



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations

July to December 2021

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Introduction

This Field Report presents and analyses information collected by KHRG field researchers and covers the period between July and December 2021.¹

The reporting period was marked by increased armed conflict and attacks, which spread to locations in KHRG's operational area that had reported little to no fighting or shelling during the initial five months following the February 1st 2021 military coup². It was also marked by an increase in human rights violations, including forced labour, the use of human shields, torture, killings, theft and looting, and the planting of landmines.

Burma (Myanmar)³ is party to several human rights treaties and is bound by principles of customary international human rights law prohibiting arbitrary deprivation of life; torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; and arbitrary deprivation of liberty. During the current reporting period, KHRG documented multiple cases of forced labour and the use of civilians as human shields. In most cases, villagers were forced to serve as both porters and human shields as State Administration Council (SAC)⁴ and Border Guard Force (BGF)⁵ troops engaged in troop rotation and the transport of rations and ammunition between army camps in areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU)⁶. Both forced labour and the use of human shields constitute violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and other human rights conventions. In many cases, these acts have been combined with other rights violations like beatings or torture, the deprivation of food and water, and various threats, including threat to life. In Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, villagers living between Lay Kay and Yoh Klah army camps were subjected to

¹ Much of the information in this field report is based on unpublished raw data collected and prepared by KHRG researchers and staff. Hyperlinks have been provided for any information that comes from KHRG's previously published raw data reports.

² On February 1st 2021, the Myanmar military 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.

³ In 1989, the then-ruling military regime changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar without consultation from the people. Despite controversy over this name change, the use of Myanmar has become more common on an international level in recognition of the establishment of a civilian government in 2016. KHRG prefers the use of Burma because it is more typically used by villagers and since the name change to Myanmar is reflective of the military regime's longstanding abuse of power. Note: In 2013, KHRG made a decision to use Myanmar in our reports and publications, recognising that it would be difficult to do advocacy directly with the Government if KHRG called them by a name they no longer recognise. Since this type of advocacy is no longer relevant, KHRG has decided to return to using the term Burma.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

repeated demands for forced labour and ‘navigation’ over the course of several months. In particular, skirmishes and ambush by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁷, due to SAC and BGF trespass while travelling between their camps, systematically led SAC and BGF troops to round up any villagers they found along the way to protect themselves from further attack. At times, skirmishes and ambushes took place while villagers were forced to porter or navigate, putting them in grave danger. Villagers also experienced looting and other security threats as SAC and BGF soldiers camped in or near their villages while traveling between their army camps.

A surge of armed conflict and attacks, including airstrikes, took place in the Lay Kay Kaw area of Dooplaya District in December 2021 after SAC and BGF troops entered the area and conducted raids and arrests while searching for Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁸ participants and People’s Defence Force (PDF)⁹ members. Established at the time of the earlier ceasefire agreements to welcome back former refugees and IDPs to their country, Lay Kay Kaw New Town was supposed to serve as the symbol of a new era of peace and unity. Instead, the former refugees and IDPs who live there found themselves fleeing once again for their lives as fighting erupted throughout the area. Over 10,000 people were displaced in just over a week. Possibilities for seeking refuge in Thailand remain extremely limited. Most displaced villagers were either pushed back by Thai authorities or forced to set up temporary encampments along the river.

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District had been the target of major offensives, including airstrikes, during the first five months of the coup. Although there were no further airstrikes in Mu Traw District from July to December 2021, most parts of the district continued to experience heavy conflict and military activities. In some areas, fighting and shelling took place on a near daily basis during the current reporting period, thus many villagers continue to face displacement. Those who have remained in their villages have endured repeated threats by SAC soldiers, including battalion commanders, who seek to punish civilians for the activities of the KNLA. Such acts are in clear violation of international humanitarian law, which forbids reprisals against civilian persons and objects.

Fighting continued in Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District, leading to some displacement. While no fighting or shelling was reported for Taw Oo (Toungoo), Mergui-Tavoy and Hpa-an districts prior to July 2021, during the current reporting period, KHRG documented the emergence of fighting in both Taw Oo and Mergui-Tavoy districts. In the case of Mergui-Tavoy District, the fighting occurred between the SAC and a local group of PDF fighters.

Military activity, like troop rotation and reinforcement, sending rations and ammunition, and patrolling, continued to increase throughout all districts, except Hpa-an District (for which KHRG received no reports). These activities often included or took place alongside other activities, such as the increased use of checkpoints, direct threats against local villagers, arbitrary arrests, and opening fire while in villages, that led to heightened insecurity for local villagers.

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

⁸ 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.

⁹ The People’s Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

Theft and looting, particularly of food items, crops and livestock, became more systematic as the presence of SAC soldiers in rural areas, including KNU territory, spread. Most of the theft and looting during the current reporting period occurred while SAC and BGF troops passed through villages or were temporarily camped in the area. Theft and looting have often taken place after villagers have been forced to flee their homes, and in some cases have been combined with the destruction of property. Looting and the destruction of property are prohibited under various elements of international humanitarian law, including Additional Protocol II (Article 14) concerning the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, like foodstuffs, crops and livestock.¹⁰

Other serious human rights violations like torture and killings took place during the current reporting period. As the SAC continued to target anyone seen as opposing the military regime, it undertook violence against civilians while searching for people whom they suspected of having an affiliation with the PDF and CDM. On multiple occasions, SAC soldiers tortured and beat local civilians following bomb explosions in the area. SAC soldiers intentionally shot at civilians, killing three. In one of the killing cases, local villagers believe the victim was also tortured by the SAC prior to being killed.

Landmine contamination and the planting of new landmines continued to be a serious problem, with landmines being placed in civilian areas, along transportation routes and near critical infrastructure, as well as in areas that villagers depend on for their livelihood. Two deaths and injury to eight villagers, including one child, were reported for the current reporting period. All reported incidents took place in Mu Traw District. Villagers were often not made aware of the landmine contamination in their area. KHRG also received reports of time bomb explosions.

In July 2021, Burma was hit with a third wave of COVID-19 infections, this time reaching rural areas in KHRG's operational area. Often whole villages reported experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, but due to lack of testing facilities, there was no way to confirm that all of these were positive COVID-19 cases. However, in Mergui-Tavoy District, where the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) actively engaged in testing, positive cases were found in every township of the district. The spread of the virus has been particularly worrisome in situations of displacement with reports of the virus spreading among groups who have displaced, since many are unaware that they are infected. Displaced villagers may also find themselves crowded together in hiding places, making the likelihood of infection greater. Access to healthcare services in general continued to be an issue due to restrictions on movement, brought about both by efforts to contain the spread of the virus and by increased military activities and armed conflict.

Access to education also continued to be an issue due to widespread school closures tied to the spread of COVID-19, the CDM and refusals by students to attend SAC-run schools since the military takeover. Most Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)¹¹ schools remained open and experienced increased enrolments as students who previously attended government schools sought to continue their studies in KECD schools. The additional enrolments have placed heavy strain on KECD schools, and some have begun requiring parents to pay educational fees or rice (for the teachers) to keep the schools running.

¹⁰ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), [Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol II\)](#), Article 14, June 1977.

¹¹ 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.

The livelihood situation of villagers has grown more critical. Villagers reported being unable to work on their farms or plantations or travel to access work as day labourers. A number of factors have prevented villagers from carrying out their regular livelihood activities: displacement, conflict, ongoing military activity, landmine contamination, travel restrictions tied to COVID-19, increased checkpoints and security concerns while traveling, and fears of being apprehended to serve as forced porters or human shields. Many villagers are also now facing severe food insecurity as a result.

Part I: Major developments

A. Forced labour and the use of human shields

During the current reporting period, there has been a significant increase in reports of forced labour, including the use of civilians as human shields. These incidents were primarily tied to the movement of SAC and BGF troops through KNU-controlled areas as soldiers engaged in troop rotation or brought food rations, supplies and ammunition to more remote army camps. Since large military trucks are often unable to travel through these areas, SAC and BGF troops turned to forcing local villagers to carry their supplies for them and/or guide them along local roads and footpaths. The use of forced labour is a violation of international humanitarian law and multiple international human rights conventions, including the Forced Labour Convention, which was ratified by Burma in 1955 and remains in force.¹²

When travelling through KNU-controlled areas, SAC and BGF troops consistently required villagers to serve as human shields to protect them from armed attack and ambush by the KNLA. Framed as requests for navigators, villagers frequently noted that the SAC and BGF demanded 'navigators' even though they clearly knew the way. According to villagers, women in particular seem to be preferred as navigators/human shields because their presence is seen as more likely to ward off attack.

International humanitarian law prohibits the use of civilians as human shields, that is of "utilizing the presence of a civilian or other protected person to render certain points, areas or military forces immune from military operations".¹³ Such practices are also prohibited by the requirement that "the civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations".¹⁴ In addition, deliberately using civilians to shield military operations is contrary to the principle of distinction and violates the obligation to take feasible precautions to separate civilians and military objectives. Civilians clearly lose their right to protection against armed attack when used as human shields.

According to KHRG documentation, incidents of forced labour and the use of human shields often combined with other human rights violations, particularly since undertaken as part of other military operations like the movement of troops between army camps. In the reported cases, villagers often cited threats of violence, the deprivation of food and water, and being caught in gunfire. Because the soldiers often stayed in or near local villages along the way, villagers also reported

¹² The [Forced Labour Convention of 1930 \(No. 29\)](#) defines forced labour as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily" (Article 2).

¹³ UN General Assembly, [1988 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#), Article 8(2)(b)(xxiii), 1988.

¹⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), [Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol II\)](#), Article 13, June 1977.

theft and looting of their property by the soldiers, and overall general insecurity due to the presence of troops in their community.

In August and September 2021, multiple reports of forced labour and the use of civilians as human shields were documented by villagers living between Lay Kay and Yoh Klah army camps in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, highlighting a clear pattern of abuse by the SAC and BGF against the local population. During the month of October, multiple incidents also took place in Dooplaya District. Other reports emerged elsewhere in KHRG's operational area but were not as well documented.

i. Doo Tha Htoo District: Yoh Klah area case study¹⁵

Since early August, conflict between the SAC/BGF and the KNLA in Bilin Township has escalated. The KNLA and Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)¹⁶ blocked the road that SAC and BGF troops had been using for troop rotations and the transport of rations, leading the SAC and BGF to travel along another local unpaved road from Lay Kay army camp to Yoh Klah army camp. This road lies within KNU-controlled area and requires advance permission from the KNU to enter, per earlier ceasefire agreements. But SAC and BGF troops have consistently failed to request permission to travel through this area, resulting in skirmishes between the armed groups. Since the SAC and BGF started using this local road, they have demanded portering and navigation of the local villagers, and also repeatedly used them as human shields to protect themselves from attack by the KNLA. During the months of August and September, villagers in A---, B---, C--- and D--- villages (the primary villages between Lay Kay and Yoh Klah army camps) also reported multiple incidents of looting, threats and other human rights violations while the soldiers passed through their villages. The increased presence of soldiers in the area and inside villages, along with the increase in fighting, has also contributed to the overall insecurity of local villagers.

August 9th – 11th [or 12th]: Lay Kay to Yoh Klah

On August 9th 2021, SAC troops and affiliated BGF troops – about 80 soldiers total – left Lay Kay army camp to travel to Yoh Klah army camp in order to collect information about the situation on the ground and measure Yoh Klah army camp land. When SAC and BGF troops arrived at P'Ya Raw village by vehicle, villagers warned them not to proceed and to retreat from the village to prevent skirmishes with the local KNLA. However, the SAC and BGF troops ignored these suggestions from local civilians and, on August 10th, the troops continued to head from P'Ya Raw village toward Yoh Klah army camp on foot due to flooded roads.

Local KNLA soldiers [battalion number unknown] ambushed the SAC and BGF troops before they arrived at C--- village. The fighting was brief and it did not involve or immediately endanger any villagers. However, following the skirmish, the SAC and BGF continued on their way to C--- village and forcibly apprehended several C--- villagers who were working on their farms, fishing or looking

¹⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all information in this section is based on the following reports: KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021](#)", December 2021; KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Forced portering and the use of civilians as human shields, and updates on livelihood, health and education, August to September 2021](#)", February 2022; and unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-290-D1).

¹⁶ 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.

after their livestock, requiring these villagers to act as human shields to protect them from further KNLA attack. The villagers included men, women and children.

The SAC and BGF troops released these villagers right after they arrived at the entrance of C--- village, but then entered the village, and began searching the premises, most likely for KNLA soldiers. As the soldiers searched, they threatened villagers, pointing their guns at villagers, including children, when they saw villagers hiding under their houses. The soldiers also threatened to fire mortars into the village if they were attacked by the KNLA. They also entered the homes of two villagers who had fled due to the fighting, and stole three kilograms of steamed betel nut leaves and one phone.

The troops stayed at the local monastery on the night of August 10th. While at the monastery, they also shot at villagers' chickens and ducks and confiscated¹⁷ at least one duck as food. Some of the soldiers asked two villagers – one of whom was an 8-year-old child – to buy alcohol for them. Since the BGF and SAC soldiers were drunk, villagers, especially women and girls, felt more insecure and worried that the soldiers would commit other violations, such as sexual violence and rape, as they had during past periods of conflict. Because of this, women and girls did not feel secure sleeping in their own houses, and many were sent to sleep at the other end of the village furthest from where the soldiers were staying. Fearing they would be forced to act as porters, the men in the village began sleeping outside of the village in tents on their farms after the soldiers arrived in their village.

At about 9:00 am on the morning of August 11th [possibly August 12th], SAC and BGF troops ordered village leaders and one representative from every family in C--- village to meet them at the monastery in order to obtain 15 villagers to accompany them to Yoh Klah army camp as navigators. They claimed not to know the way to the camp. They also threatened the village elders, saying that, if the KNLA shot at SAC troops again, they would fire mortars into the villages. In order to protect the other villagers, two female village leaders volunteered to accompany the troops. Two male villagers also volunteered to accompany the troops in order to protect the two female village leaders. The four villagers had to accompany the SAC and BGF until they arrived at Yoh Klah army camp. These four villagers did not have to carry military supplies as porters, but they had to travel with the SAC and BGF troops through this difficult terrain for the whole day, and were also used as human shields, putting them at high risk. According to one interviewee, the SAC and BGF also apprehended any villagers they encountered along the road between C--- and D--- villages and forced them to follow and to act as human shields. The troops arrived at Yoh Klah army camp on August 12th, at which point they released the villagers who accompanied them.

August 16th – [unknown date]: Yoh Klah (possibly back to Lay Kay)

The SAC troops departed from Yoh Klah army camp on August 16th and unlawfully detained everyone they met on their way. They then released those villagers when they arrived at the next village. Because of this, local villagers said that they had to hide and sleep in the forest and beside streams in order to escape being detained and forced to serve as human shields. One of the villagers also said that they have been facing difficulties in order to go to their farms, plantations and gardens because they worry that they will meet SAC troops and be detained by the SAC for forced labour or as human shields. When the soldiers left Yoh Klah camp, it is likely that they were heading back to Lay Kay camp.

¹⁷ Villagers often use the word 'confiscate' when referring to the theft and looting undertaken by SAC security forces even though the seizing of the villagers' property is completely unlawful.

August [unknown date] - 19th: (possibly Lay Kay) to Yoh Klah

On August 19th, SAC and BGF troops returned to the army base at Yoh Klah [possibly from Lay Kay army camp]. At that time, Company 2nd-in-Command Lieutenant Bo¹⁸ Wa Tho from Company #2, which is under BGF Battalion #1013, gathered the local villagers and told them that they (the BGF) would move their base and asked the villagers to help them with their move. He told the villagers that they would withdraw their troops from the army camp on August 20th 2021, but they did not actually leave on that day.

August 23rd – [unknown date]: Yoh Klah to Lay Kay

It was not until August 23rd that SAC and BGF troops left Yoh Klah. During their return journey from Yoh Klah army camp through C--- village, the SAC/BGF forcibly apprehended a villager from D--- village, requiring him to act as a human shield and navigator. They released this villager when they arrived at C--- village and tried to give him 5,000 kyats [USD 2.81]¹⁹. He did not accept the money, saying, “*You do not have to pay me anything. I am already okay that you guys [BGF and SAC soldiers] did not beat me!*” It would seem that no other D--- villagers were forced to accompany the soldiers, despite the request on August 19th.

September 1st – 20th: Ka Taing Ti Town to Lay Kay to Yoh Klah

(Arrived Lay Kay army camp on September 5th, and left on September 11th; passed through B--- village on September 17th and arrived at C--- village on September 18th; possible date of arrival in Yoh Klah September 20th)

On September 1st 2021, soldiers from BGF #1013 departed from their army camp headquarters in Ka Taing Ti Town to travel to Yoh Klah army camp (via Lay Kay army camp) to exchange troops and transport rations. Following an attack by KNLA troops on September 3rd while BGF vehicles transported rations on their way to Lay Kay army camp, the BGF and SAC seized three Win Ta Pan villagers’ vehicles and ordered the owners of the vehicles to transport the rations for them.

SAC and BGF troops arrived at Lay Kay army camp on September 5th, and then travelled to P’Ya Raw village on September 11th. On September 14th, they seized five, possibly six, villagers’ tractors and ordered the tractor owners to transport rations from P’Ya Raw village to Kyon Waing village.

On September 17th, when the SAC and BGF arrived at B--- village, the SAC and BGF ordered the KNU village tract²⁰ administrator in B--- village tract to send rations for them by boat. Feeling unsafe to do so (since the local KNLA had been attacking the SAC and BGF for trespass), the KNU village tract administrator fled from the village. SAC and BGF troops then arrested his wife in order to force the village tract administrator to return to the village and accept sending rations for them. As a result, on September 18th, over 100 B--- villagers agreed to carry the rations for the SAC and BGF to C--- village in order that the SAC and BGF release the village tract administrator’s wife. Because of the likelihood of a boat being shot and sinking with the villagers onboard, the village tract administrator’s wife chose for the villagers to carry the rations on foot.

¹⁸ Bo is a Burmese title meaning ‘officer.’

¹⁹ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the March 25th 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.56 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

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

Villagers were forced to carry 105 sacks of rice and other food such as canned fish and canned milk, as well as some ammunition. It took two round trips.

Before the SAC/BGF troops and villagers arrived at C--- village, the local KNLA attacked the SAC and BGF twice; one time at Kreh Koh Place and one time in the jungle outside of C--- village. However, according to the villagers, the KNLA just shot one or two times per attack so as not to cause any injury to the villagers who were walking amongst the SAC and BGF troops.

