anything much about the [COVID-19] virus. Does the virus disappear or not we do not know? Since then we do not hear about people infected by the virus. Everyone is healthy as normal. We also see the screening checkpoints were already withdrawn in the areas. There is no temperature checking in the village tracts. The quarantine places are however still kept.”¹⁰⁵



This photo was taken on April 7th 2021 in Hay Day T’Kuh village, Yaw K’Daw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. It shows an abandoned COVID-19 screening checkpoint at the entrance of the village. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on April 7th 2021 in Taung Kaway village, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. It shows COVID-19 awareness posters on the ground. The local screening checkpoints were also dismantled. [Photo: KHRG]

News of a third wave of COVID-19 taking hold in Myanmar did not begin to surface until late June to early July. Likewise, information about the spread of the virus in rural areas was not reported by KHRG researchers until July, thus outside the current reporting period.

Prior to the coup, travel restrictions to limit the spread of the virus were still creating livelihood challenges for villagers. A KHRG community member reporting on the situation in January 2021 in Mu Traw District, stated that travel restrictions due to the pandemic resulted in difficulties such as travelling, trading, and buying or selling. Local authorities were thus allowing villagers to travel three days in a month to buy food.¹⁰⁶ Although movement restrictions continued throughout the reporting period, they were more directly tied to the coup and increased insecurity than COVID-19 prevention measures.

¹⁰⁴ KHRG, “[Military Atrocities and Civilian Resilience: Testimonies of injustice, insecurity and violence in Southeast Myanmar during the 2021 coup](#)”, November 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-37-S1).

¹⁰⁶ KHRG, “[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw results in displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2020 to February 2021](#)”, June 2021.

Part II. Overview of the human rights and security situation in Southeast Myanmar

A. Intentional violence against civilians

Since the coup, KHRG has received increasing reports of violence against civilians in rural areas, including what appears to be intentional shooting and killing of civilians.

On March 30th in Saw Muh Plaw area, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District, SAC troops based at Wa Klay Too army camp shot Saw M--- from Saw Muh Plaw area using a sniper rifle. They fired 3 rounds at him. No other information was available.¹⁰⁷ On April 29th 2021, SAC LIB #407 shot dead a 38-year-old villager Saw N--- with a bullet to the head, in As--- village, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District.¹⁰⁸

On May 28th 2021 in Ax--- village, Ay--- village tract, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, a patrol of SAC soldiers opened fire on two local villagers, 36-year-old Saw O--- and 27-year-old Saw P---, who were in a hut on their farm. They were waiting to pick durian when the soldiers fired at them, injuring at least one of them. Saw O--- was injured by a bullet to his kneecap, and was unable to run away. Saw P--- was never found, and local villagers believe that he was either killed or taken away. Saw O--- was brought to the hospital for treatment by the father of the other victim, but was later taken from the hospital by SAC soldiers under the pretext of providing further treatment. He has not been heard from since that time.¹⁰⁹

In Dooplaya District, U¹¹⁰ Q---, the ten-household head (also a local traditional healer) from Az--- village, Kyone Kwel village tract, Kyone Doe Township was shot at his home on April 23rd 2021, at about 8:30 pm. Responding to a knock at his door, six rounds of bullets were fired at him, although only one actually hit him. He died as a result of a bullet to the chest. The SAC police officers at Chaung Na Kwa claimed the bullets were not theirs, thus the case remains unresolved, and no further investigation has been made by either the Karen National Police Force (KNPF)¹¹¹ or the SAC police force.¹¹²

The KNLA General Headquarters reported other incidents of the SAC military intentionally shooting villagers on sight. On April 8th 2021 at 6:37 am, SAC LIB #349 shot dead a villager Saw Bu Ki, 60 years old, from Pyeh Hta village, Ler Mu Plaw area, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District.¹¹³ On April 12th 2021, SAC LIB #407 under MOC #8, shot dead two villagers while they were traveling: Saw Hpa Hkay, 50 years old, and Saw Nge Lay, 35 years old from Wa Tho Hkoh village, Lay Hpoh Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township.¹¹⁴ On the same day at 3:30 pm, SAC soldiers shot dead Saw Maung Bo, 44 years old from Leh Hpoh Der village, Hkay Poo village tract, Lu Thaw Township.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-152-D1).

