



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

May 28th, 2021 / KHRG # 21-142-D1

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

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo [Nyaunglebin] District from March 28th to May 4th 2021. Since early April, the Tatmadaw in Ler Doh Town have been sending an increasing number of soldiers to Mu Traw District through the military road from Ler Doh Town to Mu Theh area, resulting in several skirmishes with the KNLA and KNDO. Because of the fighting, as well as the continuous presence of Tatmadaw soldiers and observation aircrafts in the area, IDPs in Ler Doh Township are now too afraid to return to their villages. They might face livelihood difficulties in the future as they are currently unable to tend to their farms.¹

Ler Doh Township

Since March 28th 2021, after the airstrikes on Day Bu Noh village, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District,² Tatmadaw³ jets and drones have been flying regularly over Kheh Der village tract,⁴ Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District [presumably on reconnaissance missions]. It also happened on April 20th 2021. Local IDPs [who were displaced because of fighting and indiscriminate shelling by Tatmadaw troops] and villagers are now afraid that the Tatmadaw will carry out airstrikes in their area like they did in Day Bu Noh village [airstrikes are usually preceded by reconnaissance flyovers].

Since early April, the Tatmadaw based in Ler Doh army camp has been sending more soldiers, as well as military supplies and ammunition to Mu Traw District. These reinforcements usually travel on foot on the military road between Ler Doh and Mu Theh area. According to a KHRG researcher, they seem to be heading to Mu Traw District's frontlines [territory controlled by the Karen National Union - KNU].⁵ The Tatmadaw sent around 270 soldiers [local villagers assume it

¹ The present document is based on information received in April 2021. It was provided by a community member in Kler Lwee Htoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

² For more information, see 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.

³ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

⁴ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

⁵ 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

was an entire Light Infantry Division - LID]⁶ and 140 horses [to carry military supplies, rations and ammunition] to Mu Traw District [KHRG was not able to establish when these soldiers left their camp].

On April 16th 2021, at about 6 am, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁷ attacked these Tatmadaw soldiers in Pwa Ga Kyoh area, near T’Kaw Der village, Keh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township. The fighting lasted for about five minutes. During the fighting, the Tatmadaw indiscriminately fired mortar shells at nearby villages. Fortunately, there was no one in the villages because local communities had previously fled to the forest [due to fighting, indiscriminate shelling and fear of airstrikes]. However, the fighting and shelling caused security concerns among IDPs in the area. According to information received by the villagers, there were no casualties, but three Tatmadaw horses were killed during the fighting.

The increased Tatmadaw presence in Ler Doh Township also resulted in skirmishes between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA/Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO).⁸ On May 4th 2021, fighting between Tatmadaw and KNDO troops broke out in Eee Tha Plaw Place, Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township. IDPs from Kheh Der village, Kheh Der village tract heard the sound of gunfire, as well as several mortar explosions. The fighting did not reach the displacement site so no IDPs were injured. Villagers do not know whether [KNDO or Tatmadaw] soldiers sustained injuries during the fighting.

IDPs in Ler Doh Township cannot return home due to the increasing presence of Tatmadaw soldiers; flyovers by observation drones and jets; and on-going fighting between Tatmadaw soldiers and the KNLA/KNDO in the area. At this time of the year, the villagers should be preparing their paddy farms [the farms need to be cleaned ahead of the rice planting season in June-July]. However, they are now hiding in the forest so they cannot work on their farms. Because of this situation, they are deeply concerned about their current and future livelihoods.

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.

⁶ Like a Military Operations Command, a Light Infantry Division has ten (Light Infantry) battalions divided into three Tactical Operations Commands and is used for offensive operations. However, LIDs take their orders from the Ministry of Defence rather than the Regional Command.

⁷ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

⁸ 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.

Further background reading on the consequences of fighting between armed actors in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

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

About KHRG

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

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District