The SAC and BGF arrived at C--- village on September 18th and slept at C--- monastery for two nights. On the evening of September 18th [possibly September 19th]²¹, the KNLA attacked the SAC and BGF soldiers when they came to buy goods at the shop of local villagers, Ko²² E--- and his wife Naw²³ G---. A skirmish took place in front of the shop. As a result of the fighting, one BGF soldier died during the incident and two other soldiers were injured. There were no civilian casualties. In response, more SAC and BGF soldiers entered into the village, searching for KNLA soldiers. They also shot at the shop, destroying all of the goods in the shop, and almost burned it down. According to a C--- villager, Naw H---: *“A female village head who has been serving the village for some time shouted at the SAC and BGF soldiers without fear, stating: ‘You can’t burn the shop because it is not the fault of the shopkeeper. It is your soldiers’ fault [for getting shot] because they did not carry guns while they walk [when they entered into the shop, and so could not defend themselves] [...] It is not right to burn our village because people [the KNLA] shot your fellow [soldier].”* Naw H--- continued: *“If she [the village head] didn’t yell at him, they [the SAC and BGF] would have actually burned down the shop, and if they burned the shop, the whole village would have burned down.”* However, the SAC and BGF confiscated [stole] food and materials from the shop, including a phone and money. The villagers do not know how much money they confiscated.

One of the local villagers added that, whenever fighting occurs, villagers are the ones who suffer the negative consequences. She cited a common local proverb that says: *“Whether the sharp material falls on leaves, or the leaves fall on sharp material, the leaves will be damaged.”*

While the SAC and BGF stayed in C--- village, they confiscated two chickens from villagers for their own consumption. They were also drinking alcohol and threatened to burn down the village if the KNLA attacked them. Villagers who have remained in the village feel greater insecurity and are worried the SAC and BGF will engage in indiscriminate shelling and other forms of human rights violations. Women, children and the elderly have been deeply concerned for their safety since men are absent from the village. However, they do not know where to flee to be safe so they take the risk of remaining in the village. As of yet, there have been no incidents regarding sexual violence against women and girls, but the fear of sexual violence is present, especially among older villagers concerning their daughters, because of trauma from past experiences of sexual violence committed by the Tatmadaw²⁴.

²¹ KHRG received different information from different sources but was unable to establish the exact date of the incident.

²² Ko is a Burmese title meaning older brother. It can be used for relatives as well as non-relatives.

²³ Naw is a S’gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person’s name.

²⁴ 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

On the morning of September 20th, BGF soldiers ordered villagers from C---, D--- and F--- villages to carry rations as well as some ammunition for them as they continued on to Yoh Klah army camp. Close to 300 villagers in total (180 from C--- village and 100 from D--- village)²⁵, including men, women, children, the elderly and sick people, had to carry rations and ammunition for them. The majority of the villagers required to serve as porters were women, and another 12 were underage (nine girls and three boys). The men were fewer in number because some were busy working for their family's livelihood and others had fled to other places. According to Naw J---, who was herself forced into portering: *"I went because my husband is not home. When I returned home, my legs were in pain. It was so painful."* They started travelling from C--- village at 10:30 am and arrived at Yoh Klah army camp at 12:30 pm (thus a two-hour walk each way) under extremely hot conditions. They also did not receive any food or drink along the way. Some villagers had to carry rations such as rice and canned fish while others had to carry ammunition such as mortars. The SAC and BGF soldiers walked between the villagers along the way to Yoh Klah army camp. There were no attacks by the KNLA on this portion of the journey, so villagers were able to return home safely.

According to local leaders, the SAC troops that operate in Bilin Township are BGF Company #3 under Battalion #1013, led by Company 2nd-in-Command Lieutenant Ka Don, and SAC Battalion #406 under Military Operations Command (MOC)²⁶ #8.

September 24th - [unknown date]: Yoh Klah to Lay Kay

On September 24th 2021, the same SAC troops, along with BGF Company #2 led by Major Maung Soe, returned to Lay Kay army camp from Yoh Klah, taking the same road. There were about 50 soldiers in total. The SAC and BGF arrested three D--- villagers and five C--- villagers, some of whom were women, to use as human shields while travelling from D--- village to C--- village. Naw H--- from C--- village explained: *"They [SAC and BGF] didn't dare go back by themselves. That is why they brought along two to three villagers and walked between villagers like that. It is because they worry that they will be ambushed. By walking amongst the villagers, if they are ambushed, those villagers will get shot instead of them."*

Before the SAC and BGF arrived at C--- village with the eight villagers, the SAC and BGF were ambushed by the local KNLA in a jungle outside of D--- village. According to one of the villagers forced to accompany the soldiers: *"We fled randomly [scattered] when we heard the gunshots from here [the village]. We fled. One of the villagers, Saw K---, said that while he was fleeing from SAC [and BGF], he encountered Burma soldiers on his way, and was taken [for use as a human shield]. He said that there were a lot of gunshots [while he was fleeing] but the bullets just missed hitting him in the head."* No villagers were injured, however two SAC soldiers received minor injuries. Despite the lack of civilian casualties, the SAC soldiers fired guns in C--- village and the SAC commanders encouraged their soldiers to shoot villagers on sight in the village. After the fighting, the SAC and BGF arrested anyone they saw on their way for use as a human shield while travelling from the eastern part of C--- village to the C--- village monastery. They also forcibly apprehended some villagers who were hiding inside their bunkers and under their houses during the skirmishes.

and Development Council] from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

²⁵ The exact number of villagers is unclear. Another source provided KHRG with the following numbers: 140 villagers from C--- village, 11 villagers from Bi--- village and 97 villagers from D--- village.

²⁶ 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.

Due to the attack on September 24th, the SAC and BGF troops temporarily set up base in the monastery in C--- village, instead of continuing on to Lay Kay army camp. Therefore, C--- villagers continued to worry for their security and feared that the SAC and BGF would force them to be human shields for their return to Lay Kay army camp. It is unclear what date they left.

December 17th – 23rd: KNLA occupation of Yoh Klah army camp

KHRG did not receive further reports of forced labour or the use of human shields in the Yoh Klah/Lay Kay area after September, however, on December 17th, KNLA Battalion #1 and PDF troops attacked and occupied Yoh Klah army camp, then burned it down. During the fighting and indiscriminate shelling, villagers' homes and property were damaged. SAC jets also flew over the area, so villagers felt more insecure. The local villagers fled to nearby farms or other villages such as C---. Some fell ill during displacement.²⁷



This photo [top left] was taken on December 21st 2021 in D--- village, Yoh Klah village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The photo shows the BGF's Yoh Klah army camp that was burned down after it was captured by the combined forces of the KNLA and PDF on December 17th 2021. [Photo: KHRG]



These photos were taken on December 19th 2021 in D--- village, Yoh Klah village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The photo on the left shows damage to a villager's home caused by shelling by BGF troops from Noh Hpaw Htee army camp in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District on December 17th 2021. The shelling killed a pig, and damaged some houses, a motorcycle, and other civilian objects. The photo on the right shows a mortar shell that landed in the village. [Photos: KHRG]

On December 21st, about 40 SAC and BGF soldiers arrived in D--- village. It is not clear how long they stayed, but they were still there on December 23rd. The SAC and BGF said that they would

²⁷ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-359-P1 and 21-360-P1).

stay in the village for several days. They bought 20 sacks of rice from D--- villagers on the morning of December 23rd, so villagers assumed they would stay longer than several days in the village.²⁸ [No further updates have been provided.]



These photos were taken between December 17th and 22nd 2021 in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The photo on the left shows D--- villagers who fled to a nearby farm due to armed clashes and indiscriminate shelling by the SAC on December 17th 2021, when the KNLA occupied Yoh Klah army camp. The photo on the right shows supplies, like food and warm clothes, that Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) provided to IDPs from D--- village. [Photos: Local villager]

ii. Use of civilians as human shields in Dooplaya District

On October 11th 2021, fighting occurred between KNLA Battalion #18 and SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)²⁹ #556 at L--- village and M--- village in Kaw Nweh village tract, Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District. The fighting began as the SAC troops crossed into KNU-controlled areas, resulting in conflict, including around Kaw Nweh village tract. Therefore, villagers felt insecure, so most of them in Kaw Nweh village tract fled to other places, including to monasteries. On October 17th, SAC LIB #556 soldiers patrolled near N---, Kaw T'Ree Township, and arrested one N--- villager while he was looking after his cows and ordered him to lead them as a human shield on a direct path to Ta La Aww place. They released the N--- villager when they arrived at Ta La Aww place.³⁰

Then, in the evening of October 17th 2021, SAC LIB #556 soldiers entered O--- village, Yay Kyaw Gyi village tract and met villager Saw³¹ P--- who was in his house. The soldiers ordered him to stay in the same compound as the soldiers without allowing him to go to other places because the soldiers were worried about possible attack by the KNLA. As a result, Saw P--- had to sleep in a barn behind his house in the same compound as the SAC soldiers. The next morning, on October 18th, the SAC troops ordered Saw P--- to be a navigator and human shield, to walk in front of the SAC soldiers, observe the road situation and make sure the road was safe for SAC

²⁸ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-360-P1).

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmishes between armed groups and indiscriminate shelling result in displacement, casualties and destruction of villagers' property \(October 2021\)](#)", December 2021.

³¹ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

soldiers to use. The SAC soldiers told him: *“We are going back so you show and lead the way for us.”* Saw P--- had to accompany the SAC soldiers until they arrived at the village monastery. When the SAC arrived at the monastery, SAC soldiers found villagers hiding in the monastery. The soldiers tied up all the male villagers for a few minutes because they were worried the male villagers might try to flee. Later, the SAC soldiers left the monastery whereupon fighting broke out with the KNLA outside O--- village. Villagers think that these SAC soldiers may have actually been BGF soldiers because they were speaking Karen and another language spoken by the Taw Thoo^{32, 33}.

In a separate incident in October 2021, 23 SAC soldiers from an unknown battalion ordered Q--- village head Saw R--- and the village secretary to accompany them as human shields on the way to their army camp because they were worried that they would be attacked by the KNLA. The two village leaders were asked to lead them along a side road, but just to Kway Lay village. Before reaching the village, they were attacked [unclear by whom but probably the KNLA], and two SAC soldiers sustained injuries. Neither Saw R--- nor the village secretary were harmed during the fighting. Because of the attack, the SAC soldiers were not able to continue to their army camp, and the two village leaders were able to return home. According to village head Saw R---, *“Later, they also asked us to help them. But I don’t know their plan. They [the SAC] said they will go back [and asked me to accompany them]. I dared not go so [I tried to stay away].”*³⁴

B. Eruption of conflict and SAC offensives in Lay Kay Kaw

In early December, SAC activities in Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District dramatically increased as the military began targeting the area in search of NLD members, civil servants and activists who had sought refuge in KNU-controlled areas due to their participation in the anti-coup protests and the CDM. Patrolling and searches in the area had been ongoing since shortly after the coup, as Dooplaya District was one of the key locations where CDM participants and anti-coup protesters had sought refuge. As a result of a sudden increase in raids and arrests in December and the SAC’s trespass into more restricted areas of KNU territory, fighting between the SAC military and the KNLA broke out in Lay Kay Kaw New Town and surrounding areas on December 15th 2021 and continued through the end of the reporting period. From December 23rd to 27th, the SAC military also launched four airstrikes in the area.

Lay Kay Kaw New Town was first established in 2015, at the time of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)³⁵, as a resettlement site where refugees who had fled to Thailand during past periods of conflict could return to re-establish their lives in Burma. It was funded by the Nippon Foundation and the Burma government, at that time under President U³⁶ Thein Sein (Union

³² The Taw Thoo in Karen, or Pa’O in Burmese, are an ethnic group found throughout parts of eastern Burma/Myanmar.

³³ KHRG, [“Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmishes between armed groups and indiscriminate shelling result in displacement, casualties and destruction of villagers’ property \(October 2021\)”](#), December 2021; see also unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-306-A1-I1).

³⁴ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-310-A1-I1).

³⁵ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the Karen National Union. It was followed by the adoption of a Code of Conduct by the signatories in November 2015. In February 2018, two additional armed ethnic groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

³⁶ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

Solidarity and Development Party [USDP])³⁷, in an effort to help forge the peace process.³⁸ Situated close to the border with Thailand and about 14.5 kilometres south of Myawaddy Town, it comprises 1,250 units that house over 3,000 residents, mostly former refugees and IDPs.

i. Increased SAC activity in the area

As early as October 2021, the SAC had begun setting up more checkpoints in and out of towns in Kaw T'Ree Township. The SAC soldiers checked civilians' phones and questioned them about where they are from. They also checked car, truck and motorbike licenses, and carried out unlawful taxation, demanding 30,000 kyats [USD 16.87] in payment for missing car or motorbike licenses, or if an identification sticker was placed on the car windshield (for instance, for the KNU, DKBA, or a religious organisation). They also searched vehicles and motorcycles looking for any materials carried by civilians that might suggest affiliation with the PDF, CDM, or National Unity Government (NUG)³⁹. According to a KHRG researcher, the only way for the villagers to avoid this problem was not to go to town. Due to these activities of the SAC and BGF troops, local civilians felt insecure, faced travel restrictions and livelihood challenges as they could not go to town to sell their crops.⁴⁰

In early December 2021, armed SAC soldiers increased patrolling in villages under KNU control, such as in Lay Kay Kaw Town and Thay Baw Boh village in Kaw T'Ree Township. A KHRG researcher stated that the SAC increased their movements in Thay Baw Boh village every day and they carried their weapons with them when they came to the village.⁴¹ Moreover, SAC soldiers entered into neighbourhoods and searched in villager's houses. There were police in places where police had never been before. SAC soldiers also cooperated with the BGF and local police in setting up more checkpoints along the road between Myawaddy Town and Waw Lay village in Kaw T'Ree Township. This road extends south of Myawaddy Town and runs along the Thai-Burma border. New SAC checkpoints were established along this road between Waw Lay and Htee Ther Leh villages, between P'Loo Hpa Doh and Min Let Pan villages, between Maw Htoh Th'LAY village and Myawaddy Town, at Ain Kyin Myaing junction and Lay Kay Kaw junction.⁴²

³⁷ The Union Solidarity and Development Party (Pyi Khaing Pyo in Burmese) is the successor of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. It was officially registered as a political party on June 2nd 2010, and governed Burma/Myanmar from 2010 through 2015. In November 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD) ousted the USDP in a landslide election, winning a majority of seats in parliament. The USDP is known for its close ties with the military and most of the party officials are former military personnel.

³⁸ Laignee BARRON, "[Japan's Gamble to Help Myanmar's Peace Process](#)", *Nikkei Asia*, March 2017.

³⁹ 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. On May 5th 2021, the NUG announced the formation of a "People's Defence Force" to serve as its armed wing. Further information can be found at the NUG website: <https://www.nugmyanmar.org/en/>.

⁴⁰ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

December 13th - 14th: Questioning, raids and arrest of civilians by SAC military in Lay Kay Kaw area

Between December 13th and 14th 2021, the SAC military entered into Lay Kay Kaw Town eight times.⁴³ On December 13th, about 200 SAC soldiers from four troops under LIB #560⁴⁴ and LIB #275⁴⁵ entered into Lay Kay Kaw Town and nearby villages, Kway K'Lay, P'Hee Klaw, P'Loo Hpoh, and Y'Thay Koo in Kaw T'Ree Township, questioning villagers about PDF members and political leaders.⁴⁶ On December 14th, SAC soldiers from LIB #560 and LIB #275, together with BGF Battalion #1013,⁴⁷ entered into Section 6 of Lay Kay Kaw Town, checking documents, questioning villagers about how long they have lived in Lay Kay Kaw and how many family members are in their household. They then arrested about 30 people.⁴⁸ According to a KHRG researcher, KNU leaders had given them permission to enter but only to investigate, make notes and take pictures, not to make arrests. According to Free Burma Rangers (FBR)⁴⁹, when the SAC military entered the Lay Kay Kaw area on December 14th, they started "arresting villagers and torturing them by tying them up and beating them and pushing their faces into water".⁵⁰ According to Karen Information Center (KIC), the people arrested included suspected PDF and CDM participants, as well as one doctor and one Hluttaw (parliament) committee member.⁵¹

On December 14th 2021, as reported by KIC, about 400 villagers fled due to concerns that fighting would erupt.⁵² Many villagers fled to S--- village, which is one mile away from Lay Kay Kaw Town.

December 15th - 16th: Fighting breaks out in and around Lay Kay Kaw

On December 15th 2021, SAC soldiers returned to Lay Kay Kaw Town in the morning. Due to SAC raids and arrests, fighting broke out at 10:30 am between the KNLA (plus the PDF) and the SAC (plus the BGF) in Lay Kay Kaw Town.⁵³ According to a KHRG researcher, this fighting happened because KNU leaders could not accept SAC soldiers' use of force towards civilians in Karen State.⁵⁴ During the fighting, mortars landed inside the town so villagers were at risk of losing their life. According to one Lay Kay Kaw villager, U T---, "An auxiliary of the Lay Kay Kaw village leader shouted out loud [during the fighting on December 15th]: 'Flee!! Flee from the village.' [...] Fighting

⁴³ "[Radio Karen: Over 400 Residents Fled their Homes in Lay Kaw New Town as Military Tension Mounted](#)", *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁴⁴ "[Radio Karen: Burma Army Entered Lay Kay Kaw Searching and Arresting Coup Resistant](#)", *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁴⁵ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

⁴⁶ "[Radio Karen: Burma Army Entered Lay Kay Kaw Searching and Arresting Coup Resistant](#)", *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁴⁷ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

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 Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1); see also Free Burma Rangers, "[Burma Army Air and Ground Attacks Displace Over 10,000 People in Central Karen State Along the Burma Thai Border](#)", December 2021.

⁵¹ "[Radio Karen: Over 400 Residents Fled their Homes in Lay Kaw New Town as Military Tension Mounted](#)", *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "[The Karen News: Fighting Broke Out at Lay Kay Kaw New Town, Fighting Continue](#)", *Karen Information Center*, December 2021; see also unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

⁵⁴ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

happened in the village, between the houses right after the checking [after the SAC conducted its searches]. [...] Then fighting happened again during the night and big weapons [mortars] landed continuously around us so we had to flee. It was while the Burmese [SAC] soldiers continuously fired mortars into the village that we fled from the village.”⁵⁵

Naw V---, a 17-year-old student from W--- village, studying in Lay Kay Kaw said: *“The SAC launched mortars so we were afraid to stay, [...] that’s why I have fled. If I continued to stay there, I would have died. [...] The shelling was close to us so we fled to protect [ourselves].”⁵⁶*

Ma⁵⁷ Y---, a villager from Lay Kay Kaw, also fled after the fighting and shelling began. She was helped by a rescue team at the Lay Kay Kaw clinic. The clinic sent her to P’Loo village tract to take refuge. She heard from others afterward that a mortar had landed on her house. Her house was destroyed.⁵⁸

On December 15th at 5:00 pm, the SAC sent more soldiers to nearby Z--- village, Maw Htoh Th’Lay village tract, so villagers around Z--- village, including IDPs who had earlier fled to that area from Lay Kay Kaw, faced security concerns as well.⁵⁹

The next day, December 16th, fighting broke out in Z--- and Aa--- villages, with mortars landing in the village and near villagers’ hiding places. Some houses were also damaged. According to a KHRG researcher, villagers in Aa--- village were too scared to flee. After the shooting stopped, KNLA soldiers came to check on the villagers in Aa--- village to make sure everyone was okay.⁶⁰

Afterward, the fighting intensified, leading villagers from Z--- village to flee to Ab--- village on the Thai side of the Moei River. Villagers from Lay Kay Kaw and nearby villages, such as S---, Aa---, and Ac---, were forced to flee to Ad--- village, P’Loo village tract.⁶¹

According to Ma Ad--- from Aa--- village (who eventually fled to Ad--- village), *“Big weapons [mortars] landed in our village so we fled. [...] Our life is the most important so we left everything behind and fled [for our lives] so there are many difficulties for us. [...] My baby is one month old. [...] I was extremely worried that my baby would be hit [by shelling]. [...] My father has cancer so I am very concerned about facing difficulties in the future. [...] I hope for peace as soon as possible. I want to go home and stay in our own house. [...] I am very much in fear.”⁶²*

Another villager, Ko Ae--- from Z--- village, Maw Htoh Th’Lay village tract, explained, *“I have been separated from my family because the fighting happened in front of my shop while I was working on my farm. My family is now on the Thai side [of the river], but I am now left in Burma. [...] I do not know when we will meet each other [reunite]. I could see the burning in my village from S--- IDP hiding place.”⁶³*

⁵⁵ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-23-A1-I1).