¹⁰⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-148-D1 and 21-152-D1).

¹⁰⁹ KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: One villager injured, another one missing after being shot at by the Tatmadaw in Moo Township, May 2021](#)", June 2021.

¹¹⁰ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

¹¹¹ The Karen National Police Force is the law enforcement agency of the Karen National Union. It was established in 1991.

¹¹² In-process (as yet unpublished) data collected from Dooplaya District (21-195-S1).

¹¹³ This information was taken from the [KNLA General Headquarters Facebook page](#), from a post dated April 16th 2021.

¹¹⁴ This information was taken from the [KNLA General Headquarters Facebook page](#), from a post dated April 21st 2021.

¹¹⁵ This information was taken from [KLNA General Headquarters Facebook page](#), from a post dated April 16th 2021.

B. Forced labour

Fears of forced labour emerged among rural villagers immediately upon hearing news of the military coup, due to its prevalence during past periods of conflict. Actual incidents of forced labour have also surfaced in multiple areas.

On March 30th 2021, SAC Captain San Myo Htaik Aung from Strategic Operations Command (SOC) #2 required one representative person from each household in Bb--- village, Lut Shar village tract, Waw Ray [Win Yin] Township, Dooplaya District to clear brush, carry trash, and do clean-up, otherwise pay 3,000 kyats [USD 1.68]¹¹⁶ each.¹¹⁷

KHRG received two reports of forced labour in April.¹¹⁸ SAC and BGF troops from SOC #8 and BGF #1013 (under Maung¹¹⁹ Hla Kyaing) demanded 25 porters from three villages (Bc---, Bd--- and Be---) in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. Local villagers were afraid to carry items for the soldiers, and asked the village heads to help collect money to use as replacement fees. Between the three villages, they collected 1,250,000 kyats [USD 700.28]. This has however increased the financial hardship of the local villagers. In addition, five villagers from Bf--- village were ordered to be navigators for BGF troops under Bo Chit Thu (Battalion #1012) and Bo Maung Chit (Battalion #1014) while they marched to Bg--- village, Meh Pree village tract, Bu Tho Township. According to a KHRG researcher, the soldiers did not actually need navigation, and thus were using the villagers as human shields to prevent attack by the KNLA.

In May 2021, the BGF [battalion unknown] ordered Bh--- villagers in Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District to be navigators for them and carry ammunition and other military supplies as porters.¹²⁰

C. Landmines

Since the coup, there has been an increase in the planting of new landmines by both the SAC military and the KNLA. In Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, the KNLA have actively been planting landmines in order to prevent SAC troops from accessing the area.¹²¹ In April, SAC troops based in Hpapun were planting landmines while they marched through civilian areas in Bu Tho Township. As a result, villagers' livestock (pigs and buffaloes) have died in landmine explosions. Both KNLA and SAC soldiers have also stepped on their own landmines.

Two landmine incidents occurred near Hpapun Town, Mu Traw District.¹²² On June 20th 2021, at 7:15 am, a 32-year-old villager from Bi---, Aur'Naung Pat Kan Ywar village tract, Dwe Lo Township stepped on a landmine while he was returning home from his hill fields. On June 22nd at 1:30 pm, a villager named Daw S---, 55 years old, also from Bi---, Aur'Naut Pat Kan Ywar village tract, stepped on a landmine while she was harvesting mushrooms outside of her village. In both cases, the injuries required the amputation of one of their legs. Local villagers believe the landmines were planted sometime during 2021.

¹¹⁶ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the December 2nd 2021 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.56 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

¹¹⁷ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-114-S1).

¹¹⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-152-D1).

¹¹⁹ Maung is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

¹²⁰ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\)](#)", November 2021; no further details provided.

¹²¹ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.; also in-process (as yet unpublished) data collected from Mu Traw District (21-141-S1).

