



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Interview**

July 20<sup>th</sup> 2021 / KHRG # 21-185-A1-I1

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**Doooplaya District Interview:  
Recent fighting and displacement in Kaw T'Ree Township,  
June 2021**

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*This interview describes events occurring in Kaw T'Ree Township, Doooplaya District on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021, when fighting between the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO) and the State Administration Council (SAC) military caused local villagers to flee to the Thai border.<sup>1</sup>*

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**Interview | A--- village, Maw Hkee village tract<sup>2</sup>, Kaw T'Ree Township, Doooplaya District (June 2021)**

**Name:** Naw B---

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 24

**Religion:** Christian

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Family Status:** Single

**Occupation:** villager

**Where did you go because of the fighting that happened [in A---]?**

I live in A--- village which is located in Myanmar. We fled to Thailand because of the sounds of fighting and shelling. We live near the Thai-Myanmar border so we fled to Thailand.

**When did you flee?**

We fled here just half an hour ago. We heard the sound of shooting around 12:30 pm. Then, we fled to Thailand with over 10 people, including children.

**So you fled on the day of June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021 around 12:30, right?**

Yes.

**Was there anyone who organised where to go? How did villagers organise it?**

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in June 2021. It was conducted by KHRG staff with a displaced villager. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG staff.

<sup>2</sup> A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

We did not have specific arrangements. When my mother went into the village, the village head told her that villagers are not allowed to move about in the village. And, every shop must be closed. From 3:00 am to 6:00 am, we heard the sound of gunfire. At that time, some people in the village packed their stuff [belongings] and fled immediately. As for us, we did not flee yet. I live a bit outside of the village. At that time, some villagers in the village fled to our place. Later, we came along with them to Thailand.

**Do you know how many villages were displaced?**

A---, C---, D---, E--- and F--- villages in Maw Hkee village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township were displaced.

**Was there fighting in G--- village?**

Yes, there was fighting that happened in G--- village. Another combat took place at the Burma Army [Tatmadaw/SAC military]<sup>3</sup> camp situated close to A--- village.

**Did villagers from G--- flee yesterday?**

Yes.

**The five villages you are talking about [mentioned above] fled today?**

Yes.

**Do you know how many villagers from each village have fled?**

I have no idea. In E---, which is close to the Burma Army camp, there were around 50 villagers fleeing. There were about 100 villagers from A--- village who fled from the village. Some villagers hid in the bunkers [villagers often dig their own earth bunkers for protection from shelling]. My mom said it might be around 300 villagers displaced. We fled desperately as there was no one to organise our displacement.

**Where did villagers mostly displace to? Did they flee to Thailand?**

As for us, we fled to Thailand. Some villagers did not dare flee to Thailand. They fled to the river banks [on the Myanmar side of the border]. If Thai police officers do not allow us to go to Thailand, we have to stay at the river banks. Even if Thai authorities allow us to go into Thailand, we have to stay at the river banks on the Thailand side.

**Were you able to bring your stuff [belongings] during the displacement?**

Some villagers could bring only one or two items of clothing and blankets. Some villagers could bring only one or two small tins of rice [the exact quantity in weight is unclear from the interview]. As for us, we [had just] cooked rice [that morning] and [so] brought it with us.

**So fighting took place once in G--- and more fighting took place in A---, right?**

Yes. After the fighting happened in G--- village, we heard a Burma Army helicopter flying over at 9:00 pm. We did not take it seriously at that time. The next morning from 3:00 am to 6:00 am, we heard the sounds of shooting and shelling. We were not afraid at first. Then, the village head told us to pack our things up. When we heard the sounds of shooting and shelling at about 12:30 pm, we fled.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

**Do you know how many helicopters were flying over?**

Just one, but it was flying for a long period.

**Was there an airstrike in the area as well?**

No, it [the helicopter] was just conducting reconnaissance.

**Do you know between which armed groups the fighting happened?**

I don't know exactly. What I heard is that the Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>4</sup> [according to the interviewee, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)<sup>5</sup>] attacked the Burma Police Station [State Administration Council (SAC) Police Station]. We are not sure among which armed groups the fighting happened. [The interviewee is unsure whether both the KNDO and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>6</sup> were later involved in the fighting with the SAC military.]

**How many hours did the fighting last?**

The fighting happened for about two hours in the morning [on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021]. Again, at noon today, we heard the sound of shooting just for a short period of time. After hearing three rounds of mortar shelling, we fled to Thailand. It did not last even an hour.

**Did any mortars fall into the village during the fighting?**

No, we just heard the sound of the shelling from the Burma Police Station. The sound of the gunfire and shelling is not far from us [we could tell from the sound of the gunfire and shelling that it was not far from us].

**Is the Tatmadaw Army [SAC military] camp in A--- close to the village?**

Yes, it is close to the village. It is not far from us.

**When the fighting occurred, did any villagers get injured by the gunfire or anything?**

No. There were no villagers that got injured from the fighting.

**How is the situation right now? Has any armed group come to stay in the village?**

As the villagers already fled from the village, we just heard that two or three Tatmadaw [SAC] soldiers patrol the road inside the village. We just heard that. We did not see it.