⁵⁶ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A1-I1).

⁵⁷ Ma is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person’s name.

⁵⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A6-I1).

⁵⁹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-8-A3-I1).

⁶³ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-8-A5-I1).

December 16th – 27th: Fighting spreads throughout Taw Naw Muh Htaw area

Fighting in Lay Kay Kaw continued on December 16th in both the northern and southern parts, but also spread wider, reaching Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township and surrounding villages.⁶⁴ Thay Baw Boh village is in a mixed-control area, and is about a two-hour drive from Lay Kay Kaw Town.

Thay Baw Boh village

On December 16th 2021, fighting broke out near Thay Baw Boh village between SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)⁶⁵ #32 and LIB #55 (whose army camp is located just outside Thay Baw Boh village on the eastern side of Taw Naw Mountain [Taw Naw Muh Htaw area]) and the KNLA and KNDO.⁶⁶ According to one report, SAC soldiers fired seven or eight shots from their army camp at 10:00 am. The SAC army camp is close to the school in Thay Baw Boh village. After they opened fire, students who live in the school dormitory went to hide in the bunker they dug in the school compound. There were around 180 students staying in the school dormitory. Firing continued in the afternoon, so the students continued to hide in the bunker. At 3:13 pm the SAC troops fired three small mortars from their army camp. Afterwards, they fired multiple shots using small weapons (guns). Because the local villagers did not realise that fighting was taking place outside the village, they believed that SAC soldiers opened fire because they wanted to threaten the villagers. According to one villager, this is the first time SAC troops had opened fire in or near the village. Students and some other villagers packed clothes and bags after the SAC fired the shots in order to be ready to flee if something happens. One villager reported: *"We dare not sleep here tonight if it continues."*⁶⁷

On December 18th at around 3:00 pm more fighting broke out between the SAC and KNLA, leaving one SAC soldier dead. Other villagers in the area said that some Thay Baw Boh villagers fled to Thailand after hearing the gunfire.⁶⁸

Fighting around the Thay Baw Boh SAC army camp continued over the following days. Most of the fighting and shelling had been taking place outside of the village, but on December 20th, one mortar landed inside of the village. It was at that point that more villagers began to flee to the nearby Moei River, setting up a temporary displacement site along the riverbank.⁶⁹

At around 4:30 am on December 22nd 2021, fighting broke out again at the SAC army camp near Thay Baw Boh village. According to a KHRG researcher, since the fighting happened there three times already, the villagers no longer dared to stay in the village. The students from Taw Naw High School were afraid to stay in their dormitory, and no one dared stay in the village monastery as well. The villagers were afraid to stay not only inside the village but also in the areas outside of the village. One Thay Baw Boh villager, Naw Af---, stated: *"On some days, I can hear the sound*

⁶⁴ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-349-P1).

⁶⁵ An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most 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. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁶⁶ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-349-P1).

⁶⁷ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-347-D1).

⁶⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-352-S1).

⁶⁹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A4-I1).

of the fighting once or twice. On other days, the fighting has happened consistently [all day long].”⁷⁰

According to 70-year-old Saw Ah---, the army camp had been there for 20 years. He believes that the Tatmadaw had strategically placed the camp near the village as a means of protection against KNLA attack: “I think they use villagers as human shields [use the whole village as a human shield]. They are afraid to live outside [far from the village] because they are being attacked most of the time [day and night]. When the SAC soldiers live in the village, it is hard to attack them because the KNLA soldiers feel inconvenient [wrong about] shelling into the village. The KNLA do not hurt civilians.”⁷¹



This photo was taken on December 23rd 2021 on the Thai side of the Moei River across from Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. In this photo, Taw Naw High School students were crossing back to Thay Baw Boh village after they were prevented from staying in Thailand by Thai authorities. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on December 25th 2021 in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. Taw Naw High School students from Thay Baw Boh village had to stay in a bunker in their village from December 24th to 27th 2021 after they were forced to return to Burma by Thai authorities. [Photo: KHRG]

More intense fighting broke out on December 27th. According to a KHRG researcher, one of the mortars fired by the SAC soldiers from Thay Baw Boh village landed in a Karen village in Thailand known as Moh Loh Chai. As a result, one of the Thai military commanders contacted the KNLA and said that if KNLA soldiers keep attacking the SAC military base and if another mortar lands in Thailand, they will be forced to respond by firing mortars into Burma. The KNLA soldiers stopped the attack.⁷²

P’Loo Hpa Doh village

At 3:00 pm on December 19th 2021, fighting broke out in P’Loo Hpa Doh village, P’Loo village tract. The villagers from P’Loo Hpa Doh and P’Loo Hphoh, as well as the IDPs who had sought refuge there, could no longer stay and had to move to another place. According to a KHRG researcher, thousands of villagers including children, elderly people, people with disabilities, pregnant women and women with newborn babies faced many difficulties. Some moved to Plaw

⁷⁰ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A5-I1).

⁷¹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A4-I1).

⁷² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-S1).

T’Poh and Kaw T’Naw located on the eastern side of P’Loo Hpoh village and some fled to Lay Ghaw and Thay Baw Boh, but then had to displace when the situation worsened there as well. More than 3,000 people fled to Meh Taw Kay in Thailand.⁷³



This photo was received on December 18th 2021. The photo shows IDPs in P’Loo Hpoh and P’Loo Hpa Doh villages, P’Loo village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District receiving aid. The local ethnic armed groups and local leaders helped with the distribution. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on December 20th 2021 near P’Loo Hpa Doh village, P’Loo village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows IDPs from P’Loo Hpa Doh and P’Loo Hpoh villages after they fled from the fighting on December 19th. [Photo: Local villager]

Aoo Kray Hta village

At 4:30 am on December 27th 2021, SAC troops were attacked by the KNLA at their camp in Au Kray Hta village, Thay Baw Boh village tract. The firing of both big and small weapons could be heard by local villagers. The fighting did not stop until after 5:49 am.⁷⁴

According to a KHRG researcher, villagers from the Taw Naw Muh Hta area in Kaw T’Ree Township have been living in fear and are very worried about their livelihood. Some of the villagers from the villages in P’Loo village tract had to leave their homes and livelihood behind. Villages in Thay Baw Boh village tract, including Lay Ghaw, Wa May Hta, Aoo Kray Hta, Bler Doh, Maw Ker Hteh, and Thay Baw Boh, were also abandoned as a result of the fighting.⁷⁵

December 21st – 30th: Fighting breaks out in Ai--- village (near Kawkareik Town)

On December 16th 2021, five SAC trucks were blown up along the Asia Highway, and 10 SAC soldiers died in that explosion. A local villager told KIC that, after the explosion, SAC soldiers fired heavy artillery in the direction of Ai--- village at 6:00 pm. KHRG did not receive any report of fighting erupting on that day. Villagers were however warned not to travel along the highway as fighting would likely intensify in the area.⁷⁶ Fighting had already been taking place nearby in the southern part of Kawkareik Town, but prior to December 21st, fighting had not reached Ai--- village.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “အရှလမ်းတွင် စစ်ကား ၅ စီး မိုင်းဆွဲတိုက်ခိုက်ခံရပြီးနောက် ကော့ကရိတ်မြို့အနီး တိုက်ပွဲများဆက်ပြုစေ”, Karen Information Center, December 2021.

On December 21st 2021, fighting broke out between SAC Light Infantry Division (LID)⁷⁷ #22 and LID #44 and KNLA Battalion #18 at Ai--- village beside the Asia Highway.⁷⁸ The fighting continued through December 30th.⁷⁹

As a result of the fighting that broke out on December 21st, Ai--- villagers had to flee in fear and hide in their bunkers for their security. About 1,700 Ai--- villagers fled.⁸⁰ According to Naw Aj--- from Ai--- village, *“My children are young and they do not like to stay in the bunker. They were crying and would like to get out from the bunker. Then we fled to here [another village].”*⁸¹

While Naw Aj--- and her family had fled from the fighting, SAC soldiers entered her house and confiscated clothing, spoons, dried fish, oil, salt, a rice pot and basket of rice from her house. Her older sister, Naw Ak---, reported that the SAC soldiers looted her house as well, taking two sacks of rice and two big tins of rice, clothes, blankets and pillows. According to Naw Ak---, the SAC soldiers also confiscated rice, blankets, a rice pot, a rice box and pillows from her mother-in-law’s house.⁸²

Naw Al---, another villager from Ai---, stated that when she returned to her home, she also found that SAC soldiers had looted items and food, including boxes of noodles and canned fish from her shop. The items stolen were worth 500,000 kyats [USD 281.19]. She had just restocked her shop when the fighting broke out and she was forced to flee. She stated that, *“Nothing is left in my shop [...] Everything was taken. Only some soaps are left.”* She believes that the looting took place on December 30th 2021, and noted that another shop in the village had also been looted.⁸³

According to Saw Am---, an IDP from Ai--- village, *“They [SAC troops] do not have rules [follow International Humanitarian Law]. If they did, even if fighting happens, we would feel secure to stay in our village.”*⁸⁴

After fighting broke out in Ai--- village on December 21st, about 100 SAC soldiers entered into KNU territory. According to a local villager, there were about 100 SAC soldiers that seemed to be new troops coming to Dooplaya District from Mergui-Tavoy District.⁸⁵

ii. Displacements and attempts to enter Thailand

Many villagers spent multiple days fleeing as each place they arrived fell under attack. Naw An-- fled with her school in Lay Kay Kaw when the fighting began on December 15th but had to

⁷⁷ A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general, and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw in 1966. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units. Each division is directly under the command of the Chief of Staff (Army).

⁷⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A1-I1 and 22-2-A2-I1); see also [“Radio Karen: Fighting on Myawaddy-Kawkareik Asia High-Way Near Kawt Nwet”](#), *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁷⁹ “[ကျော့ကရိတ်အနီးတိုက်ပွဲစစ်ကောင်စီမှ လက်နက်ကြီးအမြောက်အများ အသုံးပြုပစ်ခတ်သဖြင့် ဒေသခံ ၁၀၀၀ ကျော် တိမ်းရှောင်နေရ](#)”, December 2021.

⁸⁰ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A1-I1).

⁸¹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A3-I1).

⁸² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A2-I1 and 22-2-A3-I1).

⁸³ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A2-I1).

⁸⁴ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A1-I1).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

displace every day as the fighting spread: *“We have been fleeing for five days and each day we slept in a different place. [...] When the fighting happens at the place where we flee, we need to flee to another place. Last night, we had a problem sleeping [due to fear of the fighting and the difficulty of finding a place to sleep]. We slept at a goat factory. It was difficult to sleep there, but we tried our best to [fall] asleep.”*⁸⁶

Another IDP from Lay Kay Kaw Town, a school teacher, Naw Ag---, stated that, *“When the fighting broke out in Lay Kay Kaw we were very afraid and we were afraid to stay there. We also have [our] students there. When the firing started, we prepared ourselves to flee from Lay Kay Kaw to S---. There were many people at S--- and when the [SAC fired] mortars we fled to Ao---. Yesterday, the fighting broke out at Ao---, near the corn field beside the house [where we stay] so we decided to flee but unfortunately we didn’t have enough cars. Therefore, our [senior] teacher told us: ‘We will transport you round by round.’ So we were left behind. When the fighting broke out beside the house we couldn’t do anything. [...] There were a thousand IDPs [staying] in the school and church, there were newborn babies and the elderly. I couldn’t imagine how they will flee.”* She explained about the different places where they fled: *“After Lay Kay Kaw, we slept one night at S---. There were many people at S--- so we went back to Lay Kay Kaw. In the early morning, we fled to Ao--- by car and slept at Ao--- village. But in the morning, we fled to Ap--- and slept in a cow stable. The next morning, it wasn’t safe to be there so we fled to Bj---. We had to flee after every night. We are fleeing here and there since the fighting happened until now.”*⁸⁷

According to KIC, from December 14th to December 22nd 2021, about 10,000 IDPs from Maw Htoh Th’Lay, Min Let Pan, P’Loo Hpa Doh, P’Loo Hpoh, P’Hee Klaw, Y’Thay Koo and Lay Kay Kaw villages had to flee to Thailand.⁸⁸ More villagers from Thay Baw Boh and the Taw Naw Muh Htaw area fled to the border in the days that followed. Some of the villagers who crossed into Thailand were then forced by Thai soldiers to return to Burma. Thousands more remained on the Burma side of the river unable to cross into Thailand.

One Lay Kay Kaw villager, Saw Aq--- stated, *“We stayed at Ar--- for several days but received information that this place is not secure, so then we had to flee to another place. Therefore, some villagers fled to Thailand and some of us fled to As--- village. For displaced villagers who fled to Thailand, Thai soldiers told them “Hey!!! No gunfire sound, you cannot come”, so they had to return to Burma.”*⁸⁹

According to another IDP from Lay Kay Kaw, Naw Ag---: *“Thousands of civilians fled to the other country [Thailand] and we are not sure whether the other country will accept them. When you enter [flee to] the other country they also have rules and regulations. This is during the COVID-19 [pandemic] so they need to test for COVID-19. Since there were thousands of IDPs, people [Thai health workers] can’t take care of them individually. [...] Some of my friends who crossed the Thai border told us they faced problems such as they didn’t have enough toilets and enough beds to sleep in. Even if there isn’t fighting [in Thailand], they [displaced villagers] also face personal problems.”*⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A2-I1).

⁸⁷ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A2-I1).

⁸⁸ [“Radio Karen: Thousands of Villagers Fled Homes after Fighting Broke out at Thay Baw Boe village”](#), *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁸⁹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-23-A1-I1)

⁹⁰ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A1-I1).

A displaced villager from At---, Naw Af--- said: “The Thai authorities do not like us crossing the Thai-Burma border so we have to stay at the riverbank. [...] We are afraid to live [in the village] if the fighting gets worse so we are going to cross [to the Thailand side] anyhow. If we are shot [by Thai authorities] while crossing the river, we cannot do anything.”⁹¹ Naw Ag--- from Lay Kay Kaw added, “We the civilians don’t want to seek shelter in another country and don’t want to go to another country as well. But it was impossible for us [the situation made us flee to another country].”⁹²



This photo was taken on December 16th 2021 at the Moei River between At--- (Burma) and Moh Loh Chai (Thailand) villages. This photo shows the IDPs from At--- village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District crossing the river to flee to Thailand due to fighting that broke out between the SAC and the KNLA. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on December 19th 2021. The photo shows IDPs from the Lay Kay Kaw area in Dooplaya District who have been fleeing since December 14th due to fighting. The photo shows them as they arrived across the Moei River into Thailand. [Photo: KHRG]

iii. Airstrikes ensue

December 20th: KNU calls for a “No Fly Zone”

During the ongoing fighting, the SAC also conducted reconnaissance with helicopters. On December 20th 2021, the KNU released a “No Fly Zone” statement to prevent airstrikes from happening like earlier in Mu Traw District.⁹³ On December 21st, International Karen Organisation (IKO) also called upon the United Nations for the establishment of a “No Fly Zone”.⁹⁴

December 23rd – 27th: Airstrikes around Lay Kay Kaw

Even though the KNU and IKO released a “No Fly Zone” statement on December 20th 2021, multiple airstrikes took place shortly afterward. On December 23rd at 10:00 pm, SAC launched its first airstrike in the Lay Kay Kaw area.⁹⁵ Airstrikes continued throughout the week, with the second

⁹¹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A5-II).

⁹² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A2-II).

⁹³ “[Radio Karen: KNU Calls for UN to Impose “No Fly Zone” at Lay Kay Kaw Areas](#)”, Karen Information Center, December 2021.

⁹⁴ This information was taken from the [International Karen Organisation Twitter Page](#), from a post dated December 21st 2021 (Accessed March 18th 2021).

⁹⁵ “[The Karen News: KNU soldiers and civilians were wounded in series of military airstrikes](#)”, Karen Information Center, December 2021.

taking place on December 24th at 4:00 pm, the third on December 25th at around 4:00 pm, and the fourth on December 27th at 1:00 pm.

According to a villager from Lay Kay Kaw, Saw Aq---: *“During the airstrikes, SAC dropped bombs and fired machine guns [from helicopters and jets] so bullets [and bombs] fell from the sky just like rain in Meh Wah Hkee village. We did not feel secure to stay anymore, and then we had to flee [to another village]. [...] The airstrike happened in the place around Lay Kay Kaw and Meh Wah Hkee villages. [...] On that day, there was one jet and one helicopter [of the SAC]. [...] They [the SAC] used machine guns from [the jet/helicopter] so [the bullets] fell from the sky just like rain.”*⁹⁶ Due to the airstrikes, some villagers and KNLA soldiers were injured and died, and some villagers' houses were destroyed. Saw Aq--- continued, *“On that day [of the airstrike in Meh Wah Hkee], one villager who was a chef [cook for the IDPs] in Meh Wah Hkee village died. [...] There were the most damages in Meh Wah Hkee village.”*⁹⁷

On December 28th 2021, SAC authorities made an announcement on the SAC-owned MRTV [Myanmar Radio and Television] news channel urging IDPs to return home, saying that the SAC could control the situation in the Lay Kay Kaw area.⁹⁸ Some villagers returned, but the majority of villagers have not yet returned. Despite the announcement, fighting broke out again on December 30th 2021 so villagers who had returned to their villages had to flee again.

C. Mu Traw District situation update

During the previous reporting period, Mu Traw District was the location of the vast majority of fighting and ground and air attacks since the February 2021 coup. Tens of thousands of villagers were also forced to displace. During the current reporting period, although no airstrikes took place, the situation in Mu Traw District continued to deteriorate, with widespread fighting and shelling. Thousands of villagers remain displaced and many are now facing food shortages. The security situation for villagers in Mu Traw continues to be critical, with heavy travel restrictions and limited movement due to conflict, shelling and landmine contamination. KHRG received report of eight incidents of landmine explosions and two time bomb explosions, all of which occurred in Mu Traw District (see Part II, Landmines). Threats and arrests by the SAC have also been taking place.