¹²² KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: Two villagers were seriously injured as a result of landmine explosions in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, June 2021](#)", July 2021.

Although the KNLA sometimes inform villagers not to go to the areas where they have planted landmines, this does not happen systematically.¹²³ Moreover, such warnings are insufficient as a solution. When the landmines are planted in areas that villagers need to access for their livelihoods, the warnings about landmine contamination do not deter them, as was the case in Bi--- village.¹²⁴



This photo shows a villager from Bi--- village, Aur Naung Pat Kan village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District who was injured after stepping on a landmine near her village. Her right leg had to be amputated due to the severity of her injuries. [Photo: A local villager]

The KNLA engaged in the clearing of landmines along the road between K'Ma Moh and Hpapun on June 19th 2021.¹²⁵ However multiple landmine incidents have taken place since. On July 16th, a 46-year-old villager from Bj--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township ran over a tripwire which detonated a landmine. He sustained injuries to his chest. Unable to get him to a hospital, the other villagers brought him to his home, where he died immediately. That same day, two villagers from Bk--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township drove over a tripwire which detonated a landmine while riding on their motorcycle to Bj--- village. Their injuries were minor, and they did not require medical treatment as the speed at which they were riding protected them from most of the shrapnel.¹²⁶

On April 5th 2021, a civilian from Hpapun Town stepped on a newly-planted landmine at Ngar Inn Suu junction in Na Koo Hta village, Na Koo Hkee village tract, Dwe Lo Township. He was taken to the clinic in SAC LIB #434's camp for treatment. Local villagers do not know how badly he was injured.¹²⁷ On June 29th, a 10-year-old boy from Bl--- village, Ma Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, stepped on a tripwire which detonated a landmine at a place between Bm--- and As--- villages. As a result of the explosion, he sustained injuries to his head, chin and belly.¹²⁸ There have been several other reports of landmine injuries in Mu Traw since the coup.

A landmine incident was also reported near Bn--- village, Kheh Kah Hkoh village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. On March 1st, two local villagers died and another one sustained minor injuries in a landmine explosion. The victims were travelling to Ler Doh Town

¹²³ In-process (as yet unpublished) data collected from Mu Traw District (21-141-S1).

¹²⁴ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: Two villagers were seriously injured as a result of landmine explosions in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, June 2021](#)", July 2021; see also KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: One villager died and another two villagers were injured due to landmine explosions along a road in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, July 2021](#)", September 2021; KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: Two villagers killed, one injured in a landmine explosion in Ler Doh Township, March 2021](#)", April 2021.

¹²⁵ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹²⁶ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: One villager died and another two villagers were injured due to landmine explosions along a road in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, July 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹²⁷ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021](#)", May 2021.

¹²⁸ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: A 10-year-old boy was injured after stepping on a tripwire that detonated a landmine in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, June 2021](#)", September 2021.

to purchase goods when one of their motorbikes hit a landmine. Because of this incident, local villagers are now too afraid to go to their plantations.¹²⁹

Another landmine incident was reported prior to the coup. On January 8th 2021, a 12-year-old boy stepped on a landmine in Ta Maw Daw village tract, Thaton Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. His left foot was blown off in the explosion, and he sustained injuries to his right thigh. The victim spent three weeks at a local clinic for treatment, after which he was sent back to his village. This particular landmine was planted by the KNLA in response to an increase in SAC military activities in the area.¹³⁰

D. Healthcare

The military coup negatively impacted access to healthcare in rural Southeast Myanmar. Many medical staff joined the CDM, leaving hospitals and clinics understaffed. Armed conflict and attacks have led to widespread displacements, limiting healthcare for IDPs, and has resulted in the destruction of some healthcare facilities. Many clinics have also been forced to move or shut down due to security concerns.

