



Situation Update

February 26th 2022/ KHRG # 21-270-D1

Dooplaya District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling, fighting, forced labour, peace talks, and the COVID-19 pandemic, August to September 2021

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District in August and early September 2021, including indiscriminate shelling, fighting, forced labour, and the spread of COVID-19 infections. Indiscriminate shelling and fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and State Administration Council (SAC) troops in and near villages led to the displacement of local villagers. SAC troops have also been using villagers as navigators and human shields when they are travelling from place to place. COVID-19 infections are on the rise in areas where SAC troops patrol and travel. A meeting was held in Kyaw Hta village tract between multiple armed groups, including the SAC, Border Guard Force (BGF) and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), to discuss the end of fighting and inform villagers about the peace process.¹

Indiscriminate shelling and displacement

Four State Administration Council (SAC)² military³ trucks carrying over ten soldiers were attacked on the road after they left A--- village, Poh Yay village tract,⁴ Kaw T'Ree Township Dooplaya District on August 23rd 2021. After their trucks were attacked, more SAC soldiers entered into the village [A--- village]. On August 28th 2021, at around 5:00 pm, SAC soldiers

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

² The 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.

³ Tatmadaw is the term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

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

conducted indiscriminate shelling in A--- village. As a result, the local villagers had to hide in their [makeshift] bunkers for the night. Then most of the villagers fled from their village the next morning; only a few households did not flee that day. All of the men from the village fled, but a few women stayed. They [the women and villagers who stayed in the village] dared not stay at their own houses so they stayed together in one house. However, later they also got ready to flee because of the ongoing indiscriminate shelling and the presence of SAC troops. Some villagers fled to the other side of the Chay Yar Kloh River. One of the villagers reported that, *“My father tried to go back into the village but there were more SAC soldiers present in the village, so he dared not go back. [Instead he] returned to the other side of the river.”*

A--- villagers heard that the village head, who was forcibly arrested [date unknown] by the SAC troops, was released but they still haven't seen him come back to the village yet. His family is also afraid to stay in the village.

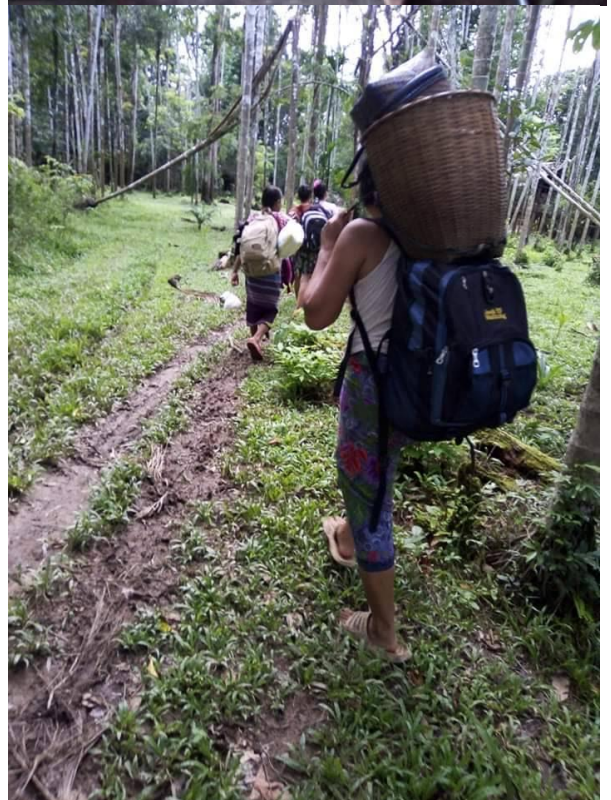
One villager from B--- village, Kwin Ka Lay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District reported that, *“We always have to flee when we hear mortar shelling.”* She continued, *“We heard mortar shelling and the sound of gunfire between Kyeh Doh [Kyaikdon] and A--- village around 4:00 pm and 5:00 pm.”* All of the local villagers from [C---] village fled, including women and children. It was raining and they had to stay in someone's hut (at the place they took refuge). There were seven families there.