Due to heavy insecurity and travel restrictions as well as communication interruptions (phone connection issues), KHRG researchers have also had difficulty documenting all of the fighting and human rights violations that have been committed by SAC and BGF troops in Mu Traw District over the past six months.⁹⁹ Some KHRG researchers in this district have also faced security concerns, at times having to refrain from seeking out further information. Thus, the information provided in this section represents only a fraction of the conflict and military activities that occurred between July and December 2021.

i. Militarisation

Throughout the period from July to December 2021, SAC ground attacks in Mu Traw District have increased. Numerous skirmishes between SAC troops (including the BGF) and the KNLA have occurred in all three townships in Mu Traw District. SAC military activities, like troop reinforcement

⁹⁶ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-23-A1-I1).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ [“Radio Karen: Military Junta’s Official Made Announcement urging Displaced Villagers to go back”](#), *Karen Information Center*, December 2021.

⁹⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-240-D1).

and ration transportation, often involved SAC trespass into KNU-controlled territories and thus led to further outbreaks of fighting and shelling.

Although the KNU released a statement on March 21st 2021 demanding SAC troops based all over Mu Traw to retreat from KNU territories,¹⁰⁰ the call was ignored. The SAC's disregard for this demand led to more fighting with the KNLA. According to KNU Mutraw News, fighting between the SAC/BGF and KNLA broke out about 1000 times in Lu Thaw, Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships in Mu Traw District during the last six months of 2021.¹⁰¹ Due to ongoing fighting, the KNU has not been able to confirm the number of casualties or the amount of damage.

Lu Thaw Township

The Day Bu Noh area in Lu Thaw Township had been a key target during the March 2021 airstrikes. Although no more airstrikes took place in the area during the current reporting period, the SAC continued to conduct reconnaissance missions using fighter jets, serving as a great source of concern for villagers. KHRG received reports that at 6:00 am on August 17th 2021, two SAC fighter jets conducted reconnaissance missions in Day Bu Noh area. Again, on August 19th, more SAC fighter jets came to the Day Bu Noh area twice in order to conduct reconnaissance missions, first at about 9:30 am and later at about 2:30 pm.¹⁰²

According to a KHRG researcher, SAC troops increased their military activity and committed further human rights violations in the area. Villagers living in Day Bu Noh area and elsewhere in the township now have to stay alert because of the fear of attack by SAC forces. The villagers living in Day Bu Noh area were also informed by local KNU leaders to stay alert as they do not know when attacks will happen.¹⁰³

On September 8th and 9th, SAC troops from Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District transported rations by horse to Maw Poo and Lu Thaw Hkoh army camps located in northern Lu Thaw Township. They were attacked by KNLA soldiers while they were transporting rations because they had trespassed into KNU territory. On September 17th and 18th, the same SAC troops transported more rations to their camps based in northern Lu Thaw Township by horse and on foot. In order to avoid KNLA attacks, the SAC troops conducted indiscriminate shelling into villagers' farms while marching to their army camps. The SAC troops also transported rations to Wa Klay Too army camp situated in Saw Muh Plaw village tract, northern Lu Thaw Township.¹⁰⁴

Bu Tho Township

In August, SAC troops from areas outside of Mu Traw District arrived in Bu Tho Township on several occasions. On August 20th 2021, about 60 soldiers from SAC LIB # 338 travelled to Meh Leh Hta and Thoo Mweh Hta areas, Bu Ah Der village tract, Bu Tho Township. The local KNU authority speculated that these SAC soldiers had come to this area in order to set up a new military post. However, they are not sure whether the SAC troops came instead for troop rotation for one of the following army camps: Thoo Mweh Hta army camp, Haw Ma Der army camp, Nyah T'Khoh Kyoh army camp or Kaw Kwah Hta army camp. Villagers reported that the SAC troops travelled near Au--- village, Av--- village, Aw--- village, Ax--- village and Ay--- village, Bu Ah Der village tract, Bu Tho Township. The local villagers living in these areas have no idea where the

¹⁰⁰ This information was taken from the [KNU Mutraw News facebook page](#), from a post dated May 21st 2021.

¹⁰¹ This information was taken from the [KNU Mutraw News facebook page](#), from a post dated December 21st 2021.

¹⁰² Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-240-D1).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-292-D1).

primary army base of LIB # 338 is located, but suspect that these troops are based in Hpa-an District [it is unclear why they believe this].¹⁰⁵

On August 27th, over 80 SAC soldiers from LIB #409 from Hpa-an District marched to Bu Ah Der village tract, Bu Tho Township. During this trip, some BGF soldiers accompanied SAC LIB #409 along the way. They were marching to the same area where SAC LIB # 338 had headed the week prior.¹⁰⁶

On August 28th, KNLA Battalion #102, Company #4 occupied the BGF army camp based at Az-- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township. KNLA Battalion #102, Company #2 killed four SAC soldiers during the camp occupation. On August 31st, KNLA Battalion #102, Company #4 raided Paw Htee Hku BGF army camp located in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township [no further information has been reported on this].¹⁰⁷

On October 4th, SAC LIB #406 troops under the authority of MOC #8 marched to the western part of Way Moo village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township. On their way, the SAC troops were ambushed by KNLA Battalion #102 and a local group of home guards¹⁰⁸ after being stopped by a tripwire-detonated landmine planted by the KNLA. Following the attack, the SAC indiscriminately fired mortars into Bb--- village. The indiscriminate shelling destroyed villagers' houses, a water pipe, betel nut baskets and four cows. On the same day, a villager from Ba--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, came to buy goods at a shop located in Bb--- village, Meh Klaw village tract. Before he arrived at the shop, SAC LIB #406 soldiers shot at him. He was able to escape; only his motorbike was damaged.¹⁰⁹



These photos were taken on October 4th 2021 after SAC LIB # 406 indiscriminately fired mortars into Bb--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The photos show the destruction caused by the indiscriminate shelling, which killed four cows and damaged villagers' homes. [Photos: KHRG]

¹⁰⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-244-D1).

¹⁰⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-261-S1).

¹⁰⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

¹⁰⁸ 'Home guard' or *gher der* groups have been organised locally in parts of northern Karen State to address Tatmadaw operations targeting civilians and the resulting acute food insecurity. Villagers interviewed by KHRG have reported that *gher der* were established with the objective of providing security for communities of civilians in hiding, particularly when those communities engage in food production or procurement activities, and when other modes of protection are unavailable.

¹⁰⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-304-P1 and 21-304-D1).

On November 20th, SAC LIB # 407 and affiliated BGF #1014 led by Bo Maung Chit indiscriminately fired mortars into Bc--- village, Day Wah village tract, Bu Tho Township. During the shelling, Bd-- villagers, Saw Be--- (68 years old) and Saw Bf--- (35 years old), were injured by shrapnel from the mortars. One mortar fell into the hut where Saw Be--- and Saw Bf--- were staying. Saw Be--- was seriously injured and was sent to Taung Ka Lay Hospital located in Hpa-an Town for treatment. He is still in recovery at the hospital. Saw Bf--- was also injured in the shelling, however not seriously. Therefore, he was able to receive treatment in his village. In addition, a hut also burned down as a result of the shelling in Bc--- village.¹¹⁰

Dwe Lo Township

Ma Htaw village tract has been a site of heavy conflict and human rights violations, even before the coup. SAC Strategic Operation Command (SOC) #8, LIB # 407, led by Lieutenant General Zaw Min Htike, continued to terrorise local villagers through threats against villagers and direct attacks on civilian areas, including burning down villagers' homes.

On July 12th 2021, soldiers from SAC LIB #407 burned villagers' houses in Bg--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township. The villagers whose houses were burned did not dare to return to their village and found it difficult to build new houses elsewhere because of the rainy season. Therefore, some of them now live in the forest and some of them live in poor conditions in the buildings at several monasteries in Myaing Gyi Ngu special area.¹¹¹

On July 16th, KNLA Battalion #102, Company #1 collaborated with Company #2 security guards from Meh Nyoo and Ma Htaw village tracts to ambush the SAC troops that had trespassed into KNU-controlled areas between Bg--- and Bh--- villages.¹¹² During the fighting, at about 12:30 pm, the SAC soldiers from LIB #407 burned the houses of four villagers living in Bg--- village. The SAC soldiers were attacked by the KNLA as they continually patrol these areas situated very close to the villages. Villagers believe that they do so in order to spy on the villagers. The SAC burned down the four houses in retaliation for the attack. There are around 50 houses in the village. Some of the villagers living in Bg--- village fled to other nearby villages and others fled to Hpapun Town.¹¹³



¹¹⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-235-D1).

¹¹¹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S3).

¹¹² Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1).

¹¹³ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-220-D1).



These photos were taken on July 16th 2021 in Bg--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District after SAC LIB #407 burned down the houses of four Bg--- villagers. The houses were burned in retaliation for an ambush by the KNLA that same day. [Photos: KHRG]

On August 6th, BGF #1013 soldiers based at Htwee Thee Auh village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township fired both mortars and bullets every night into the forest, typically lasting one and a half hours. According to a KHRG researcher, whenever SAC troops and BGF soldiers would hear the sound of branches dropping from the trees and the sounds of wild animals running, they conducted indiscriminate shelling.¹¹⁴

On August 8th, fighting broke out between the KNLA and SAC LIB #407 at the eastern part of Ma Htaw village and western parts of Ku Seik village, Ma Htaw village tract.¹¹⁵ Following the fighting, SAC LIB #407 based at Ku Seik army camp indiscriminately launched mortars and shot gunfire in the forest vicinity, which lasted an hour.¹¹⁶

Because of the armed conflict between the KNLA and SAC troops, villagers living in Ku Seik and Ma Htaw started fleeing from their villages. Some of them went to stay in Hpapun Town and K'Ma Moh (Kamarmaung) Town while others fled to nearby villages.¹¹⁷

On August 12th, SAC LIB #408 joined LIB #407 in undertaking security operations at Ku Seik village as SAC LIB #407 patrolled the road between Hpapun and K'Ma Moh towns.¹¹⁸

On August 15th, a skirmish between KNLA Battalion #102 and SAC LIB #407 broke out in Bh--- village after SAC troops trespassed into KNU-controlled territories. A goat was killed and one monk was injured due to the SAC indiscriminate shelling that took place during the fighting in Bh--- village. The indiscriminate shelling also destroyed parts of villagers' houses.¹¹⁹ The SAC troops based at Bh--- village threatened villagers, warning them that they will kill all of the villagers if more fighting happens between them and the KNLA. The next day, the villagers fled their village fearing the threat made by the SAC troops.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

¹¹⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-245-D1).

¹¹⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

¹¹⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1).

¹¹⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-238-D1).

¹¹⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

¹²⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-245-D1).

On September 7th 2021, the NUG declared “a people’s defensive war against the military junta”,¹²¹ as SAC troops conducted more indiscriminate shelling into the villages.¹²²

On the morning of September 9th, the KNLA ambushed SAC LIB # 407 soldiers while they were patrolling in Bh--- village. No casualties were reported. Some Bh--- villagers had to displace to nearby villages due to the fighting. This time, SAC LIB #407 Battalion Commander Lieutenant General Zaw Min Htike did not make any threats to the villagers as he did on August 15th 2021. Instead, at 7:00 pm that night, he gathered villagers and apologised to them by saying: “*You do not have to flee, I will not do anything to you.*”¹²³

In response to the KNLA ambush on September 9th in Bh--- village, troops led by SAC Corporal Nyunt Lwin from SAC LIB #407 engaged in indiscriminate shelling on September 11th. The indiscriminate shelling resulted in injury to one Bh--- villager. While the local villagers in Bh--- were moving their livestock (cows, buffalos and goats) outside of the village to forests and other areas to keep them from being harmed by the shelling, troops from LIB #407 fired 40 mm mortars into the crowd of people. A young man named Saw Bm---, 22 years old, living in Bh--- village, was seriously injured by the indiscriminate shelling. He was taken to the hundred-bed hospital in Hpapun Town where his right leg had to be amputated.¹²⁴

Fighting between the KNLA and the SAC troops has taken place every day in the area between Bh--- village and Bn--- village for the past year (since before the 2021 coup). Bh--- and Bn--- villagers have been displaced for some time and dare not return home due to the ongoing conflict between the KNLA and SAC/BGF troops. As of the end of September 2021, only five or six households continue to live in the village. These villagers, along with those in nearby villages, said that they can hear the sound of fighting and shelling every day.¹²⁵

Hpapun Town

Multiple incidents of fighting in Hpapun Town were reported, with SAC firing and shelling into civilian areas, including a hospital, resulting in some casualties.

On September 10th 2021, in Hpapun Town Section 3, near the township Forestry Department offices, KNLA Battalion #15 soldiers ambushed SAC LIB #407 soldiers who were serving on the frontline. The number of casualties between the two armed groups is unknown. However, one of the 81 mm mortars launched by SAC LIB #407 fell near the house of U Bp---, 45 years old, and exploded. The shrapnel from the mortar injured U Bp---, hitting him in the thigh. His son was hit in the head by the shrapnel, but was only injured mildly.¹²⁶

On the morning of September 12th, while temporarily camped at Way Lu Wun monastery located in Section 2 of Hpapun Town, soldiers from SAC LIB #407 indiscriminately fired mortars into Section 2, where the hundred-bed hospital is located. Two mortars fell next to the COVID-19 female patients’ ward (quarantine centre within the hospital compound). Only one of the mortars exploded. The shrapnel from the exploded mortar hit a COVID-19 patient named Daw Bq---, 80 years old, who lives in Br--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township. She was injured on

¹²¹ This information was taken from the [National Unity Government’s facebook page](#), from a video posted on September 7th 2021.

¹²² Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S2).

¹²³ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

¹²⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S2).

¹²⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-291-D1).

¹²⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

her right thigh while she was staying at the quarantine centre. She was immediately transferred to the hospital for treatment and recovery.¹²⁷

At 7:40 am on September 23rd, SAC soldiers indiscriminately fired mortars into Section 3 of Hpapun Town. As they were marching toward the road in Section 3, they conducted indiscriminate shelling into the residential areas. The road connects Hpapun Town and Kaw Poo SAC army camp. All Hpapun Section 3 residents had to hide in their makeshift bunkers, and some worried that mortars and bullets would hit their houses. According to a KHRG researcher, this is not the only time the SAC troops have fired into this residential area.¹²⁸

Road from Hpapun Town to K'Ma Moh Town

The road between Hpapun Town and K'Ma Moh Town in the southern part of the district cuts not only through Ma Htaw village and Ku Seik village, but through other villages in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships. During troop rotations, patrolling and the sending of rations to army camps in KNU-controlled areas, SAC troops typically conducted indiscriminate shelling into village vicinities and sometimes deliberately into the villages.

On August 12th 2021, SAC LIB #407 and #408 engaged in security operations on the road between Hpapun and K'Ma Moh towns. On the same day, the SAC troops indiscriminately fired two mortars into nearby villages in Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township.¹²⁹



These photos were taken on August 12th 2021 at Bs--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The photos show the mortars that landed in the village after SAC troops based at Ku Seik army camp fired indiscriminately while undertaking security along the road between Hpapun Town and K'Ma Moh Town. [Photos: KHRG]

According to a KHRG researcher, the sound of explosions could be heard every day in the area between Hpapun Town and Htee K'Hsaw Meh village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township, and as well as along the road closer to K'Ma Moh Town.¹³⁰ Multiple incidents of fighting and shelling were reported in the area around K'Ter Tee village tract, where a BGF army camp is located.

¹²⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S2).

¹²⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-281-D1).

¹²⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-238-D1).

¹³⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

On July 29th 2021 at 5:30 pm, soldiers from BGF #1013, led by Major Kyaw Win, fired two or three grenades into Bt--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township, while guarding the road close to the village. At the time of the incident, the soldiers were drunk and arguing amongst themselves. At around the same time, BGF soldiers in an army camp near the village fired three or four mortar rounds into the same village after they heard the explosions from the grenades that were fired earlier. During the shelling, villagers hid in the bunkers under their houses. There were no casualties, however, the roofs of some houses were damaged as a result of the shelling.¹³¹

On September 7th, SAC troops from LIB #407 based at Htee K'Hsaw Meh village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township were attacked by KNLA soldiers. [It is unknown if there were casualties and no further information has been reported on this.]¹³²

On November 17th at about 9:20 am, fighting broke out between BGF Battalion #1013 based in K'Ter Tee army camp led by Bo Hla Kyaing and KNLA Company #3 of Battalion #105 close to the vicinity of Bt--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract. At about 2:47 pm on the same day, SAC troops and BGF soldiers indiscriminately fired mortars into Bt--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract. A dormitory and school building were destroyed by the indiscriminate shelling. The incident happened when the school was closed and no civilian casualties have been reported. The shelling however fatally injured three buffalos and one cow in Bu--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract. Villagers live in fear and they worry for their security. After the fighting, BGF Battalion #1013 set up a temporary checkpoint near their army camp. At the checkpoint, the BGF regularly asked for money, yaba¹³³ and alcohol from the villagers.¹³⁴

On November 18th, a mortar fired by the KNLA (during training of PDF fighters) fell on the barracks of BGF Battalion #1013 based in Bv--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township. Three children of BGF soldiers (a 13-year-old boy, 10-year-old girl and 8-month-old baby girl) were injured by shrapnel from the mortar. These three children were not injured badly. They were treated at the SAC military hospital and had almost fully healed at the time of reporting, later in November.¹³⁵

ii. Displacements and IPD support

Aside from reports of ongoing displacement due to fighting and attacks, KHRG received little information on the situation of IDPs in Mu Traw District. Some villagers have still been unable to return to their villages since the early months of the coup. Others are experiencing cyclical displacements, while others have stayed in their village despite the high security risks.

In a July 2021 report on Bu Tho Township, where most of the local villagers rely on farming and hill farming for their livelihood, one KHRG researcher reported that even villagers who have not been displaced could not go to work as normal because of the security situation and feared the loss of crops due to the inability to work in their plantations and farms. The researcher added that there are 80 acres of farms and 75 hill farms in Bu Tho Township where villagers are afraid to

¹³¹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-229-D1).

¹³² Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

¹³³ Yaba, which means 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured

¹³⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-318-P1).

¹³⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-325-D1).

work. Villagers also spoke about growing concerns of food shortages, especially of rice, which is a staple in their diet.¹³⁶

In Bu Tho Township, some village tracts received humanitarian support following the fighting and airstrikes in March and April 2021 that led to widespread displacements. On July 24th 2021, local villagers from Bu Ah Der village tract and Meh Klaw village tract received food support through the arrangement of Karen Office for Relief and Development (KORD) and Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP). However, KHRG did not receive information about how much food each household or individual received. At the time of reporting, some village tracts were still hoping for support from external organisations or for KNU leaders to arrange support for them.¹³⁷

Due to the location of villages in Mu Traw District, access to aid from external sources, including from CSO/CBOs and NGOs operating on the Thai side of the border, has been challenging due to the ongoing conflict and the SAC's efforts to impede the delivery aid. A villager in Dwe Lo Township interviewed in December 2021 stated that no support at all had been received, adding: *"Villagers just eat foods that they keep. They bought those foods before the road closed last year. They keep some foods last year. If those foods are gone, they don't know what they are going to do."*¹³⁸

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

A. Militarisation and armed conflict

From July to December 2021, the primary areas where armed conflict took place were Mu Traw District, Doo Tha Htoo District and Dooplaya District. Incidents of armed conflict and other issues tied to militarisation for Mu Traw and Doo Tha Htoo districts have been covered in the first part of the report, as have the offensives that took place in the Lay Kay Kaw area in Dooplaya District during the month of December.