i. CDM and healthcare

After the coup took place, government staff, including nurses and doctors from government hospitals, joined the CDM. This has resulted in inadequate healthcare service throughout Myanmar. In Bilin and Thaton townships, Doo Tha Htoo District, government hospitals were closed as most doctors and health workers joined the CDM. Only private and non-government run clinics, like those run by ethnic health organisations, remain open in these areas. KDHW clinics are still operating but do not have sufficient medical supplies or the ability to treat major illnesses.¹³¹ Similarly in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah, and Ler Doh Soh townships, Mergui-Tavoy District, public hospitals closed down while nurses and doctors participated in the anti-coup protests and CDM. It is unclear if the hospitals were able to continue operating every day. This became a challenge for sick people to get medical treatment.¹³²

The SAC security forces responded to opposition to the coup by arresting and threatening healthcare workers who joined the CDM and protests. In Lu Pleh Township, Hpa-an District, it was reported that some local villagers have been taking security for the healthcare workers in Lu Pleh Town hospital because SAC soldiers were coming to arrest the nurses and doctors. There are now no more doctors and nurses at that hospital because they have had to flee and hide from security forces. As a result, local villagers in Lu Pleh Township cannot access healthcare services when they are sick. They have turned to using home remedies on their own. A KHRG researcher in Hpa-an District reported that some people however passed away due to the lack of healthcare in the area.¹³³

ii. Impact of armed conflict on healthcare

In some areas, healthcare has been heavily impacted by military activities, including armed conflict. KHRG researchers reported that armed conflict has been carried out in civilian areas without distinguishing these areas from legitimate military targets. This has resulted in healthcare insecurity. At the end of March 2021, the SAC air force attacked civilian areas in

¹²⁹ KHRG, "[Kler Lwe Htoo District Incident Report: Two villagers killed, one injured in a landmine explosion in Ler Doh Township, March 2021](#)", April 2021.

¹³⁰ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: Child seriously injured in a landmine explosion in Thaton Township, January 2021](#)", March 2021.

¹³¹ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo Situation Update: Fighting and indiscriminate shelling by SAC forces, April to May 2021](#)", June 2021.

¹³² Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-46-S1).

¹³³ Unpublished data collected from Hpa-an District (21-36-S1).

Mu Traw District including education and healthcare facilities.¹³⁴ A KHRG researcher from Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District reported that some clinics under KDHW operation had to move to a safe place because there have been SAC drones and helicopters conducting reconnaissance on the area both day and night.

On the night of April 19th 2021, the healthcare department coordinator Saw T--- decided to move the KDHW clinic at Kyaw Pah. The clinic cannot move back to its original location yet, and staff are still living in fear. The other local clinics have also prepared to move. As a result, it now takes more time for the local villagers to go to the clinic when they are sick. They are also unable to access medical services by going to town since there are no doctors, nurses or healthcare workers at Hpapun hospital. As a Myanmar government hospital, it has been impacted by the CDM. Patients with serious conditions have had to contact the local monks and religious leaders when they need to get treatment in a hospital or they have had to get treatment at the KNLA operation command clinic.¹³⁵

On April 2nd 2021, in Tha Htoo Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, fighting occurred between KNLA Brigade 1, Battalion #2 and SAC LIB #406 in T'La Aaw Hpoh Klah village, Neh Hpaw Hta village tract. Following this incident, the SAC troops based in P'Nweh Klah army camp fired 120 mm mortars in the vicinity, in order to support their fellow soldiers from LIB #406. The shrapnel hit the roof and the wall of KDHW's clinic in Lay Gher Kler village, leaving extensive damage. At that time, a hospitalised woman from Hpa Baw village got hit on her back while she was breastfeeding her baby. Afterward, the nurses at the clinic had to sleep outside of the village during the night and they would only come back to the clinic during the day in order to treat patients.¹³⁶

iii. Lack of access to healthcare

Within the reporting period, KHRG received information that villagers in IDP sites and remote areas had little access to healthcare. On March 10th 2021, a 78-year-old women, Naw U---, from Bs--- village passed away in a displacement site due to the lack of healthcare. She had been displaced to Bp--- Place, Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District and was unable to receive treatment for her illness.¹³⁷