Three days ago [before the displacement, and interview on August 28th 2021], the local villagers [from C--- village, who had fled] heard that civilians in Kyeh Doh Town were taken for forced portering at 10:00 pm and that 39 people were arrested. They heard that from their relatives from Kyeh Doh Town. [This has heightened their concerns.] They are also experiencing food scarcity because they could not bring enough food when they fled. Some people have nothing left to eat. Dengue is another problem for them during displacement. The villagers, including children, had to flee in the rain. They can get medicine such as paracetamol and amoxicillin [an antibiotic] at the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)⁵ clinic but they are only given the exact dose [of the medicine prescribed]. The local villagers from D--- village and E--- village, Poh Yay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township fled as well. All of the children who fled are from the same village [D--- village].

On September 3rd 2021, at 8:00 pm in G--- village, Taw Naw Mu Htao area, Kaw T'Ree Township, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁶ [unidentified battalion number] attacked the [local] SAC army camp. The mortar shells fell on one [G---] villager's house and fragments of the mortar shells fell beside the house. According to the local villagers, people in the house were not injured.

⁵ Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is an organisation that provides health care and medical assistance to displaced civilians inside Burma.

⁶ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.



These photos were taken on August 28th 2021 in A--- village, Poh Yay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photos show a group of A--- villagers fleeing due to indiscriminate shelling by the SAC. According to the villager who provided information to KHRG, these families and some other villagers fled to nearby villages the next day, on August 29th 2021. [Photos: Local villager]

Fighting and displacement

At 2:10 pm on August 22nd 2021, fighting broke out between SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁷ #585 led by Battalion Commander Win Lay Soe and the KNLA. The fighting took place [in the area] between H--- and J--- villages in Noh Hpoee village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, about 25 minutes from the main road by motorbike. Around 70 or 80 SAC soldiers came from Pah T'Kaw Hill, heading in the direction of H--- village. They entered into restricted area so the fighting broke out. Two SAC soldiers were injured and one died. However, it was not possible to get a final count of the number of casualties.

The SAC soldiers went to H--- village and slept in the monastery after the fighting. On August 23rd 2021, they called a meeting with the village head and village leaders and asked them to arrange cars for them to go back [to Pah T'Kaw Hill]. The village leaders arranged the cars for them and sent them back with eight cars.

There were no casualties among the villagers. However, there are now more SAC soldiers patrolling in the local areas and in the forest, so the local villagers are afraid there will be tension and that fighting will break out again between the two armed groups [SAC and KNLA]. The local villagers cannot go to their plantation areas because of the insecurity for them (since there may be about 100 SAC soldiers at Pah T'Kaw Hill). About 70 or 80 of them [soldiers] came into the village but no one knows where the other soldiers were going [it is unclear which other soldiers the researcher is referring to here]. Therefore, the local villagers are not allowed to go out of the village or to their plantations. It is a challenge for the local villagers regarding livelihood issues, earning money and travelling to their work place. The local villagers also face livelihood challenges because of COVID-19. The [increased] militarisation is another challenge for them. They have to be careful, and live in fear now.

On September 3rd 2021, A--- villagers fled from their village to other places [for their safety due to militarisation and fighting occurring in the area]. Some of them stayed in the monastery and some of them fled into the forest and built huts to stay there. Some of them went to stay with their relatives from other places. They cannot cross over [fully] into Thailand but some of them came to the border areas such as K--- village (in Thailand) and L--- Place, Hter Wa Law village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township.

On September 3rd 2021, fighting broke out in Meh K'Thaw Hkee village, Meh K'Thaw Hkee village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township in the KNLA Battalion #18 area. On the same day at 2:00 pm, fighting broke out in the area between Ler Thaw Maw village and Noh Ta Khaw village [Noh T'Kaw village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township] in the KNLA Battalion #17 area.⁸ [This means that] fighting happened twice [in one day] in Brigade 6 [Dooplaya District] in different places. The local villagers have to be more careful and they are living in fear because there are more SAC troops patrolling in the local areas near the villages. They [SAC soldiers] even sleep in the local monastery. If the fighting happens continuously in the near future, the local villagers [in these areas] may have to flee. But they are not sure now whether to flee or not. They try to live well and prepare themselves [in case the situation changes].

Since then, there have been more SAC troops patrolling in the village, so the villagers have had to flee. Some of them fled to other villages, some of them are taking refuge in the monastery, and some of them fled into the forest.