Fighting and military activity that took place in Dooplaya District prior to December is covered in this section. As noted in KHRG's previous field report covering January to June 2021, Dooplaya District had remained rather calm until June, when multiple incidents of fighting in Kaw T'Ree Township led to hundreds of villagers fleeing to the Thai-Myanmar border. During the current reporting period, conflict continued to erupt throughout the eastern regions of Dooplaya District.

Fighting also continued in Kler Lwee Htoo District, with multiple incidents reported for the month of September. Fighting has been much rarer elsewhere in KHRG's operational area, despite signs of increased military activity. Only one incident of fighting was reported for Mergui-Tavoy District, as well as for Taw Oo District. Neither district had reported fighting during the previous reporting period. There are still no reports of fighting in Hpa-an District.

Even in areas of low conflict, the SAC continued to regularly reinforce troops and send rations, ammunition and other military supplies to their army camps. Sometimes, SAC activities involved threats and attacks on the local villagers. Some villagers also fled from their village due to this increased military activity and fears that fighting and other human rights violations would ensue. As a result, displacements also increased during the current reporting period.

¹³⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-345-A5-I1).

i. Taw Oo District

From July to December 2021, the SAC regularly transported rations to their army camps in Daw Hpa Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) and Htaw Ta'Htoo (Htantabin) townships, Taw Oo District, including to Toungoo and Leik Tho towns, Baw Ga Lee, Bu Sa Hkee, Thauk Yay Khant, Htee Tha Saw, A Lel Chaung, Ya Do villages, and Ba Yin Naung military training school.



This photo was taken on September 8th 2021, in P'Leh Wa village, Yay Ta Kun village tract, Htaw Ta'Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. This photo shows an SAC military truck transporting artillery and soldiers from Toungoo Town to their army camps in Daw Hpa Hkoh and Htaw Ta'Htoo townships. [Photo: KHRG]

On July 21st 2021, fighting broke out near Bw-- village, Htee Tha Saw village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township between SAC LIB #604 under MOC #6 and the KNLA because the SAC entered KNLA-restricted territory without giving prior notice. Local villagers fled from their village and stayed at their plantations because of fear of armed conflict as well as COVID-19 (villagers feared the movement of SAC soldiers into their area would spread the virus).

A few days after the conflict, on July 24th, the SAC LIB #604 commander Major Phyo Way Myint from the Htee Tha Saw checkpoint ordered all local villagers to return and stay in the village. He also threatened to shoot them if villagers failed to obey this order.¹³⁹

On August 4th 2021, SAC soldiers patrolled the road by foot through Hton Bo village, Kon Pin village tract, Htaw Ta'Htoo Township. Meanwhile, they set up red flags along the road to mark the way for SAC troops to transport rations from Toungoo Town to Leik Tho Town. As a result, villagers felt afraid to go out of their village to find food and vegetables. Eventually, on August 9th, the SAC LIB #603 under MOC #6 travelled from Toungoo army camp toward Leik Tho Town with five trucks full of ammunition and rations. When seeing the large troop reinforcement, the villagers felt greater fear and insecurity due to concerns that fighting in the area could happen at any time.¹⁴⁰

On September 23rd 2021, the SAC from A Lel Chaung village, A Lel Chaung village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, transported rations and ammunition to military camps in the eastern part of Leik Tho Town, namely Thauk Yay Khant camp, Htee Tha Saw camp, Kyay Ka Taw camp and Ba Hon camp. However, before transporting the rations, the SAC unit from A Lel Chaung village opened fire five times at 1:00 am and one more time at 4:00 am on September 23rd. When villagers heard the gunshots at night, they knew that the SAC troops would be transporting rations in the morning. Therefore, they fled and hid in a safe place. The local villagers reported that the SAC usually threaten them this way.¹⁴¹

The local community members reported that the SAC in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township formed a Pyu Saw Htee group¹⁴² to assist with security and the gathering of information. On November 20th

¹³⁹ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-230-D1).

¹⁴⁰ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-232-P1).

¹⁴¹ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-282-P1).

¹⁴² The first Pyu Saw Htee groups were officially formed in mid-May 2021 in response to the National Unity Government's call for the formalisation of a People's Defence Force to resist the military regime following the 2021

2021, the villagers witnessed SAC trucks transporting the Pyu Saw Htee group to their IB #739 army camp to cooperate with SAC troops in Ba Yin Naung Tat Myo Town, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township. Local people also reported that two militia groups, the Pyu Saw Htee group and Special Thandaung Area Peace Group¹⁴³, came to the SAC army camp in Khun Na Mine area, Kyauk Taing village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township as reinforcement on November 20th. Since this SAC camp is located near the road, the local villagers have been afraid to travel and go to work when seeing the SAC troop reinforcement.¹⁴⁴

On December 26th 2021, the SAC military from Toungoo Town transported rations and ammunition to Ba Yin Nuang Tat Myo Town, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township with seven trucks, including two trucks of military working dogs and two trucks of soldiers. According to a local villager, the SAC uses these dogs to detect landmines. On December 28th, the SAC from Toungoo transported more rations to Leik Tho Town and Ya Do frontline camps. The local villagers noticed that SAC troop reinforcement and transportation of rations have increased dramatically within KNU district boundaries since the military coup took place.¹⁴⁵

ii. Kler Lwee Htoo District

According to KHRG documentation from Moo (Mone) Township, on September 9th 2021, fighting occurred between the SAC and KNLA in Kheh Der village tract, followed by indiscriminate mortar shelling and jet surveillance by the SAC. Villagers from Kheh Der and Hpla Hkoh village tracts fled to hiding sites in the jungle. According to a KHRG interview, most of the villagers returned to their villages when the situation became calmer. However, villagers from Saw Hkoh and Maw Law village in Kheh Der village tract could not return straight away.¹⁴⁶

During the second week of September 2021, fighting occurred between the SAC and KNLA in Ler Doh Township. SAC troops fired mortar shells into village areas. One village in Muh Theh village tract had to flee to a hiding area in the jungle.¹⁴⁷

On September 22nd and 23rd 2021, around 200 soldiers from SAC LIB #60 entered KNU-controlled territory in Ler Doh and Paya Lay Gon towns, Ler Doh Township. Seven skirmishes took place within those two days. This resulted in displacement of over 650 people in Law Mu Thaw village tract, Ler Doh Township. On September 24th, the SAC returned to Kyauk Pyar military base in Moo Township. On September 25th, they left their base for eastern Maw Lay village. Fearing the possibility of getting caught in the middle of skirmishes, villagers living close to Maw Lay village, such as those in Thaw T'Koo and Plee Hta, Thaw T'Koo village tracts fled their homes.¹⁴⁸

military coup. The Pyu Saw Htee is made up of military veterans and Buddhist ultranationalist pro-military supporters whose aim is to counter and control opposition to the military regime.

¹⁴³ *Htanay Phyithu Sitt A'pweh*, or 'Thandaung Peace Group', is a local militia located in Toungoo District. The group split from the Karen National Union in 1997. It is distinct from the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council, which is also sometimes translated as 'Peace Group'.

¹⁴⁴ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-327-P1).

¹⁴⁵ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (22-9-P1).

¹⁴⁶ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-274-D1).

¹⁴⁷ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-277-D1).

¹⁴⁸ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-285-D1).



These photos were taken on September 28th 2021 in Et--- village, Thaw T’Koo village tract, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The photos show Et--- villagers fleeing from their village and hiding in the jungle. They fled on September 25th 2021 fearing that fighting would occur or that they would be forced to serve as porters given that SAC LIB #60 increased their military activities in the area. [Photos: KHRG]

iii. Mergui-Tavoy District

Fighting occurred between PDF and SAC troops on October 22nd and 23rd 2021, causing over 1,400 villagers to become displaced from Aaw Poo village tract, Ler Mu Lah Township. Some villagers fled to the nearby monastery and some to nearby villages. They did not receive any humanitarian aid due to travel restrictions in the area. As of October 28th, these villagers had not yet dared to return to the village.¹⁴⁹



These photos were taken on November 28th 2021 in Eu--- village, Ev--- area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photos show the living conditions of the IDPs in Ev--- area. [Photos: KHRG]

¹⁴⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-308-D1 and 21-308-A1-I1).

The *pyithusit* ("people's militia")¹⁵⁰, which re-emerged in Mergui-Tavoy during the previous reporting period, continue to operate in the district and are in charge of restricting people's movements to prevent people from sending rations to the PDF in local areas.¹⁵¹

iv. Dooplaya District

Kaw T'Ree Township

On July 16th 2021, a local villager witnessed five SAC trucks heading to Kyaw Hta army camp, Kaw T'Ree Township for troop rotation.¹⁵² Again on July 27th 2021, SAC Battalion #32 transported five more trucks to Kyaw Hta army camp. The local villagers in Kyaw Hta village were concerned for their security and the spread of COVID-19 (by the soldiers) when seeing the SAC transporting troops to the army camp located in their village. Therefore, villagers' shops near the army camp closed their doors so that the soldiers could not come in and out of their shops.¹⁵³

On August 28th 2021 at 5:00 pm, the SAC indiscriminately fired mortars into Bx--- village, Poh Yay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. The SAC also marched to the village and stayed there. This caused fear among the villagers, who then fled from the village during the shelling. Some villagers hid in a bunker during the incident and fled to the forest the next day. A villager said that the shelling continued until August 29th 2021.¹⁵⁴



This photo was taken on August 28th 2021 near Bx--- village, Poh Yay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows villagers as they fled their village after SAC soldiers came to the village and fired mortars. [Photo: KHRG]

In October 2021, heavy fighting happened between the KNLA, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group¹⁵⁵ and SAC in Kaw T'Ree Township. During this period, the SAC committed a number of abuses, including indiscriminate shelling, using forced labourers and human shields, looting and damaging villager's properties in the local villagers. On October 1st 2021, the DKBA splinter group ambushed the SAC LIB #230 and #231 under MOC #12 at Kyoe Doe and Ywa Thit junction near the Asia Highway. After the

¹⁵⁰ The *pyithusit* refers to militias that were created by the Tatmadaw in the early 1960s under the Ne Win regime and were the forerunners of the Tatmadaw-supported community-based militias. Coordinated by the Tatmadaw, they were created as part of the regime's national defence strategy. One of their primary duties was to assist with village defence and serve as guides and informants.

¹⁵¹ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-308-D1 and 21-308-A1-I1).

¹⁵² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-223-S1).

¹⁵³ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-231-S1).

¹⁵⁴ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-255-A1-I1).

¹⁵⁵ 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.

ambush, the SAC troops fired mortars at the villages in southern Kawkareik Town in Kaw T'Ree Township. One house was destroyed, one cow died and one cat was injured by a mortar explosion in T'La Aww Klah village, T'La Aww Klah village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. Another mortar fell near a COVID-19 checkpoint in Ywa Thit village, T'La Aww Klah village tract, but no casualties were reported. The 20 households that live close to the COVID-19 checkpoint fled to stay with their relatives in other villages because they did not feel secure remaining in Ywa Thit village.¹⁵⁶

On October 11th 2021, fighting occurred between KNLA Battalion #18 and SAC LIB #556 at Aaw K'Raw village and T'La Aww Klah village in T'La Aww Klah village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township when the SAC troops crossed into KNU-controlled areas. Three cows owned by a T'La Aww Klah villager were killed, but no other casualties were reported.¹⁵⁷

On October 12th 2021, there were three skirmishes between the KNLA and the SAC/BGF. Three houses in Ywa Thit village were destroyed by indiscriminate shelling and SAC soldiers robbed two other houses, but there were no casualties among the villagers. All 153 households from the villages of Aaw K'Raw and Kaw Nweh in Kaw Nweh village tract fled and became displaced due to fighting among the armed groups and indiscriminate shelling. Some villagers managed to flee and stay with their relatives in other villages while others fled to the forest. These villagers feared they would be forced to act as porters and be tortured by the SAC troops. On October 13th, there were roughly 100 soldiers from SAC LIB #556 who continued to stay at farms close to T'La Aww Klah village. SAC troops have set up checkpoints to stop villagers and fine them when travelling to Kawkareik Town to buy food or go to the hospital. The villagers worry that the SAC will suspect them of being affiliated with the KNLA and accuse them of buying food for the KNLA.¹⁵⁸



KHRG received these photos from a villager in By--- village, T'La Aww Klah village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District on October 12th 2021. The photo on the left shows damage to a villager's house caused by indiscriminate shelling during skirmishes between the KNLA and the SAC and BGF on October 12th. The photo on the right shows part of a mortar that fell into the villager's home. *[Photos: Local villager]*

At around 12:40 pm on October 14th 2021, SAC IB #97 conducted indiscriminate shelling in By-- village. A house in By--- village was directly damaged by the shelling, while several other houses in the village were damaged by artillery fragments. Four cows were also injured. On October 16th 2021, SAC troops conducted indiscriminate shelling in By---, Bz--- and Ca--- villages. No

¹⁵⁶ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmishes between armed groups and indiscriminate shelling result in displacement, casualties and destruction of villagers' property \(October 2021\)](#)", December 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

casualties were reported in By--- and Bz--- villages; however, a villager's house in Ca--- village was damaged by a mortar.¹⁵⁹

SAC LIB #556 spent the night in Ca--- village on October 16th 2021. The next day, they marched to By--- village forcing a villager in Ca--- to be their navigator. Then the SAC soldiers stayed the night at a different villager's house in By--- village. Later, they forced the house owner to navigate them when leaving the village on October 18th. On the same day, the SAC troops returned to By--- village and encountered KNLA soldiers, resulting in a skirmish near the village. As SAC soldiers were injured during the fighting, the SAC troops got angry and stole goods from one of the villager's shops. Then they burned the shop and a car [in By--- village]. The following day, the SAC troops engaged in searches and further destruction of civilian property in By--- village. The fighting stopped after the KNLA retreated from the village. As of October 29th, the SAC troops from LIB #556 were still present in Cb--- village school and Cc--- monastery. In this case, displaced villagers have not returned to their village due to fear of potential fighting.¹⁶⁰

Noh T'Kaw (Kyainseikgyi) Township

On August 22nd 2021 at 12:00 am, KNLA Battalion #17 under Company #2 in Dooplaya District attacked the SAC at Cd--- village, Noh T'Kaw Township, because the SAC soldiers trespassed into KNU-restricted areas. According to the village leader, the SAC military reinforced their troops at T'Hka Kloh army camp on September 22nd at 6:00 pm. The SAC troops from Kyaikdon Town, Noh T'Kaw Township accompanied them during the troop reinforcement.¹⁶¹

On August 27th 2021, KNLA Battalion #17 attacked the SAC army camp at Ce--- village, Noh Taw Plah village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township. After the attack, 50 soldiers from SAC IB #32 set up weapons, including two 81 mm mortar launchers, on the road between Noh T'Kaw Town and Noh P'Nah village, Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township. The youths from the village were afraid that they would be arrested and used in forced labour as porters, therefore they fled the village to hide. On the same day at 2:00 pm, those SAC troops headed to Ce--- village from Cf--- village.¹⁶² Following this incident, the SAC troops stayed in Cg--- village, Noh T'Kaw village tract in a villager's house from August 29th to September 10th 2021.¹⁶³



On September 22nd 2021 at 10:00 am, a skirmish occurred between the SAC and KNLA in Ch--- village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township. The skirmish resulted in the death of one SAC soldier. After the skirmish, the SAC troops that were involved in the skirmish indiscriminately fired 20 artillery shells into Ch--- village. One of the shells hit a

This photo was taken on September 22nd 2021 in Ch--- village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the damage to a villager's home caused by SAC soldiers' indiscriminate shelling following a skirmish with the KNLA. [Photo: KHRG]

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-279-S1).

¹⁶² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-253-P1).

¹⁶³ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-275-D1).

villager's house and caused damages to the roof, a closet, a reclining chair, and a Buddhist altar. No one was injured as the house owner had fled prior to the fighting.¹⁶⁴

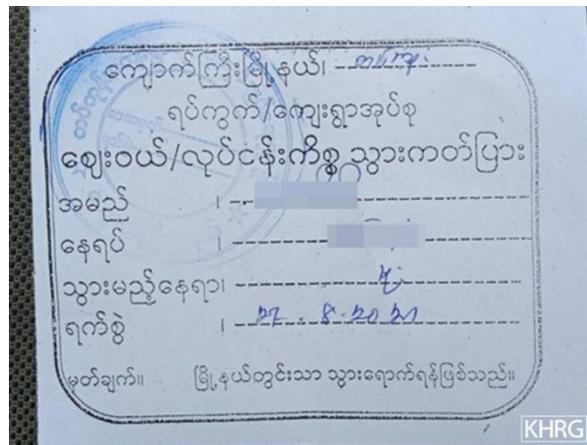
B. General security issues

During the July to December 2021 reporting period, the escalation of activities by SAC forces raised security concerns for local communities. Notable SAC activities included the increased use of checkpoints, threatening local villagers, requiring villagers to obtain travel permission letters, arbitrary arrests, searching for PDF and CDM participants in villages, and opening fire while in villages. As a result, the safety of villagers, as well as their livelihoods and freedom to travel and conduct business, has been negatively impacted.

i. Checkpoints and restrictions on movement

In August 2021, as fighting increased between the affiliated SAC and BGF and the KNLA, the SAC set up a checkpoint in front of the MOC #8, Battalion #9 army camp on the road between Win Pa, Wi Yaw and Pein Neh Taw villages, Kye Hto (Kyaikto) Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The checkpoint made travel and transportation more difficult for civilians. One of the villagers said that the SAC army camp does not allow villagers to transport rice, health and medical supplies, P'Leh fertilizer [a specific type of fertilizer], engine oil, or electrical materials such as batteries and wire. The villagers have to pass through the SAC checkpoint and be questioned by SAC soldiers whenever they transport any supplies. In some cases, after they were questioned by the SAC troops from the army camp, their supplies were confiscated and/or destroyed and they also had to pay fines to the SAC.¹⁶⁵

Since the second week of August 2021, villagers in Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District reported that they have been required to obtain travel permission letters from the SAC-appointed village head to travel to Mone Town, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District in order to buy or sell goods. They are not allowed to travel without this permission letter. In order to receive a travel letter, villagers have to pay an arbitrary fee, according to the demand of the village head. Some pay 200 or 300 kyats [USD 0.11 to 0.17], whereas some have to pay 1,000 kyats [USD 0.56] for one letter. Even with a travel letter, movement is still restricted. In Ci--- village, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, villagers were only allowed to travel outside the village two days a week. In this case, villagers could only travel on Tuesdays and Fridays and were only allowed to buy goods until 11:00 am. Therefore, local villagers are facing heavy



This photo was taken on August 27th 2021 in Mone Town, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The photo shows the travel permission letter that villagers in Ler Doh Township are required to carry when going to Mone Town. It states the villager's name, address, the place they are going and the travel date. Villagers have to pay 200 to 1,000 kyats to SAC authorities for one letter. [Photo: KHRG]

¹⁶⁴ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-286-P1).