A KHRG researcher in Mergui-Tavoy District also reported that rural villagers in T'Naw Th'Ree Township have faced challenges in accessing healthcare. Access to healthcare varies, with some villagers relying on the KDHW clinic in Meh Wa village for healthcare, while other communities have access to Myanmar government healthcare services such as midwives and malaria tests. However, healthcare services from both the KNU and Myanmar government are not adequate in these communities. In case of serious illness, rural villagers in T'Naw Th'Ree Township have to travel to the hospital in Tavoy Town to receive adequate treatment for the ailments that most commonly arise for them.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ KHRG, "[A Worrisome Escalation: Tatmadaw airstrikes kill at least 16 villagers, displace thousands in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts, March 2021](#)", May 2021; KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹³⁵ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹³⁶ KHRG, "[An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)](#)", May 2021.

¹³⁷ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-82-D1).

¹³⁸ In-process (as yet unpublished) data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-175-S1).

E. Education

Beginning in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of government schools. During the first 6 months of 2021, government schools remained closed due to the February 1st coup. Despite efforts by the SAC to reopen government schools in June, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and more recently the third wave of COVID-19 has impeded that process. These closures have had an impact on students as well as KECD schools, most of which are still operating, despite pressure by the SAC to close. The military coup has resulted in further impacts on education in Southeast Myanmar as armed conflict and attacks have increased in many areas and led to displacement.

i. Government school closures

In some areas, the closure of government schools since 2020 resulted in an increase in student enrollment at KECD schools. These higher enrollments have placed additional strains on KECD schools, which are now in need of additional teachers and school supplies. The Civil Disobedience Movement that emerged in reaction to the February 1st military coup further impacted the reopening of government schools for the 2021-2022 academic year as teachers throughout Myanmar refused to work for the military junta. The SAC ordered all basic education schools to reopen on June 1st 2021, but many teachers and students have refused to return.¹³⁹

In Doo Tha Htoo District, KHRG's field researchers indicated that KECD schools have run out of classroom space as well as dormitory space to accommodate the new students. The schools are also in need of more teachers and funding if they are to continue teaching all of these students.¹⁴⁰ During the 2021-2022 academic year in Meh Theh Hkee village, Hpwah Ghaw village tract, Tha Htoo Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, the number of students quadrupled, with over 400 students (compared to 100 last year) enrolled in the Meh Theh Hkee high school because of the closure of government schools.¹⁴¹

KHRG field researchers in Mu Traw District noted similar problems.¹⁴² As in most other areas, many local villagers who used to send their children to government schools do not want to send their children to the government schools anymore. Due to increased enrollments in KECD schools, KECD has had to hire more teachers, and add not only additional classes but additional grades (some schools only go up to Grade 4). This has created a further burden on the students' parents, who are now being asked to cover these new costs.¹⁴³

There have been other problems due to KECD schools remaining open. The SAC military and affiliated armed groups have put pressure on KECD schools to shut down. In June 2021, the Htee Kyaw Hkee KECD school located in Meh Theh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District made plans to open, however BGF soldiers told KECD school teachers in Meh Theh Hkee village tract that they were bothered by the fact that KECD schools would remain open while government schools had closed. BGF soldiers later called two Htee Kyaw Hkee school teachers from Meh Theh Hkee village tract to meet with them at their military outpost. It is unclear what came of that meeting. Concerned about security risks if they didn't follow the BGF's orders, since the BGF outpost is located very close to the village, the KECD

¹³⁹ “[Parents, teachers and students boycott ‘slave education system’](#)”, *Frontier Myanmar*, May 2021.

¹⁴⁰ [KHRG, “Doo Tha Htoo Situation Update: Fighting and indiscriminate shelling by SAC forces, April to May 2021”, June 2021.](#)

¹⁴¹ [KHRG, “Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\)”, November 2021.](#)

¹⁴² [KHRG, “Mu Traw District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw results in displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2020 to February 2021”, June 2021.](#)

¹⁴³ [KHRG, “Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021”, September 2021.](#)

Htee Kyaw Hkee middle school did not start the school year in June 2021. The Meh Theh Hkee high school, however, planned to open on June 28th 2021 anyway.¹⁴⁴