**Did you also hear something like the soldiers were looting or stealing the villagers' property that was left behind?**

No, I haven't heard about it yet but we are worried that such things will happen in the future because this is just the beginning. If the fighting gets serious, we worry that the Tatmadaw soldiers will enter the village and take the villagers' property such as cattle, pigs and chickens. It is not happening now but we worry it will happen in the near future.

**How far is the place where you are now staying from your village? The place you have fled to, is it far from your village?**

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<sup>4</sup> The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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

No, it is not that far because we can see our village from here. There is only one river in between so we can just see our village from here. We are now living in A--- on the Thai side [A--- village extends from Myanmar into Thailand, so villagers refer to the two locations as Myanmar side A--- village and Thai side A--- village].

**If on foot, how many hours it will take to go to A--- Thai side from your village?**

It does not take hours. It only takes around 10 minutes. We just have to wait and see the situation here. If the situation is calm in our village and we dare to go back, we will go back to our village. If the fighting happens again then we will come and flee here again, something like that.

**How are the villagers who fled with you able to stay [live] right now? How do you live on the Thai side?**

We came here with 19 people in total but we only brought one mat with us because we did not have time to prepare ourselves well. So, we let the children use that mat and the rest just stay under trees or beside the river.

**How is the weather there [where you are living now]?**

Now, it is hot here.

**Were you able to bring food with you when you fled?**

Only a little. We could not bring much.

**What food did you bring?**

We brought drinking water and the cooked rice. We did not bring [raw] rice with us because we thought that if we dare [have the courage or are able] to go back to our village, we will go back to take it [be able to get more raw rice then], that's why. We also brought one or two items of clothing with us.

**Are you getting any support such as food, clothes, etc. from any organisation?**

No, we do not have any organisation [helping us] and have not received any support yet. There are a few Thai authorities who came to see us and told us that we can come to the Thai side [enter into Thailand] but we cannot enter the village [the Thai side of the village]. We can only stay beside the river. They came to tell us that and just went back.

**Do you have any sick people there?**

No, we do not have any sick people now but we have one boy with a disability who came with us. The rest are fine.

**Was the school open while the fighting occurred?**

The school in our village is a Myanmar government school. First, it was opened and there were around 50 students who went to school, but because of the fighting, the school had to close and people had to flee.

**As the students had to flee like that, how is it going with their education? Are there any plans for them?**

We do not know about that. The children who fled with us are not the students from the Myanmar government [school]. They are the students from the KECD [Karen Education and Cultural Department]<sup>7</sup> [school] so we do not know about any plans. But I think there might be a

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

plan for the Myanmar government students who have had to flee but I am not sure. We do not have much connection with the Myanmar government school so we do not know about that.

**The students who fled with you are KECD students only?**

Some of the students are KECD and some attended the Myanmar government school in the past but due to this situation [the coup], their parents are not sending them to the Myanmar government school anymore. And some students attend Thai school.

**Do you mean the students who fled with you are from KECD and Thai schools as well?**

Yes.

**Who is taking care of your safety and security while you stay here?**

No [no one], there is no safety for us here because no one is taking care of our safety now. We only met with the Thai authorities as we came to flee to Thailand. They [the Thai authorities] did not come to take care of us. They just came to meet with us and told us that we can stay here. We do not do anything now. We just stay here and watch the situation. If the situation gets better and we can go back, we will just go back.

**Did the fighting continue after you fled?**

After we fled to here, we did not hear any sounds anymore but we will have to wait and see.

**Before the fighting, was there any displacement?**

The villagers were displaced in 2009 once, but we have not had to flee since then. We have only had to start fleeing again now.

**How long did they have to flee when they were displaced in 2009?**

They started fleeing in 2009 and they were able to come back in 2013.

**What about now? When do you think you will be able to go back to your village?**

We would like to go back as soon as possible. We do not want the fighting to happen for long. We do not know when we will be able to go back to our village but we hope that we can go back soon.

**What is your perspective on the current situation?**

I just want to say that the children and the older people have to flee from fighting. If possible, we do not want the fighting to happen. We want to live in peace. If the fighting happens then we would like our leaders and people to get freedom because we have started already [fighting for freedom]. We should get what we want. We do not want the fighting to happen like this again and again.

**Do you have anything else to say?**

I do not have anything more to say but if the situation gets better or worse in the future, we will let you know.

**Thank you.**

Thanks.

Further background reading on the situation of fighting in Southeast Myanmar since the February 2021 military coup<sup>8</sup> can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [\*“Doo Tha Htoo Situation Update: Fighting and indiscriminate shelling by SAC forces, April to May 2021”\*](#), April 2021.
- [\*“Dooplaya District Incident Report: Two villagers injured in the explosion of a mortar shell in Kaw T'Ree Township, March 2021”\*](#), April 2021.
- [\*“Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmish between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA in Kaw T'Ree Township, February 2021”\*](#), February 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.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

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<sup>8</sup> On February 1st 2021, the Burma Army deposed the democratically elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military proclaimed a year-long state of emergency and transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces. Based on unproven fraud allegations, the Tatmadaw invalidated the landslide victory of the NLD in the November 2020 General Election and stated it would hold new elections at the end of the state of emergency. The coup d'état occurred the day before the Parliament of Myanmar was due to swear in the members elected during the 2020 election. Elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

## Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