¹⁶⁵ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Forced portering and the use of civilians as human shields, and updates on livelihood, health and education, August to September 2021](#)", February 2022.

restrictions from SAC authorities in order to conduct necessary and important livelihood activities.¹⁶⁶

On August 24th 2021, several SAC battalions [battalion numbers unknown] attacked and occupied the KNLA army camp at Cj--- village, Aee Weh village tract, Paw (Paung or Maw S'Ko) Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. After the SAC occupied the KNLA army camp, SAC soldiers set up many small temporary bases near Cj--- village to allow them to defend the territory they were now occupying. The troops also imposed a curfew on the community that lasted from 6:00 pm to 4:00 am.¹⁶⁷

ii. Threats and attacks against villagers

Some communities reported that, after the SAC was attacked by the KNLA or KNDO, the SAC often threatened to retaliate against the villagers. Villagers in Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District have faced multiple threats from the local SAC troops. On July 12th and July 16th 2021, SAC soldiers burned down villagers houses.¹⁶⁸ On August 15th, a skirmish between KNLA Battalion #102 and SAC LIB #407 [led by Lieutenant General Zaw Min Htike] broke out in Bh--- village, Dwe Lo Township after SAC troops trespassed into KNU-controlled territories. The SAC troops based at Bh--- village threatened villagers, saying that if more fighting happens, they will kill all of the villagers.¹⁶⁹

During the month of August 2021, as SAC and BGF soldiers rotated troops between Lay Kay and Yoh Klah army camps in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, they made threats to villagers in C--- village on multiple occasions that, if attacked by the KNLA, they would fire mortars into the village.¹⁷⁰ While staying at C--- village, SAC soldiers also threatened to shoot any villager they encountered outside of the village at night, arguing that anyone found outside the village at night must be the enemy, adding that “*good people [those who do not pose a threat to the BGF and SAC] have to sleep in the village*”.¹⁷¹ Following a skirmish with the KNLA on August 11th 2021, the SAC and BGF entered C--- village and began searching the premises, most likely for KNLA soldiers. As the soldiers searched, they threatened villagers, including children, by pointing their guns at them when they saw them hiding under their houses.¹⁷²

There have been multiple incidents where soldiers staying in or near villages made threats against villagers while intoxicated. While SAC and BGF stayed in C--- village during their troop rotations between Lay Kay and Yoh Klah army camps in September 2021, they began drinking alcohol and threatened to burn down the village if the KNLA attacked them.¹⁷³ Earlier, on August 10th, some of the soldiers had also asked two villagers – one of whom was an 8-year-old child – to buy alcohol

¹⁶⁶ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-262-P1).

¹⁶⁷ KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC shot on sight a pregnant woman and her husband in Paw Township, September 2021](#)”, December 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1, 21-220-D1 and 21-294-S3).

¹⁶⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-245-D1).

¹⁷⁰ KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Forced portering and the use of civilians as human shields, and updates on livelihood, health and education, August to September 2021](#)”, February 2022; also KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021](#)”, December 2021.

¹⁷¹ KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021](#)”, December 2021.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-290-D1).

for them. Since the BGF and SAC soldiers were drunk, villagers, especially women and girls, felt more insecure and worried that the soldiers would commit other violations.¹⁷⁴

A villager in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District said that an intoxicated SAC officer shot at his house. At the time of the incident, Captain Naing Lin Htun and two of his fellow soldiers from an unknown company under SAC LIB #604 were temporarily based in Day Dah Hkoh army camp, near Ck--- village, Chee Thu Saw village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. On the night of August 10th 2021, these three soldiers left the army camp, entered the village and openly drank alcohol. While they were drunk, Captain Naing Lin Htun took his pistol and fired at a house owned by a villager. The zinc panels on the roof as well as the wooden roof supports were damaged. The community members reported this to the SAC LIB #604 Battalion commander, Major Hein San Htun, but no action was taken. Therefore, the villagers worried that SAC soldiers will commit similar acts in the future.¹⁷⁵

iii. Targeting of suspected PDF and CDM participants

On August 24th 2021, after the SAC attacked and occupied the KNLA army camp at Cj--- village, Aee Weh village tract, Paw Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, the SAC soldiers arrested about 20 people. The majority of those arrested were villagers who were working on their farms and living in farm huts near the Cj--- army camp. However, two suspected CDM participants and some KNLA soldiers were also arrested. Four of the villagers arrested by the SAC were known to local villagers, but many of the other arrested villagers were day labourers from other villages. One local civilian said, *“Those [villagers] who were arrested had nothing to do with the army camp.”*

The SAC sent the KNLA soldiers and villagers they arrested to the new Zin Ma Thweh prison which is about a three-hour drive from the village. The families of the villagers who were arrested by the SAC could not do anything to secure the release of their family members. Based on updated information that KHRG received on November 25th 2021, the villagers who were arrested by the SAC following the SAC's occupation of Cj--- army camp were still detained in Zin Ma Thweh prison and the SAC were still operating in the village.¹⁷⁶

A KHRG researcher in Mergui-Tavoy District reported that, in August 2021, SAC troops were patrolling and searching for PDF fighters in and around Cm--- village, Ler Doh Soh Township. Therefore, Cm--- villagers were afraid and they fled from the village. Although they were able to return later, local villagers expressed concern that fighting might break out between the PDF and SAC, particularly if the PDF were attacked by the SAC.¹⁷⁷

Between July and August 2021, the SAC increased checkpoints and restricted movement in Cn-- village, Htaw Ta'Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, as they heard that CDM participants were taking refuge in KNU-controlled areas. Some CDM participants also joined the PDF and attended basic military training provided by the KNU. Villagers in Htaw Ta'Htoo Township were afraid that the SAC would create problems for them if they noticed PDF movement in the community. To target CDM participants, the SAC conducted strict checks on travellers. They were also checking for travel permission letters when villagers travelled to hospitals and towns in the township area. In this situation, local villagers were also afraid that they could be arrested or used in forced labour

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ KHRG, [“Taw Oo District Incident Report: A villager’s house was damaged by indiscriminate gunfire from a drunk SAC military officer in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, August 2021”](#), December 2021.

¹⁷⁶ KHRG, [“Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC shot on sight a pregnant woman and her husband in Paw Township, September 2021”](#), December 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-263-S1).

as porters by the SAC. Due to these restrictions and fears, community leaders also warned villagers not to go outside their villages at night.¹⁷⁸

Without a warrant or explanation, about 70 SAC soldiers from IB #60 in Tha Bo army camp, Kyaukkyi Town led by Captain Aung Yar Lin arrested five male villagers in Co--- village, Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District on August 30th 2021. The villagers were taken to the SAC LIB #351 army camp at Kyaukkyi Town and placed in detention. Later that day, the villagers were released after one of the SAC village administrators went to the detention place to request their release. However, the village administrator was detained for one night during which he was questioned about his connection with the KNLA, the location of KNLA training camps and about participants in the CDM. Since he did not know anything about these issues, he was released the next day. As a consequence of these arbitrary arrests, local villagers are now concerned about their security and that the SAC will come and arrest people in their villages.¹⁷⁹

KHRG previously reported that the SAC military had entered into Dooplaya District in order to arrest CDM participants, protesters and NLD members who had fled to the area seeking refuge. These problems continued through the reporting period, culminating in the December offensives that erupted in the Lay Kay Kaw area (see Part I).

C. Intentional killing and shooting of civilians

During the previous reporting period, KHRG noted an increase in violence against civilians in rural areas, including what appeared to be intentional shooting and killing of civilians. That trend has continued into the current reporting period. KHRG received reports of SAC soldiers intentionally shooting at civilians. In three of the cases, the shooting victims died as a result. In one of the killing cases, local villagers believe the victim was also tortured by the SAC prior to being killed. Due to ongoing suspicions about villagers serving as *da lan* (spies or informants) for the SAC, KHRG also received report of the brutal murder and assault of two villagers and their family by other villagers.

i. SAC shooting at civilians

After the coup, armed conflict in Burma led to a dramatic increase in arbitrary killings committed by SAC troops. During the reporting period, KHRG documentation also shows that SAC soldiers were committing serious violations toward the rights to life, liberty and security in Southeast Burma. KHRG has documented four cases of the SAC intentionally firing at villagers. The increasing number of intentional shootings has exacerbated insecurity among villagers.

On August 16th 2021, at about 10:00 am, SAC LIB #401 and LIB #341 soldiers shot at five villagers when they encountered the five villagers at Aoh Loh Kloh [river name], Cv--- place on their way to Cw--- village, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. Due to their fear of the SAC soldiers, the five villagers ran away and the SAC soldiers shot at them, injuring one of the five villagers, 24-year-old Saw Cx--- from Cy--- village, Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township. He was sent to the hospital at the Ei Tu Hta IDP camp and then transferred to a hospital in Thailand because Ei Tu Hta hospital could not treat the injury.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-287-S1).

¹⁷⁹ KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: Arbitrary arrest of civilians by SAC military in Moo Township, August 2021](#)", January 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-238-D1 and 21-261-S1).

In August 2021, the SAC occupied a KNLA army camp at Cj--- village, Aee Weh village tract, Paw Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. A week later, they imposed a curfew on villagers in Cj--- village. Due to the curfew, villagers were facing difficulties getting sufficient food, especially fish. Therefore, some villagers snuck out of their houses during curfew to fish. On the night of September 4th, Naw Cz---, who was pregnant, and her husband Saw Da--- in Cj--- village were walking back after fishing when they were shot by SAC soldiers. At the time of the shooting, Saw Pu Day was carrying his 4-year-old daughter in his arms. Naw Cz--- and the unborn child died early the next morning. Saw Da--- was taken to Mawlamyine Hospital before being transferred to a hospital in Yangon. Having received no further communication related to Saw Pu Day, villagers living in Cj--- village believe that Saw Da--- died of his injuries in the hospital in Yangon. When the SAC met with Naw Cz---'s mother on September 5th, the soldiers expressed no guilt and offered no apology because they said those villagers did not obey the 6:00 pm curfew. They also bribed the victim's mother by offering her 500,000 kyats [USD 281.19] to prevent her from disclosing the killings to the public. Yet, she was only given 300,000 kyats [USD 168.71].¹⁸¹

On November 9th 2021, between 4:00 am and 5:00 am, SAC troops from Bokpyin Town entered Db--- village, P'Law Township, Mergui-Tavoy District and shot and killed a Db--- villager working on a rubber plantation. The Db--- villager, who was around 23 years old, had two children and was three-months pregnant. Based on the report of one the village leaders, the SAC soldiers met with the victim's family members and informed them that they had mistakenly shot the woman and that they would provide 500,000 kyats [USD 281.19] to the family members as compensation. However, the victim's husband did not accept the money.¹⁸²

On November 16th 2021 at about 1:30 pm, BGF Company #3 led by Kyaw Leh Theit from BGF Battalion #999 under the command of Bo Chit Thu and Bo Maw Tho fired shots at a villager's truck on the road close to Kruh Kyee River [it is unclear why they shot at the truck]. Two teenage girls in the truck, 17-year-old Naw Dd--- and 14-year-old Naw De--- from Df--- village, Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, suffered gunshot wounds. One of them suffered gunshot injuries to her thigh and the other suffered gunshot injuries to her throat. The driver of the truck immediately drove the girls to Hpa-an Hospital for medical treatment. At the time of reporting on November 19th, the doctor had successfully performed surgery on the girl with injuries to the throat, but had not yet removed the bullet from the thigh of the other girl.¹⁸³

ii. Suspected torture and killing by SAC

On December 21st 2021 at about 8:00 am, fighting took place when SAC troops encountered KNLA troops at a rubber plantation in Dg--- village, Noh Ber Baw village tract, Bilin Township. The troops were on their way to Yoh Klah army camp. At the time of the fighting, two villagers, Naw Dh--- and her husband, Saw Di---, were working on their plantation. Both of them had to flee out of fear for their life, but only Saw Di--- was able to escape. Due to the security risk, Naw Dh---'s husband and other villagers could not return to the incident place to look for Naw Dh--- until 5:00 pm that evening, which is when they found Naw Dh---'s corpse on the ground. The local villagers believe that the SAC and BGF troops caught Naw Dh---, questioned her (probably about the KNLA), tortured her and then killed her on the plantation. According to a local villager, *"I think they [the SAC and BGF] tortured her before they killed her because her whole nose bone was broken. The bullet went out the back of her neck so we [villagers] think they [the SAC and BGF] forcibly*

¹⁸¹ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC shot on sight a pregnant woman and her husband in Paw Township, September 2021](#)", December 2021.

¹⁸² Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-330-M1).

¹⁸³ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-317-D1).

put the muzzle [of the gun] into her mouth and shot her dead.” Due to the killing, villagers in the nearby communities do not feel safe to go to their farms and plantations anymore.¹⁸⁴

iii. Other killings, including villager on villager killings

On July 18th 2021 at 10:00 pm, an unknown person or persons entered a local villager’s house in Dj--- Section, Dk--- village, Htaw Ta’Htoo Township, Taw Oo District and shot dead 36-year-old Ma DI---. After the incident, she was sent to Za Yat Gyi hospital, but she passed away. The victim has four children. The father had migrated to Thailand to work so he had to return home for his children after the incident. There are rumours in the village that the murder may have been a case of mistaken identity, and that the real target of the killing was the SAC village administrator who lived nearby.¹⁸⁵

Since the coup, there has been widespread suspicion of spies informing on local villagers and KNU/KNLA activity. Such suspicions have on occasion led to villagers engaging in violence against each other.

On July 9th 2021, Saw Dm--- and his wife were murdered by other villagers. Saw Dm--- and his family ran a small shop out of their house in addition to working on their plantation in Dn--- village, Si Pin Ka Lay village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. On July 9th at around 2:00 pm, Saw Bk--- (who also lives in Dn--- village) came to their shop and asked Saw Dm---, *“Uncle, how are you? What are you doing?”* After he said this, he shot Saw Dm--- in the chest with his .22 Long Rifle because he thought that Saw Dm--- was a *da lan* [an informant]. He accused Saw Dm--- of providing information to SAC police and soldiers. There seems to be no evidence to support this accusation.

Saw Dp---, Saw Dm---’s son, who had been working nearby on his rubber plantation, heard the gunshot and came back to the house. Saw Dp--- wrestled Saw Bk---, but Saw Bk--- shot Saw Dp--- in the abdomen, seriously injuring him. Once he fell, he pretended to be dead. After this, Saw Bk--- went back to his friend [who was hiding outside] and told his friend, *“I did it. I killed them. Now you have to kill the rest of his family.”* His friend came to the house and asked Saw Dm---’s wife, Naw Dq---, *“Aunty, how can I help you?”* After he asked this, he stabbed her in the chest with his knife, killing her. At that moment, Naw Dr---, Saw Dp---’s 7-year-old daughter (who had also been present in the house throughout the attack), went to her father where he lay dead. Saw Bk---’s friend saw her and stabbed her once in the chest and cut the fingers on her left hand. She was seriously injured but did not die. Then, he left the house. Naw Dr--- and her father Saw Dp--- were taken to Thandaunggyi Hospital for medical treatment. Thandaunggyi Hospital could not sufficiently treat them, as their injuries were too serious, and after three or four days they were transferred to Nay Pyi Taw hospital. After a month they were discharged from the hospital, but their injuries had still not fully healed.

Saw Bk--- and his friend were arrested by KNU authorities on the night of July 9th 2021, and were brought to the KNU district office. According to an update from a KHRG researcher on October 5th, the process of the investigation and legal action might take longer than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ KHRG, [“Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC and BGF tortured and killed a female villager in Bilin Township, December 21st 2021”](#), January 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-287-S1).

¹⁸⁶ KHRG, [“Taw Oo District Incident Report: Killing case in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, July 2021”](#), December 2021.

D. Torture

During the current reporting period, KHRG received documentation of multiple incidents of torture by the SAC against civilians. Common torture tactics by the SAC included beating civilians with guns, as well as punching and kicking with military boots. KHRG documented four specific torture cases from Mu Traw, Taw Oo, and Kler Lwee Htoo districts.

While four cases have been included here, many cases have likely gone undocumented, out of fear of possible reprisals by armed actors. Some forms of torture are also more difficult to document, particularly as individual incidents. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has defined torture as “any act that causes severe physical or mental pain or suffering”.¹⁸⁷ It is important to note however that torture, broadly defined, encompasses a wide range of practices that either individually or cumulatively cause suffering. While these four cases represent individual acts of torture, villagers repeatedly talk about the physical and mental suffering that they are currently enduring because of the SAC.

i. Mu Traw District

On August 15th 2021, a bomb exploded at 8:30 am in front of the monastery entrance in Bh--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. After the bomb exploded, SAC soldiers from LIB #407 called out three villagers whose houses were located close to the place the bomb exploded. The three villagers were Saw Ds--- (45 years old), Saw Dt--- (34 years old), and Saw Du--- (25 years old). The SAC battalion commander accused Saw Dt--- of triggering the bomb. Saw Ds--- was kicked in the head by the battalion commander, Saw Dt--- was kicked one time, and Saw Du--- was kicked and hit with a gun. Then the SAC asked the three villagers to squat on the ground. The soldiers then fired bullets, letting the shells fall on their heads. *“Lucky that none of the soldiers were injured or dead. If one of the soldiers had died, for sure they would have shot me to death,”* Saw Dt--- said. The SAC soldiers did not give any compensation for the physical abuse and said they would only treat the wounds, but the villagers did not accept medical treatment from the SAC.¹⁸⁸

In a separate incident, on August 19th 2021 at 1:00 pm, SAC LIB #341 and LIB #410 soldiers were travelling back from T’Khay Hkoh army camp to Hpapun Town when they met three female villagers who were going to their farms. The three villagers were Naw Dv--- (65 years old), Naw Dw--- (56 years old) and Naw Dx--- (42 years old) and they are from Dy--- village, Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The SAC soldiers arrested these three villagers, kicked them and stepped on their heads without asking them any questions. The SAC soldiers also threatened them by firing a machine gun two times into the sky. After torturing and threatening them, the SAC soldiers ordered the three villagers to carry loads for them from Dy--- village to Dz--- village.¹⁸⁹ Then the three villagers were released.¹⁹⁰

ii. Taw Oo District

On November 11th 2021, SAC authorities entered the house of 56-year old U Ea---, who lives in Eb--- village, Htaw Ta’Htoo Township, in order to arrest him on suspicion of supporting the PDF,

¹⁸⁷ OHCHR, “[Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)” Article 1, 1984.