Similar reports have come out of Dooplaya District. Since May 2021, villagers have been trying to organise schooling for local children to make up for the closure of the Myanmar government schools. In Kaw T'Ree Township, however, the Bq--- village secretary told villagers in Kyaw Hta village tract that the SAC military will do something bad to them if they try to open KECD schools since villagers had refused to re-open Myanmar government schools. As a result, the KECD schools are still not open. The schools near Kyainseikgyi are going to open in June 2021 and there is a plan to open the schools in the villages but they were not sure if that would happen.¹⁴⁵ These kinds of threats have also been reported in Mu Traw District.¹⁴⁶

ii. Impact of fighting and displacement on education

With increased fighting and shelling, as well as general insecurity in many parts of KHRG's operational area, it has been difficult for some KECD schools to remain open as well. These problems began shortly after the coup. Beginning in mid-February, in multiple parts of Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District, SAC troops began extending their operations into KNU-controlled areas, patrolling and indiscriminately firing mortars, leading to the displacement of local villagers and the closure of schools.¹⁴⁷ In Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, some schools have been able to open as usual, however, the situation remains particularly unstable for local villages that lie close to the main road.¹⁴⁸

Students living in Br---, Bs---, Bt---, Bu---, Bv--- and Bw--- villages situated in Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District are still facing difficulties accessing education. They have been displaced since December 2020 from their villages because of the fighting between the KNLA and SAC soldiers. Since the military coup took place on February 1st 2021, fighting and indiscriminate shelling in the vicinity of villages in Ler Doh Township has also escalated. Students could not return to their village and go to school properly.¹⁴⁹ Despite the circumstances facing them, villagers have attempted to keep schools running. Bv--- Primary School, Br--- Middle School and Bs--- Middle School are now operating while hiding in the forest. The school teachers and school committee are also planning to build temporary schools in the hiding site so that the displaced children can continue their studies under better conditions. They started school for the 2021-2022 academic year in June 2021.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\)](#)", November 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-194-S1).

¹⁴⁶ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-28-D1).

¹⁴⁸ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-181-D1).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.



These photos were taken on March 2nd 2021 in Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The photos show IDPs from Br--- village, Bs--- village, Bx--- village, Bt--- village, By--- village, and Bz--- village in Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township. The photo on the left shows the children taking their exams in the forest where they have been displaced. The photo on the right shows the displaced children studying at night, where they must use a torch light to see. [Photos: Forum Asia staff].

iii. Other issues

Some of the villages in the Lay Nya Bok Pyin area, T'Naw Th'Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District are facing disturbances by SAC military intelligence for trying to attend KECD schools. On June 15th 2021, three *Sa Ya Pa* (military intelligence officers)¹⁵¹ came to Ca--- village, Chaung Ka Hpet village tract, Bokpyin Township, Mergui-Tavoy District and asked the children who go to KECD schools to come back to the village. They said that they heard the children who go to Karen schools are going to become KNLA soldiers. As a result, they came to check on the villagers. In Cb--- village, Cb--- village tract, T'Naw Th'Ree Township some parents had not enrolled their children at the school yet because they did not want to send their children to schools run by the military. This led the village head to threaten the local villagers, saying that they will be fined for opposing the country. Some of the village leaders have been assigned by the SAC since the military coup, and thus are acting on behalf of the SAC.¹⁵²

F. Livelihoods

KHRG reported serious and deepening livelihood issues throughout Southeast Myanmar during the first half of 2021. Villagers in KHRG's area of operation typically rely on working their farms, plantations, or orchards; or on fishing, animal husbandry and trading; or the work of making charcoal and other products to sell or trade; and/or various forms of day labour for their livelihoods. These different sectors have been impacted in different ways, first by COVID-19, and then by the military coup and its wide-reaching impact on the economy. The increased

