



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools (April to June 2021)

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District between April and June 2021. Fighting continues to take place between the Border Guard Force (BGF) and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). As a result, the BGF set up temporary bases in the local monasteries and village dormitories. The BGF also pressured education staff and village leaders not to reopen local KECD schools.¹

Since March 2021, when fighting first broke out between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)² and the Border Guard Force (BGF)³ in K’Hsaw Law K’Tee,⁴ tension has increased between KNLA Battalion #1, Division #3 and BGF Battalion #1014, who have been fighting alongside State Administration Council (SAC)⁵ troops.⁶ Skirmishes between these two armed

¹ The present document is based on information received in June 2021. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha 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 The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

groups happened regularly from April through June, occurring every two or three days on average.

On June 9th 2021, the BGF and KNLA clashed at a place beside Meh K'Neh Hkee village, Htee Kyaw Hkee village tract, Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The fighting lasted for only five minutes. One BGF general died and the KNLA confiscated one pistol from him. As a result of his death, the BGF retaliated by attacking the KNLA army camp at Htee Hkyaw Hkee area, but they did not encounter KNLA soldiers because the KNLA had already moved to other places before the BGF arrived at their army camp. However, the BGF burnt down all of the KNLA camp buildings and then returned to their army base [unknown place]. In addition, the BGF threatened the villagers, saying they would burn down the village if they were attacked by the KNLA again.

From June 20th to 21st 2021, BGF and KNLA clashed in Hpa-an Township six times within two days. SAC troops patrolled regularly in the community and they mainly set up their temporary camps at community monasteries like Thay Kon monastery. On June 20th 2021, a skirmish broke out at Thay Kon area close to Thay La Baw village, T'Kaw Poe village, T'Kaw Poe village tract, and lasted for about nine minutes. On the same day, a second skirmish took place at the Kler Hkeh Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group⁷ army camp. There were no casualties from these two skirmishes.

On June 21st 2021, there were four skirmishes between the BGF [along with SAC troops] and the KNLA on the same day. The first incident happened in the morning and the second incident broke out in the afternoon, both at the place beside Meh Poo village, T'Kaw Boh village tract. There were no casualties. The third and fourth incidents happened beside the main road when BGF from Gu Bee Htwee army base were guarding the rations being transported to their army camps. Three BGF (or SAC) soldiers died and one of them was injured. The fourth incident happened when the BGF drivers and their leaders returned after sending the rations. They were attacked by the KNLA. Five of the BGF and SAC soldiers died and three of them were injured. Of those who were killed, two were commanders and the rest were soldiers.

Even though regular skirmishes have taken place in Hpa-an Township, only a few villagers, those who live close to the main road and BGF army camps such as They Hla Baw village, T'Kaw Boh village tract, had to flee. Those who did, fled to the other side of Kho Lo Klo River, to Paw Loo Hkoh village. Most of the villagers did not have to flee because most of the skirmishes happened outside of the villages.

Military activities, such as patrolling in the community and setting up temporary bases in village dormitories, have also increased. [Other rights violations have also occurred.]

In May 2021, the BGF ordered Hpwa Gaw villagers living in Hpwa Gaw village tract, Hpa-an Township to be navigators for them. The villagers were required to carry ammunition and other military supplies as porters. [KHRG was not able to determine the number of villagers involved.]

In June 2021, the BGF allowed villagers to transport rice from other places, but they sometimes set up checkpoints and imposed taxes, requiring every civilian truck or car to pay money to them without exception.

⁷ On January 16th 2016, this 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 1994-2010. 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.

Education

Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)⁸ schools opened their programs, but no government schools in Hpa-an Township could open due to the coup and the COVID-19 pandemic. The BGF got angry at the KECD school teachers in Meh Theh Hkee village tract. They said, *“No government schools are open, how could you open your schools?”* The BGF then ordered two Htee Kyaw Hkee school teachers to meet with them. Another teacher went to meet with them upon request at a different time. The school headmistress also met with them at the village monastery. [The various dates were not reported to KHRG.] They [BGF soldiers] talked about the school and asked how many teachers and students are in the school. On the next day, they asked another teacher along with one villager to meet them at their base. The villager did not feel safe to meet with them, so she did not go. As a result, the BGF did not tell anything to the teacher because her friend [the other villager] did not accompany her. The commander said: *“I will only speak with you when both of you come at the same time.”* Then he told her to think about what she had done and to meet him again after she found out the answer [but she did not understand what he was referring to]. Later, she met with him again, so as not to give him the idea that she might be avoiding him. Since she was confident she had done nothing wrong, she was willing to meet him. [Out of concern for her safety, she did not reveal to KHRG further details of the meeting.]

Htee Kyaw Hkee [KECD] middle school could not start in June 2021 (the intended KECD school open date) due to the security risk posed by the proximity of the BGF base to the community. However, the Meh Theh Hkee high school planned to start the school anyway on June 28th 2021. The enrolment numbers had quadrupled from last year. Last year there were over 100 students, but this year there are over 400 students in Meh Theh Hkee high school. This is because the students from government schools transferred into the Meh Theh Hkee high school.

Further background reading on the situation of fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

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

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.

⁸ 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.

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