¹⁸⁸ KHRG, “[Mu Traw District Short Update: Torture, fighting, indiscriminate shelling, and threats by SAC soldiers have resulted in fear and displacement of villagers in Dwe Lo Township, August 2021](#)”, December 2021.

¹⁸⁹ This information was taken from [the Facebook Page of the Salween Press](#), posted on 23rd August 2021 (Accessed 18 March 2021).

¹⁹⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-243-D1 and 21-244-D1).

following a bomb explosion at an SAC administrative office on November 8th. The villager, U Ea--, was not at home. He had gone to stay elsewhere since the SAC had come looking for him the last time a bomb had exploded in the area. Not finding U Ea--- at home, the SAC then tied up his wife and child with rope and beat them. After that, they asked U Ea---'s wife of the whereabouts of her husband. The wife told them that he went with his sister for her eye check-up. Then they asked her to call her husband's brother, Ko Ec---. After Ko Ec--- told them that his brother, U Ea--, was not at his place, they asked him where he lived and ordered U Ea---'s wife to take them to Ko Ec---'s place. Once they arrived there, they arrested both Ko Ec--- and U Ea---'s wife and locked them up in Z'Yet Gyi police station. Ko Ec--- and U Ea---'s wife were placed in detention for two nights and were released on November 13th. When U Ea---'s wife was released, the SAC told her to inform them if her husband contacted her. Hearing that the SAC were looking for him, U Ea--- fled the area on November 12th. According to U Ea---, his next door neighbour had also been wrongfully accused of supporting the PDF, and had recently been taken away, tortured and killed by the SAC. Because of similar fears, many local villagers have left or are no longer sleeping in the village at night.¹⁹¹

iii. Kler Lwee Htoo

On October 8th 2021 at about 7:40 pm, a bomb exploded in Mone Town, Moo Township. The perpetrators were unknown. After the incident, SAC LIB #599 and LIB #590 soldiers came onto the public road and beat villagers who were travelling. The SAC soldiers also shot one driver who then had to be hospitalised.¹⁹²

E. Theft and looting

From July to December 2021, KHRG received reports involving multiple cases of theft and looting committed by the SAC and BGF in the districts of Doo Tha Htoo, Dooplaya, and Mergui-Tavoy. According to KHRG documentation, the SAC and BGF primarily entered the houses of villagers who had fled, in order to steal supplies, such as kitchenware, electronics, food, and livestock. In one case, a local clinic was destroyed and medical supplies were taken. Most of these looting incidents occurred while the SAC and BGF were travelling from one village to another. This indicates that the SAC use looting as an intimidation tactic and as a source of food and re-supply.

i. Doo Tha Htoo District

During the months of August and September 2021, SAC and BGF troops repeatedly travelled from Lay Kay army camp to Yoh Klah army camp in Bilin Township, in order to collect information and measure Yoh Klah army camp land. During that time, they stole villagers' property, food and livestock while the troops stayed in and near villages along the way. KHRG received such reports from villagers in C--- village, Htee Hpa Doh Hta village tract and B--- village, Kyon Waing village tract, both villages where SAC and BGF troops stopped to demand forced labour and navigators. During these trips, the soldiers often stayed multiple nights at these villages and, while there, confiscated food items and livestock for their own consumption. They also looted the house of a villager who had fled, stealing three kilograms of steamed betel nut leaves and one phone.¹⁹³ Along the way, they also seized villagers' vehicles, including multiple tractors, in order to transport

¹⁹¹ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-334-A1-I1).

¹⁹² Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (22-24-S1).

¹⁹³ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021](#)", December 2021.

their rations. After being attacked by the KNLA when they went to buy goods at a shop in C--- village, SAC and BGF soldiers stole food, materials and a phone as well as an unknown sum of money from the shop, and threatened to burn down the shop.¹⁹⁴ (see also Part I, Forced Labour)

On November 16th 2021 at about 1:30 pm, BGF Company #3 led by Kyaw Leh Theit from BGF Battalion #999 entered the medical clinic in Ed--- village, Pwa Gaw village tract, Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. They looted all the goods, including healthcare materials, supplies, ultrasound tools and medicine. They also destroyed the clinic buildings. The BGF told the villagers, “Do not to enter the Ed--- clinic!! If you do, you will know it [what it is in the clinic].” Villagers assume the BGF planted a landmine at the clinic and do not feel safe to go to the clinic.¹⁹⁵

ii. Dooplaya District

On August 26th 2021, KNLA Battalion #17 occupied the SAC army camp in Ce--- village, Noh Taw Pla village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township. Around 4:00 pm or 5:00 pm, after the KNLA occupied the SAC army camp, about 30 soldiers from SAC IB #32 from Noh T’Kaw Township marched to Cg--- village, Kya In Shwe Doe village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township. On August 28th, they arrived in the village and entered a villager’s house as the house owner and family had fled to another place due to the fighting. The SAC soldiers confiscated about 40 chickens, one rice pot, two big spoons, two frying pans and two plates. According to the house owner, the SAC cooked those 40 chickens and ate them in the villager’s house.¹⁹⁶ One villager noted that the SAC and BGF soldiers did not loot any other homes or intimidate villagers, but villagers were still afraid and fled.¹⁹⁷



These photos were taken on August 28th 2021. The two photos show the aftermath of the theft of chickens by SAC soldiers from IB #32 from a villager’s house in Cg--- village, Kya In Shwe Doe village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District on August 28th 2021. The photo on the left shows plucked feathers from the chickens. The photo on the right shows the place where the SAC cooked and ate the chickens. [Photos: KHRG]

Villagers from Ai--- village, Kaw Nweh village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township who had fled to other nearby villages as a result of the fighting that broke out in December 2021 (see Part I, section on Lay Kay Kaw) stated that the village had been looted by SAC soldiers. Two of the local shops run

¹⁹⁴ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-290-D1).

¹⁹⁵ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-317-D1).

¹⁹⁶ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-254-M1).

¹⁹⁷ KHRG, “[Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021](#)”, January 2022.

by villagers had been completely cleared out, and rice and other food items, as well as bedding, clothes and other household items had been stolen from villagers' homes.¹⁹⁸

iii. Mergui Tavoy District

On November 6th 2021, SAC soldiers [unknown battalion] looted and burned down the house of a villager in Ef--- village, P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The reason for the attack is unknown. The SAC soldiers took all his household items, seven motorbikes and four cars. Then they burned down the house, including two motorbikes. As a result, the villager fled to another area.¹⁹⁹



KHRG received these photos on November 28th 2021. The photos were taken in Ef--- village, P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. They show the remains of a villager's house after it was burned down by the SAC, as well as two motorbikes that were destroyed in the fire. [Photos: Local villager]

F. Landmines

Since the February 2021 coup, both the SAC and KNLA have increased the planting of landmines, especially in areas where there has been an escalation of armed conflict. According to KHRG's documentation for the July to December 2021 reporting period, landmine incidents continue to be an issue.

As a result of the increased planting of landmines and incidents, local villagers fear travelling outside of their villages, including on roads, which has significantly affected their livelihoods. In addition, landmine contamination also remains a major obstacle to the return of displaced villagers since it may be unsafe to live and/or work in the area. Nevertheless, some displaced families choose to return despite the risks because of livelihood challenges faced during displacement. A displaced villager from Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, whose husband stepped on a landmine told KHRG, *"As for us, we had difficulty in the place where we had been displaced. We had no money [cannot earn money] while staying in other villages. We had to buy everything. That is why we do not want to stay in another village. So we returned to live in our village."*²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-2-A2-I1 and 22-2-A3-I1).

¹⁹⁹ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-364-P1).

²⁰⁰ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: A male villager was injured by a landmine explosion in Dwe Lo Township, September 2021](#)", December 2021.

KHRG received reports on eight incidents of landmine explosions from July to December 2021 that altogether resulted in two deaths and injury to eight villagers, including one child. Two incidents of time bomb explosions were also reported, but neither resulted in injury or death. All ten incidents occurred in Mu Traw District. Following an incident, victims and their families usually do not receive support. If support is received, it is typically only to cover hospital/medical fees.

According to these reports, many of the landmines and time bombs had been placed in civilian areas, along transportation routes and near critical infrastructure, as well as in areas that villagers depend on for their livelihood. While the perpetrators of the planting of landmines and time bombs are usually unknown, in most cases, the villagers were unaware of landmine contamination, or armed groups had only mentioned there were landmines in the area, but had not marked the contaminated areas.

On July 16th 2022, a 46-year-old villager from Eg--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District drove over a tripwire that detonated a landmine. The villager had just left his village on a motorbike in order to sell charcoal for his livelihood. The day before the incident, the villager had observed that other villagers were travelling on the road and decided that the road was safe. He sustained severe injuries to his chest. Unable to get him to a hospital, the other villagers brought him to his home, where he died immediately. The landmine had been planted by the KNLA, but they failed to inform the villagers as to the locations of the landmines. The victim was the main income provider of the family.²⁰¹

A few minutes after the landmine accident involving Sai Eh---, a second tripwire landmine exploded on the same road. Sai Ei---, 50 years old, and Sai Ej---, 45 years old, from Ek--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, were travelling from a different direction than Sai Eh---, riding their motorcycle from a neighbouring town to Ngar Inn Suu village. They only received minor shrapnel injuries due to the speed at which they were travelling.²⁰²

On September 11th 2021, a 30-year-old villager living in Bh--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District stepped on a landmine in his village while on his way to K'Ma Moh village to buy medicine for the village monks. This particular landmine was planted in a heavily-used civilian area, in front of a Catholic church. Due to the explosion, he sustained injuries to both feet and his chest. An SAC army medic amputated his left foot and treated the wounds on his right foot and chest. Later, he was sent to the SAC hospital in Taungalay, near Hpa-an, and was discharged on September 25th 2021. He and his family have not received any financial support. It remains unclear which armed group planted the landmine.²⁰³

KHRG received reports about two time bomb explosions, which occurred in July 2021 in high-traffic civilian areas in Hpapun Town, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The first incident occurred on July 3rd at 11:25 am, in which a time bomb exploded near the Moh Hay Hka Ma Toh Bridge. No casualties were reported and the perpetrator remains unknown.²⁰⁴ The second incident occurred on July 17th at 8:30 am, when a time bomb exploded close to the “Welcome to Hpapun” signboard, which is situated on the outskirts of Hpapun Town. Again, the explosion did not result in injuries and the perpetrator remains unknown.²⁰⁵ An update from a KHRG researcher on

²⁰¹ 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.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ KHRG, “[Mu Traw District Incident Report: A man was injured by a landmine explosion in Dwe Lo Township, September 2021](#)”, October 2021.

²⁰⁴ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1).

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

February 17th 2022, said that landmine and time bomb explosions such as this have occurred on a near daily basis along the road from Hpapun to K'Ma Moh towns in Bu Tho Township since the February 2021 coup. However, the KHRG researcher has been unable to document all of these incidents.

On July 16th 2021, U Ei---, a 46-year-old villager, from Em--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District stepped on a landmine at the base of a phone tower when he went to his plantation. He died that night from his injuries. It is unclear which armed group planted the landmine.²⁰⁶ Upon hearing the blast, village head U En--- and villager U Eo--- from Ek--- village, Meh Klaw village tract went to see if anyone was harmed. They inadvertently stepped on a second landmine in a place between Ek--- village and the phone tower, leaving both of them injured. U En--- sustained injuries to his legs but KHRG researchers are unaware of the exact injuries of Eo---. Local villagers are unsure whether it was the KNLA or the SAC that planted those particular landmines.²⁰⁷

On September 27th 2021, a villager from Bg--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District stepped on a landmine along the riverbank while he was going to collect fish from the gillnets he set up in a nearby river. He sustained injuries to both legs due to the landmine explosion and had to have his right leg amputated. Local villagers were only informed about landmines when the armed groups told them to avoid prohibited areas, but even then were generally not informed of the exact locations of the landmines. The victim received financial support from Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) and DanChurchAid (DCA). The victim has a wife and three children. His wife despairs at seeing her husband suffering, and she worries for the future of her family.²⁰⁸

On August 23rd 2021, a 37-year-old farmer stepped on a landmine while returning home from a meeting and walking along the Toh Thwah Hta River near Hkay Hta in Hkaw Poo village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. He was with four other people, however, he was the only one to sustain injuries. He was brought to a hospital in Mae Hong Son, Thailand, where his right leg had to be amputated. As a result of the amputation, it will be difficult for him to continue his livelihood as a farmer to support his family. Local villagers believe the SAC planted the landmine as they had been seen patrolling in the area on the morning of the incident. However, no one in the village had been informed of the presence of landmines.²⁰⁹

At the end of October 2021 [exact date unknown], a 13-year-old boy from Ep--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, stepped on a landmine when he and his friends went to look for firewood in the forest near his village. The boy sustained severe injuries to his right leg due to the blast. Villagers sent the boy to the SAC military (Phyu Ha) hospital in Hpapun Town for medical treatment. His mother and some villagers accompanied him to the hospital. His right leg was amputated. The hospital covered all of the medical expenses as well as food for the boy. Apart from covering the medical costs and food, he did not receive any other support.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: A male villager was injured by a landmine explosion in Dwe Lo Township, September 2021](#)", December 2021.

²⁰⁹ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: A male villager was injured in a landmine explosion in Bu Tho Township, August 2021](#)", December 2021.

²¹⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-322-M1).



This photo, received by KHRG on November 2nd 2021, shows a 13-year-old boy from Ep--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District who stepped on a landmine while gathering firewood in the forest near his village. He was sent to the SAC military hospital in Hpapun Town. His right leg was amputated. [Photo: Local villager]

G. Health and COVID-19

This reporting period began as Burma was hit with a third wave of COVID-19 infections. From July 2021, KHRG'S operational area experienced new widespread levels of COVID-19 infections with the virus reaching rural areas that had not been infected prior. KHRG received multiple reports of villagers dying as a result of the virus. Regulations, including travel restrictions, were put in place to prevent the spread of infections. Yet, KHRG researchers found that many villagers lacked the necessary facilities to test and treat the virus, and thus faced challenges in managing the spread of the virus. Villagers also do not trust the SAC's vaccination programme since the coup, which has prevented villagers from getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Villagers also continued to face problems in accessing healthcare.

i. A rise in COVID-19 cases

During the reporting period, KHRG received multiple reports of suspected COVID-19 cases, and of entire villages infected with the virus. Although many of the symptoms reported (i.e., fever, loss of smell and taste, cough) are those associated with COVID-19, due to lack of COVID-19 testing it is difficult to be certain that all of the reports received were in fact COVID-19 infections. Villagers themselves were often unsure whether their illness was a seasonal flu or COVID-19.

However, in Mergui-Tavoy District, where testing was available through KDHW, it was found that villagers were frequently testing positive. Within the period of July to August 2021, positive cases were found in villages in every township in the district, notably, K'Moh Tway area in Ler Doh Soh Township, Kleh Mu Htee area in K'Ser Doh Township and Lay Nya Bok Pyin Township.²¹¹ According to information compiled by KDHW, as of November 21st 2021, the number of confirmed positive COVID-19 cases in Mergui-Tavoy District for the third wave of the virus was 12,796 (compared to 634 at the end of January 2021).²¹²

KHRG received multiple reports of COVID-19 cases in Mu Traw District. According to one researcher, COVID-19 positive cases were found in Hpapun Town on July 9th 2021, and two patients died on July 21st 2021.²¹³ Another researcher reported that, as of July 22nd 2021, a total

²¹¹ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-263-S1-B4).

²¹² See Karen Department of Health and Welfare, "COVID-19 case summary, November 20-21, 2021", November 2021; Karen Department of Health and Welfare, "COVID-19 case summary, January 22-29, 2021", January 2021.

²¹³ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1 and 21-261-S1).

of 35 people had tested positive for COVID-19 in various parts of the district: 12 in K'Ma Moh Town, two in Kaw K'Rek village, one in Ma Hta village, four in Way Mone village, one in Nyaung Pin Ywar village, one in T'Khon Taing and 14 in Hpapun Town. Between July 22nd and August 12th there were an additional three deaths due to COVID-19. On August 28th 2021, another 28 villagers in Bu Tho Township tested positive.²¹⁴ One KHRG researcher also noted that civilians were not following COVID-19 regulations as instructed on COVID-19 information posters.²¹⁵

Displaced villagers have faced an increased risk of COVID-19 infections in this reporting period. A villager from Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, who fled along with other villagers in September 2021, realised that he and his parents were infected with COVID-19. One other person amongst those who fled reported having COVID-19 [and actually tested positive according to an update by a KHRG researcher]. Other villagers who fled with them later said that they also lost their sense of smell and may have been infected without knowing it prior to fleeing. One villager said, "*When villagers flee [from SAC soldiers], they forget to be afraid of the Coronavirus. They are only afraid of SAC soldiers.*"²¹⁶

ii. COVID-19 travel restrictions

As COVID-19 infections significantly increased in July 2021, tight prevention measures and travel restrictions were imposed across all districts. In Dooplaya District as of August 2021, COVID-19 prevention measures were established by the local KNU and KDHW in most rural villages. Quarantine centres and travel restrictions were activated in the district. According to a KHRG researcher, the quarantine centre workers have to ask local health workers to conduct the COVID-19 tests for those placed in quarantine. The tests, however, are not free. Villagers have to pay 10,000 kyats [USD 5.62] for one test.²¹⁷

In Kyaw Hta village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District, a COVID-19 checkpoint was set up at the entrance of Kyaw Hta village, and monitored by government health workers, village leaders and KDHW staff. People from outside the village who are passing through are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures such as hand washing, temperature testing and wearing masks as enforced by the COVID-19 checkpoint. At the same time, Kyaw Hta villagers are not allowed to open their shops or travel out of the village. Movement within the village has also been limited, with restrictions, including a curfew at night, being imposed.²¹⁸

After one COVID-19 case was reported on July 15th 2021 in Kyaikdon Town, Po Yay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District, the town was locked down by the SAC. Some local leaders in the township carried out strict travel restrictions to prevent the spread of infection. And particularly in Kwin Kalay village, Kaw T'Ree Township, villagers were prevented from travelling to other villages and would be fined 5,000 kyats [USD 2.81] by the local leaders if they broke the rules.²¹⁹

Because of the prevalence of COVID-19 in Hpapun and K'Ma Moh towns, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, the KNU temporarily set up travel restrictions in July 2021. However, SAC soldiers refused to obey these regulations and continued to send rations to their army camps. Local villagers suspect that COVID-19 positive cases have increased due to SAC soldiers arriving from

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-294-S1).

²¹⁶ KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021](#)", January 2022.

²¹⁷ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-231-S1).

²¹⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-223-S1).