¹⁵¹ Military Security Affairs (MSA), commonly referred to by its Burmese acronym *Sa Ya Pa* (*Sa Aa Pa* in Karen) is the office of the Burma/Myanmar armed forces tasked with intelligence gathering. It was created to replace the Military Intelligence Service, which was disbanded as its chief Khin Nyunt fell from favour in 2004. The office is charged with handling political issues, and had played a central role in monitoring the 2007 popular protests in Burma/Myanmar; coordinating widespread arrests of protesters and their interrogation. Human Rights Watch reported that as part of its interrogation process, MSA uses sleep deprivation and condones the beating and kicking of detainees until they are unconscious, see Human Rights Watch, "[Crackdown: Repression of the 2007 Popular Protests in Burma](#)", December 2007. As of September 2014, MSA is headed by former army chief of staff Lieutenant General Mya Tun Oo. For further details see Yan PAI "[Burmese Military Reshuffle Sees New Security Chief Appointed](#)", *The Irrawaddy*, September 2014.

¹⁵² KHRG, "[Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops \(March to June 2021\)](#)", September 2021.

insecurity that has resulted from fighting, airstrikes, and other military activities has also created livelihood challenges. Even beyond the coup and the COVID-19 pandemic, villagers encountered livelihood problems due to weather conditions. Some villagers in Mu Traw District, for instance, reported that the irregular weather patterns prevented them from planting the usual number of paddies.¹⁵³

i. Collapsed economy

Prices on necessary goods such as food staples and diesel fuel have risen substantially since the coup. Instability from the coup has also resulted in a poor job market overall. There has been little hiring since the coup, with many foreign businesses and offices closing their doors. The collapse of the economy has impacted access to jobs, not just in towns but in rural areas as well, where many rural villagers had already turned to the informal job market, working as casual or day labourers, due to problems in access to land and other livelihood challenges.

Agricultural markets have also been hit hard. As one civilian from Myeik Town noted that *“villagers are planting but they cannot sell their products. The merchants do not have money to pay for the products [...]. Both the businessmen and the local people are facing a difficult situation.”*¹⁵⁴ The combination of the coup and the effects of COVID-19 have also led to rising prices for necessities such as rice and diesel fuel, leading to increased food insecurity for civilians, particularly those who were already struggling with poverty.¹⁵⁵ Increased food prices and livelihood insecurity had led to an increase in reliance on support networks, which are themselves weakened. These changes have led to increased poverty and will impact future development, even if there is a restoration of civilian government.

ii. Illegal taxation and transport restrictions by the SAC and BGF

During the reporting period, villagers in T’Naw Th’Ree Township, Mergui-Tavoy District faced illegal taxation by various factions of the SAC. Those living on islands and working as fishermen or earning a living making charcoal were required by Myanmar Military Intelligence to pay an arbitrary fine, or to buy petrol for the Myanmar Navy Force.¹⁵⁶ Villagers trading livestock in rural areas of T’Naw Th’Ree Township reported being required to pay an arbitrary tax to multiple SAC organisations, including the Myanmar Military Intelligence, Myanmar Forestry Department, Myanmar Police Force and SAC military based on the border of T’Naw Th’Ree Township.¹⁵⁷

Villagers in Meh Pree and Htee Th’Daw village tracts in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District also reported being forced to pay arbitrary taxes to the BGF. In early June 2021, BGF Battalion #1014 set up checkpoints along the Pweh Loh Kloh river bank, and required motorboats travelling along the river to pay a “tax” of 2,000 kyats [USD 1.12], even when boats already carried a travel recommendation letter (which itself cost 3,000 to 50,000 kyats [USD 1.68 to 28.01]).¹⁵⁸

Villagers in Doo Tha Htoo District have reported that they faced ration transportation restrictions from both the KNLA and BGF troops. In May 2021, the KNLA prohibited villagers from transporting large quantities of rice without a permission letter from the village tract

¹⁵³ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-40-S1).

¹⁵⁴ KHRG, [“Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces kill peaceful anti-coup protestors in Dawei Town, February 2021”](#), March 2021.

¹⁵⁵ KHRG, [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K’Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021”](#), May 2021.