⁷ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, 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. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁸ See KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021](#)", January 2022.

COVID-19

There are now more COVID-19 positive cases found in Kaw T'Ree Township (as well as other townships in Dooplaya District). Positive cases are being found in the areas where the SAC troops patrol and travel. The local villagers who have to flee from the fighting cannot properly protect themselves against COVID-19. They are also afraid of the indiscriminate shelling by the SAC troops. [The KNLA and KNDO] do not shoot at them [the SAC troops] but they [SAC troops] are afraid while they are travelling so they conduct indiscriminate shelling. It frightens the villagers and they have to hide and flee [despite concerns about the risk of being infected with COVID-19 while fleeing].

Forced labour and the use of human shields

On September 9th 2021 at 7:00 pm, Border Guard Force (BGF)⁹ Battalion #1021 went to the shop in P--- village, Kwin Ka Lay village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township and arrested some of the women there. We [the community members] did not know the reason why they arrested the women.

There was an update from one of the local villagers there [in P--- village]. Those women have been released now. They were asked to be navigators. They had to go in front of them [BGF soldiers]. They asked those women to lead them to a safer path. The local village leaders went to meet with the SAC troops in S--- village, Meh K'Thaw Hkee village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township and requested the release of those women [villagers do not remember the date].

Peace Negotiations

On August 30th 2021, the SAC, BGF and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)¹⁰ called a meeting to talk and negotiate for peace (the end of fighting). The central DKBA Commander Maung Tho (Mote Thone) arranged for this meeting to happen in Kyaw Hta village, Kyaw Hta village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. They called the villagers from the nearby villages, such as K'Mah Kler village, Kyaw Hkee village, Meh K'Tee Kreh village, Maw Law village, Poe Hsee Muh village, Meh T'Ler village, Htaw Wa Law village, Kwee Kler village and T'Ray Kee village to attend the meeting. It is unclear whether villagers from every village attended the meeting.

[Representatives from multiple armed groups attended:]

- 1) SAC, Infantry Battalion (IB)¹¹ #32
- 2) BGF, Battalion #1023, Commander Eh Htoo
- 3) BGF, Battalion #1021, Commander Saw P'Loo
- 4) DKBA, Operation Command #3, Commander Pa Nyein

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), formerly the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, was formed in December 1994 and was originally a breakaway group from the KNU/KNLA that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burma/Myanmar government and directly cooperated at times with Tatmadaw forces. The formation of the DKBA was led by monk U Thuzana with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the military government in Burma/Myanmar at that time.

¹¹ 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.

5) Central Command DKBA, Commander Maung Tho (Mote Thone)

During the meeting, they informed villagers about the peace process, and told villagers that there will be no forced porters or threats to the villagers. [They said that] the DKBA will stay in the army camps from Ka Lee Hkee village, Noh Taw Pla village tract and Kyaw Hta village, Kyaw Hta village tract [Kaw T'Ree Township]. At the meeting, they gave one pack of coffee and one pack of MSG [monosodium glutamate] to the villagers who attended the meeting. The meeting started at around 9:00 am and finished at around 1:00 pm. They ate lunch after the meeting and then went back to Kyeh Doh (Kyaikdon) Town at 2:00 pm.



These two photos were taken on August 30th 2021 in Kyaw Hta village, Kyaw Hta village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo on the left shows villagers who attended the peace negotiation meeting organised by the SAC, BGF and DKBA. The photo on the right shows a pack of MSG and coffee mix provided to the villagers who joined the meeting. [Photos: KHRG]

Further background reading on the situation of fighting, shelling and displacement in Dooplaya District in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmishes between armed groups and indiscriminate shelling result in displacement, casualties and destruction of villagers' property \(October 2021\)"](#), December 2021.
- ["Dooplaya District Situation Update: SAC interrogation and arbitrary arrest, arbitrary killing, and displacement due to fighting in Mu Traw District, April to May 2021"](#), December 2021.
- ["Dooplaya District Interview: Fighting between SAC troops and other armed groups resulted in villagers' displacement, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District, June 1st 2021"](#), July 2021.
- ["Dooplaya District Interview: Recent fighting and displacement in Kaw T'Ree Township, June 2021"](#), July 2021.

About KHRG

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

Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