²¹⁹ Ibid.

town areas where the virus has spread more widely. According to a KHRG researcher, the KNU alone did not plan to set up travel restrictions along the road from K'Ma Moh Town to Hpapun Town. Villagers themselves suggested that the KNU impose these restrictions to prevent further transmission of the virus.²²⁰

In KNU-controlled areas of Mergui-Tavoy District, where the KNU had set up prevention measures and travel restrictions, some villagers were allowed to go out once a week to find food outside of the village.²²¹

Beginning in July 2021, in Moo and Ler Doh townships, Kler Lwee Htoo District, KNU-operated COVID-19 checkpoints were set up in local villages and were monitored by local villagers. Some quarantine centres were also established in the larger villages.²²² Following the increase of COVID-19 infections in July 2021, local villagers in Moo and Ler Doh townships were restricted from travelling, particularly in towns with the highest rates of reported COVID-19 cases.²²³ In the flatlands near towns and large villages in Kler Lwee Htoo District, the SAC also set up more COVID-19 checkpoints and localised travel restrictions as infection rates increased in July 2021. Villagers were required to get recommendation letters from the SAC-appointed village head in order to travel to other areas, including their farms. Otherwise, they were not allowed to travel. Local villagers did not agree with these new requirements because they refuse to recognise the SAC-appointed leaders as legitimate leaders.²²⁴

In Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, where SAC troop movement has increased, KHRG researchers found that some villagers, fearing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, were staying outside of the village to avoid encountering people from outside their village area. Because SAC soldiers are outsiders from crowded urban places, villagers are afraid that they could be infected with COVID-19 and spread the virus during their patrols in the community. In C-- village, Htee Hpa Doh Hta village tract, Bilin Township, SAC soldiers then threatened to shoot any villager they encountered outside of the village at night, considering anyone found outside the village at night to be the enemy. Therefore, local villagers trying to protect themselves from the COVID-19 pandemic by staying outside the village are at further risk of harm by the SAC.²²⁵

iii. COVID-19 vaccine

According to a report from Plaw and K'Ter Klah areas in Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, SAC authorities have urged local villagers to register for SAC-administered COVID-19 vaccinations. Villagers in Plaw and K'Ter Klah areas have not registered due to their lack of trust in the SAC.²²⁶

Similar perspectives were found during an interview with a villager in Dooplaya District. In the interview, the villager from T'Ku Hkee village, Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District said, "*Even though they [the SAC] talk about it [providing vaccines], people in T'Ku Hkee village won't accept the injection [vaccine] if it comes through the SAC. We are afraid to take it.*" Villagers are even concerned about vaccines provided by CBOs and CSOs. A villager

²²⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-220-D1).

²²¹ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-263-S1-B4).

²²² Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-217-D1).

²²³ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-207-D1).

²²⁴ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-225-S1).

²²⁵ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021](#)", December 2021.

²²⁶ Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-225-S1).

from Dooplaya District said that they would accept the vaccine from Thailand through Karen organisations, “*except if it comes from China and Russia. We know that China and Russia are cooperating with the SAC, so we have concerns.*”²²⁷ Nevertheless, it is unclear whether villagers have even been offered the vaccine. One villager from Noh T’Kaw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District stated in September that local villagers did not yet have access to the vaccine.²²⁸

In Hpa-an District, organisations have been supplying vaccines where they can. On September 18th 2021, religious workers, health workers and shopkeepers and vendors over the age of 18, as well as older people over 55 years of age, were given COVID-19 vaccines in Hlaingbwe Town, Hpa-an District. The rest of the adult population in Hlaingbwe Town were given COVID-19 vaccines on September 28th. Health workers from Paingkyon Rural Health Department and the Myanmar Red Cross Society along with other volunteers provided vaccine shots to more than 708 people in Paingkyon, Hpa-an District on September 11th and 19th 2021.²²⁹

iv. Lack of access to healthcare

An inability to access necessary healthcare continued to be a problem for rural villagers throughout the reporting period. Due to the military coup, local villagers in Thauk Yay Hkant village, Klay Kho village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District reported in August 2021 that the hospital in Toungoo Town had been closed because some health workers joined the CDM. This limited villagers’ access to healthcare treatment, pushing local villagers to buy medicine directly from the pharmacy when they were sick. However, some healthcare workers that joined the CDM opened a small dispensary in their homes and provided medicine and consultations to those who needed it. Some health organizations, like KDHW, also provided medicine to local villagers.²³⁰

Aside from healthcare facility closures due to the CDM movement, some clinics and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed by air and ground attacks, leaving local villagers with even fewer healthcare options. On November 16th 2021, BGF Company #3 entered Ed--- village, Pwa Gaw village tract, Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District and destroyed the medical clinic buildings and looted all healthcare materials, including medicine. They also threatened local villagers not to enter the clinic compounds anymore. Local villagers assume the BGF planted a landmine in the clinic and do not feel safe to go to the clinic. The clinic stopped operating after the incident but was able to reopen a month later, and has been able to operate normally since.²³¹

Rural areas continued to have insufficient facilities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in this reporting period. This included a lack of COVID-19 testing equipment. Villagers in Plaw Thaw village in the plains area of Moo Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District noted that COVID-19 testing equipment was not made available to them despite the rise in COVID-19 cases in the area. This made it difficult to know whether villagers were infected or not.²³²

In Mergui-Tavoy District, some COVID-19 patients self-isolated in their homes and treated themselves with home remedies. Some patients used herbal remedies and some used medicines

²²⁷ KHRG, “[Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021](#)”, January 2022.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Unpublished data collected from Hpa-an District (21-284-D1).

²³⁰ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-272-A4-I1).

²³¹ Unpublished data collected from Doo Tha Htoo District (21-317-D1).

²³² Unpublished data collected from Kler Lwee Htoo District (21-217-D1).

such as paracetamol and Tiffy for colds and pain relief. There are some people whose symptoms improved because of the medicine.²³³ In Noh T’Kaw village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, one villager noted in September 2021 that those who were infected with COVID-19 were given vitamin C, paracetamol and cough medicine to treat their illness. The villager said, “*We just have to be highly aware of it and protect ourselves the best [way we can]. We cannot do anything once we are infected.*”²³⁴

This was also reported in Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, where there were significant challenges in getting medical supplies to villages to treat infected persons. The SAC had set up checkpoints on the major roads out of towns and were confiscating and destroying medicine making it difficult for civilians to transport healthcare and medical supplies from town back to their villages. Villagers have been treating COVID-19 cases using traditional herbs such as boiling herbal root and leaves, as well as any western medicines still available to them.²³⁵



This photo was taken on August 31st 2021 in an area between Er--- village and Es--- village, Er--- village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. This photo shows a CDM healthcare worker, who sought refuge in a KNU-controlled area and worked together with KNU Brigade 2 (Taw Oo District) leaders to provide healthcare services to local villagers. The KNU Brigade 2 leaders and other donors [unspecified] distributed cash handouts for healthcare and provided medicine free of charge to local villagers. [Photo: KHRG].

H. Education

Students struggled to gain a sufficient education in this reporting period. While government schools were meant to begin the school year again in June, many were unable to open. KHRG’s operational area saw a spike in COVID-19 infections, and many government teachers had joined the CDM and refused to work for the SAC. As a result, government schools, now run by the SAC, were forced to remain closed until late in the year. Even when they reopened, continued insecurity due to military activity prevented parents from sending their children back to these schools. This placed stress on KECD schools that remained open throughout the reporting period. Many KECD schools struggled with a lack of facilities to accommodate the increased number of students who transferred from SAC-run schools. Teachers also struggled to gain a sufficient income at this time, as the local community were paying their salaries.

i. School closures

Many students did not return to schools that were run by the SAC throughout the second half of the year. Following the coup, students in local communities in Dooplaya District stopped attending

²³³ Unpublished data collected from Mergui-Tavoy District (21-263-S1-B4).

²³⁴ KHRG, “[Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021](#)”, January 2022.

²³⁵ KHRG, “[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Forced portering and the use of civilians as human shields, and updates on livelihood, health and education, August to September 2021](#)”, February 2022.

schools run by the SAC, to express their refusal to recognise the SAC as a legitimate government.²³⁶ In a similar vein, in Htaw Ta'Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, most government schoolteachers joined the CDM and parents stopped sending their children to SAC-run schools.²³⁷

As highlighted in the last field report, refusals of students and teachers to return to school often led to threats by local SAC soldiers and officers in order to force teachers to return to work and students to attend SAC-run schools. These kinds of threats added to parents' concern. In Aee Weh village, Paw Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, many parents refused to send their children to school due to concerns for their children's safety. Naw Cl---, a villager who refused to send her children to school, said, *"We don't let our children go to school. [...] They coerced the villagers to send the kids to the school. Some parents are scared, so they sent their kids to school. In fact, no one wants to go to school. The soldiers intimidated them. The soldiers are guarding the school."* However, in July, the school had to close due to an increase in COVID-19 cases.²³⁸



This photo was taken on October 18th 2021 in Cg--- village, T'Kuh Hkee village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows students in T'Kuh Hkee village studying in a villager's house because they refused to attend SAC-run schools. After the coup, the villagers funded this school on their own. The school has 10 standards (grades) available. They struggle to pay teachers' salaries by themselves. [Photo: KHRG]



This photo was taken on October 5th 2021 in Es--- village, Noe Kwee village tract, Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District. The photo shows students studying in the monastery because their school building had not yet been finished. This is the local community KECD school. Even though SAC-run schools are closed, the KECD school remained open and the number of students increased as students from SAC-run schools joined this KECD school in 2021. [Photo: Local villager]

KHRG researchers also documented the closure of SAC-run schools due to COVID-19 in numerous villages across districts. Due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, schools run by the SAC in Kyaw Hta village, Dooplaya District, closed down after one week of the school opening in June 2021.²³⁹

Students have also faced barriers to continuing their studies due to ongoing military activity in this reporting period. While the SAC-run schools in Mu Traw District reopened in November, parents

²³⁶ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-302-D1).

²³⁷ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-313-S1).

²³⁸ KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Arbitrary Arrest by SAC, August 2021](#)", January 2022.

²³⁹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-228-D1 and 21-231-S1).

did not send their children to these schools. While some parents could not afford the fees, others had safety concerns due to ongoing military activity and conflict.²⁴⁰

Multiple areas in Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District also faced heavy conflict and insecurity, forcing many schools that had opened to close. On December 15th 2021, fighting broke out between KNLA and the combined group of the SAC and BGF military in Lay Kay Kaw Town, eventually spreading to surrounding areas. Students and teachers at a residential school in Lay Kay Kaw fled as a group after the fighting broke out, displacing multiple times before reaching the Thai-Burma border.²⁴¹ News of the fighting in Lay Kay Kaw led village leaders in nearby Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township to close the local school. Fighting also broke out in Thay Baw Boh village the next day, December 16th 2021. Around 180 students in the school dormitory were forced to take shelter during the fighting. It was exam week, so students were not able to complete their exams.²⁴²

ii. KECD schools

While schools run by the SAC were closed at the beginning of this reporting period, KHRG researchers reported that KECD schools remained open in numerous districts in the second half of 2021. In Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, KECD schools were open as normal, whereas schools run by the SAC were closed. However, students, parents and teachers feared airstrikes as helicopters continued to conduct reconnaissance missions.²⁴³

Since there was increased enrolment in every KECD school in Mu Traw District, schools are facing challenges with lack of classroom space and learning materials for students. Some schools have had to add more grades in schools. Since there has been increasing numbers of students, there was also a need to recruit more teachers. However, local communities were facing challenges in securing salaries for all teachers. In Klaw Day village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, the local leaders added one more grade and recruited one more teacher for the 2021-2022 academic year. Since the newly recruited teachers are not appointed by the KECD, the parents have struggled to provide teachers' salary from their (the parents') own earnings.²⁴⁴

Due to the closure of SAC-run schools, more students in Htaw Ta'Htoo Township, Taw Oo District enrolled in the local KECD school, known as Htoh Lwee Wah School in the 2021-2022 academic year.²⁴⁵

In Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District, KECD schools continued to run in the last half of the year, while schools that were run by the SAC remained closed.²⁴⁶

As reported in October 2021, the KECD schools in Dooplaya District were open as normal, with many students transferring from SAC-run schools. In Cg--- village, Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District, the community used villagers' houses and church buildings as a place to study, as an alternative to the government school building. The villagers also provided support for

²⁴⁰ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-344-S1-B5).

²⁴¹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A1 and 22-1-A2).

²⁴² Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-347-D1).

²⁴³ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1).

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-313-S1).

²⁴⁶ Unpublished data collected from Hpa-an District (21-284-D1).

teachers who had been appointed by the community and ran the school as the village's self-funded school. Thus, there were salary shortages for these teachers in the village.²⁴⁷

KECD schools and colleges in Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District were still open until the end of July 2021. However, when many students in the Pu Dooplaya Junior College became ill (it was hard to tell whether it was COVID-19 or normal flu), the college closed from the first week of August until the end of October 2021. Meanwhile, all the students were asked to return to their villages. They were kept in the quarantine centre for 14 days in their own village. Among the returning students, two of them from Cg--- village tested positive. The college resumed teaching in November 2021 and remained open for the rest of the reporting period.²⁴⁸

I. Livelihoods

Conflict and ongoing military activity have continued to force villagers to flee their homes, and many who displaced earlier in the year are still facing displacement. The impact of displacement on livelihoods is twofold in that rural villagers often face food insecurity during displacement, but also are not able to tend to their farms and livestock as usual, often losing an entire year's crops as well as livestock. As such, many villagers expressed concerns about their livelihood in being forced to displace. One 70-year-old farmer from Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District who was forced to displace when fighting broke out in December stated: *"Now, we have to harvest corn and paddy. Rice is still in the milling process. We still have a lot of corn to harvest. We dare not go to the cornfield for the harvesting. What can we do?"*²⁴⁹ Others remain, believing they have no choice but to stay and tend to their land and livestock.

Although KHRG received little information about those who had displaced and the livelihood challenges they are currently facing in their displacement sites, KHRG did receive more general reports about livelihood challenges villagers are facing. Travel restrictions tied to COVID-19 and ongoing military activity following the military coup were reported as having significant impact on livelihoods. KHRG researchers found that those working on farms or plantations could not travel to work due to military activity and feelings of insecurity and/or travel restrictions. This had far-reaching impacts on villagers' livelihoods and the local economy, as even villagers who were able to harvest were often unable to sell their crops. Many villagers are also facing severe food insecurity as a result.

i. Impact of travel restrictions

Throughout the reporting period, KHRG researchers found that travel restrictions impacted all aspects of villagers livelihoods, as they could not go about their everyday lives. In Htaw Ta'Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, travel restrictions due to COVID-19 and the coup, as reported for July to August 2021, impacted local villagers' livelihoods. Some villagers, especially casual day labourers, were struggling to earn an income, because they cannot travel. Villagers who plant paddy fields could still earn an income by selling their crops.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-302-D1).

²⁴⁸ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-228-D1 and 21-231-S1).

²⁴⁹ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (22-1-A4-I1).

²⁵⁰ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-287-S1-B2).

Moreover, due to travel restrictions in Taw Oo District in August 2021, local villagers could not go to Toungoo Town. Those who ran shops could not buy more goods to replenish their stock, and so could not open their shops regularly. Therefore, they faced income shortages. The political situation and COVID-19 restrictions have negatively impacted crop trading in rural areas. Particularly in Klay Kho village tract, local villagers who plant cardamom were doubtful whether they would be able to sell their crops after harvesting in September 2021.²⁵¹

When KNU authorities implemented travel restrictions throughout Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District in July 2021, local villagers could not leave their village and go to the town to buy food and household materials. Neither civilians living close to the town nor those living in the mountainous areas could travel locally to buy food. Local villagers in areas near the Thai-Burma border faced additional livelihood challenges because they could not travel to the border markets due to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵²

Villagers in Noh T'Kaw Township, Dooplaya District who normally secure their livelihoods by growing paddy, lime, big limes and elephant yam plants reported that travel restrictions and COVID-19 impacted their livelihood because they could not sell their cash crops as before. The selling price of these cash crops also went down.²⁵³



This photo was taken on August 19th 2021 at A Lel Chaung, A Lel Chaung village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. Since the military coup, travel restrictions have impacted trade and villagers' livelihoods. With no other items to sell, local villagers have been gathering bamboo shoots from the local forest to sell for their livelihood. [Photo: KHRG]

ii. Impact of military activity

Increased conflict and other military activity in KHRG's operational area has had a significant impact on villagers' ability to carry out their livelihoods. Fighting, shelling and risk of landmine explosions, often prevented villagers from travelling away from their homes, even to reach nearby farms and plantations.

Following skirmishes on December 7th and December 12th 2021 near Mu Theh village, Kheh Der village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District, villagers did not dare go to their paddy farms to harvest and collect their already harvested paddy, because they worried that the SAC troops would fire mortars at their farms. In addition, the SAC troops began conducting more military activities, making the livelihood situation even more difficult for local villagers. Only some villagers continued to work on their farms, yet feared SAC troops shooting or firing at them as they carried out their work.²⁵⁴

Villagers in Aee Weh village tract, Paw Township, Doo Tha Htoo District were also afraid to leave their homes, as the SAC imposed a curfew from 6:00 pm to 4:00 am following their occupation of

²⁵¹ Unpublished data collected from Taw Oo District (21-272-A4-I1-B2).

²⁵² Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1 and 21-261-S1).

²⁵³ Unpublished data collected from Dooplaya District (21-231-S1-B6).

²⁵⁴ KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: SAC troops fired mortars into a village, injuring three villagers, December 2021](#)", January 2022.

local villages in August. SAC soldiers shot a pregnant woman and her husband who broke curfew in order to fish for their livelihood. Following the shooting, villagers feared leaving their houses, which had a significant impact on their ability to earn a living. One villager said, *“We want to live peacefully. But we feel sad since they [SAC] bully us, the villagers. We don’t know what to do and how to do [live their lives when they are made to feel powerless by the SAC]. They treat us as they want. We want soldiers not to be present here [in the village], so we can work peacefully. But now, we have to be scared. We can’t do anything but be afraid of them. Now we can’t go anywhere. [...] We have to worry that they will kill more people. Now they have killed that couple as an example so we have to be more afraid.”*²⁵⁵

Local villagers in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District faced similar livelihood challenges due to armed conflict and indiscriminate shelling. Villagers were in fear to go to their plantations and farms and could not carry out their work as normal. Therefore, villagers were concerned about facing a food shortage especially of rice, which is a staple in their diet.²⁵⁶

Recommendations

- Neighbouring states must allow for the legal provision of cross-border humanitarian aid through non-state actors and local service providers.
- The UN, donors and other international actors must support and increase the legitimacy of the CSOs, CBOs and ethnic health and aid providers operating on the ground because they have the most direct and best access to affected populations and understand their needs.
- A comprehensive global arms embargo against the Burma military must be imposed.
- Military “No Fly Zones” need to be established and enforced; and sanctions must be placed on supplying aviation fuel to the Burma military. *“If Burmese military aircraft can’t fly, they can’t bomb.”*
- Civilian safe zones need to be created, whether in Burma or across the border, and the protection of civilian safe zones must be internationally guaranteed.
- UN agencies in Burma must take a clear and strong position in responding to the situation on the ground, and to use all possible resources to limit the human rights abuses and violations undertaken by the SAC.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. 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.

²⁵⁵ KHRG, [“Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC shot on sight a pregnant woman and her husband in Paw Township, September 2021”](#), January 2022.

²⁵⁶ Unpublished data collected from Mu Traw District (21-226-S1).