¹⁵⁶ In-process (as yet unpublished) data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-175-S1).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ KHRG, [“Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education, and healthcare situation, May to June 2021”](#), September 2021.

authorities, fearful that rice or other supplies would be sent to SAC troops in Mu Traw District. Upon learning of this, the BGF also prohibited villagers from transporting rice, even if they had a permission letter, worsening the situation for the villagers.¹⁵⁹

iii. Impact of militarisation

Increased militarisation due to the coup has also affected villagers' livelihoods. Fighting, airstrikes, and shelling have led to high levels of displacement, particularly in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts, but also in some areas in Doo Tha Htoo and Dooplaya districts. Villagers have often had little possibility of gathering food and supplies to bring with them prior to fleeing.¹⁶⁰ Aside from experiencing livelihood challenges during displacement, displaced villagers have been unable to work their farms, preventing them from the essential work of clearing their paddy fields ahead of the rice planting season in June and July.¹⁶¹

In addition to loss of jobs, travel restrictions, and illegal taxation, villagers in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District spoke of not being able to work on some of their farmland for fear of being shot, arrested or forced to act as porters by the SAC troops who are occupying the roads villagers use to access their fields, or who have army camps near the villagers' farms. Others spoke of new landmine contamination making it risky for them to continue to cultivate their farmland and plantations. Villagers throughout Bu Tho Township have also expressed that they do not feel secure to go to their farms because of the ongoing fighting, indiscriminate shelling, potential airstrikes (village tracts in the airstrike zone include Meh Nyoo, Bu Ah Der, Hkaw Poo, Meh Klaw, Pa Heh, Meh Hku, Meh Mweh, Day Wah, Kyaw Pa, Meh Pree, and Htee Th'Daw Hta), landmines and potential UXO near their farmland and plantations.¹⁶² Villagers in Bu Tho Township have also expressed their fear of living under constant SAC drone and helicopter reconnaissance that prevents them from freely moving around and working their land.¹⁶³ Villagers in Ma Htaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District reported that they were also afraid to go to buy food in town due to the fighting that has occurred on the road between Hpapun and K'Ma Moh towns over the past several months.¹⁶⁴

The SAC military have also committed other violations such as looting¹⁶⁵, confiscation¹⁶⁶, extortion¹⁶⁷, and property damage¹⁶⁸, which have added to the livelihood vulnerability of villagers.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, KHRG's reporting shows that some CDM participants, such as those who have fled to Y--- area, Mergui-Tavoy District between March and June of 2021, have experienced increased livelihood difficulties including loss of salary.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, many

¹⁵⁹ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo Situation Update: Fighting and indiscriminate shelling by SAC forces, April to May 2021](#)", June 2021.

¹⁶⁰ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Interview: Fighting between SAC troops and other armed groups resulted in villagers' displacement, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District, June 1st 2021](#)", July 2021; KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Interview: Recent fighting and displacement in Kaw T'Ree Township, June 2021](#)", July 2021.

¹⁶¹ KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Increased militarisation and fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA prevent IDPs from returning home in Ler Doh Township, March to May 2021](#)", May 2021.

¹⁶² KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021](#)", September 2021.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-200-D1).

¹⁶⁵ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo Short Update: Looting by BGF and SAC soldiers, June 21st 2021](#)", July 2021.

¹⁶⁶ KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Tatmadaw soldiers confiscate two motorbikes and threaten local villagers in Hsaw Htee Township, April 2021](#)", April 2021.

¹⁶⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of these issues, please see KHRG, "[Military Atrocities and Civilian Resilience: Testimonies of injustice, insecurity and violence in Southeast Myanmar during the 2021 coup](#)", November 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-130-M1).

¹⁶⁹ For a more in-depth discussion of these issues, please see KHRG, "[Military Atrocities and Civilian Resilience: Testimonies of injustice, insecurity and violence in Southeast Myanmar during the 2021 coup](#)", November 2021.

¹⁷⁰ KHRG, "[Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops, \(March to June 2021\)](#)", September 2021.

people, particularly those who have joined the CDM, are no longer receiving a salary, hurting both the CDM participants themselves and, in cases where they are the primary source of income for a household, their families as well, which has further deepened the livelihood problems of some families.

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.