



Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update
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Dooplaya District Short Update: Skirmishes between armed groups and indiscriminate shelling result in displacement, casualties and destruction of villagers' property (October 2021)

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District throughout the month of October 2021. These events were tied to fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the State Administration Council (SAC), in alignment with the Border Guard Force (BGF). It describes indiscriminate shelling conducted by SAC troops, looting, and incidents of forced labour. Local villagers' property was destroyed, and many villagers have been displaced by the fighting and shelling. While some villagers have been able to return to their homes, others remained displaced through the end of October.¹

According to local villagers, in October 2021, fighting occurred almost every day in Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District. On October 1st 2021, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) splinter group² ambushed the State Administration Council (SAC)³ Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs)⁴ #230 and #231 under Military Operation Command (MOC)⁵ #12 [KHRG

¹ The present document is based on information received in October 2021. It was provided by a community member in Dooplaya 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 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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

received these SAC battalion numbers from Karen Information Center (KIC) News⁶] at A--- and B--- junction near the Asia Highway. After the ambush, the SAC troops⁷ fired mortars aimed at the villages in southern Kawkareik Town in Kaw T'Ree Township. One house was destroyed, one cow died and one cat's eyes were injured by a mortar explosion in C--- village, C--- village tract,⁸ Kaw T'Ree Township. Another mortar fell near a COVID-19 checkpoint in D--- village, C-- - 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 D--- village.

On October 11th 2021, fighting occurred between Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁹ Battalion #18 and SAC LIB #556 at E--- village and C--- village in C--- village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The fighting began as the SAC troops crossed into Karen National Union (KNU)¹⁰-controlled areas. Three cows owned by a C--- villager were killed, but no other casualties were reported due to the fighting on October 11th 2021. However, the villagers worried that the fighting would worsen.

Fighting broke out three times [three separate skirmishes between the KNLA and the SAC/Border Guard Force (BGF)¹¹] on October 12th 2021. Three houses in D--- village were destroyed by the indiscriminate shelling and SAC soldiers robbed two other houses, but there were no casualties among the villagers.

There are about 53 households in E--- village, C--- village tract, and there are over 100 households in C--- village, C--- village tract. All villagers in these households fled and have become displaced due to indiscriminate shelling and fighting among the armed groups. Some villagers managed to flee and stay with their relatives in other villages while others fled to the forest. These villagers also fear they will be forced to act as porters and be tortured by the SAC troops.

⁵ A Military Operations Command is composed of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

⁶ Karen Information Center News, “[ဖဲကီးတရံး ကလံထံး တ်ဒူးကဲထီၣ်ကဒီးလၢကညီသူးဟ်ဖျိၣ်ဒီးပယီၤသူးအဘၢၣ်စၢၤ](#)”, October 12, 2021; Karen Information Center News, “[ကီးတရံးဝါ ကီးန့ၢ်သဝီကပၤ ကညီသူးဟ်ဖျိၣ်ဒီးပယီၤသူးတၢ်ဒူးလိၣ်သးကဲထီၣ်ပယီၤသူးသံၣ်ၤ](#)”, October 11, 2021.

⁷ The term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces is Tatmadaw. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

⁸ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

⁹ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

On October 13th 2021, there were roughly 100 soldiers from SAC LIB #556 who stayed at farms close to C--- village [all the villagers fled following the fighting, and the presence of the soldiers deterred them from returning for fear that more fighting might break out]. Since villagers were displaced, they were not able to bring all of their livestock with them, and had to leave some livestock untied [so that the livestock could graze while the villagers were displaced]. It is very difficult for them to access food while they are living in the forest. When villagers fled from their villages, they were not able to bring enough food with them and they are now in need of humanitarian aid. Some villagers have had to borrow food from other villagers who fled in order to survive in the forest.

The villagers who fled from the fighting [721 households, totalling 3,694 villagers from 10 villages, including D---, F---, C---, and E--- in C--- village tract, discussed in this update] do not have access to medical care for sick or injured villagers. The healthcare workers from the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) clinic in this area had fled previously [due to security concerns], and were not present to provide care to the displaced villagers. It has also been difficult for the villagers to get treatment in Kawkaeik Town due to the fighting and travel restrictions. Some villagers have been injured by the SAC troops' indiscriminate shelling during this period, and have had to treat their wounds and injuries themselves.

SAC troops have set up surprise checkpoints to stop villagers and fine them when they go to Kawkaeik Town to buy food or even to the hospital. The villagers worry that the SAC will suspect them [of being affiliated with or doing tasks on behalf of the KNLA] and accuse them of buying food for the KNLA even when they are travelling to buy food for themselves.

At around 12:40 pm on October 14th 2021, SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)¹² #97 again conducted indiscriminate shelling in D--- village. A house in D--- village was badly damaged directly by the shelling, while several other houses in the village were damaged by artillery fragments. Four cows were also injured. On October 16th 2021, the SAC troops conducted indiscriminate shelling in D---, E--- and F--- villages. No casualties were reported in D--- and E--- villages; however, a villager's house in F--- village was hit by a mortar.

During the night of October 16th, SAC LIB #556 troops entered F--- village. On the morning of October 17th 2021, they [the SAC troops] forced one of the villagers to take them to D--- village using a short cut. The troops worried they would be attacked by the KNLA if they used the main road. Once they [the SAC troops] reached G--- Place [which is located between F--- and D--- villages], they released the villager and allowed him to go back to his village. The SAC troops stayed there [at G--- Place] until it was dark, and then they went to D--- village during the night of October 17th 2021.

On the night of October 17th 2021, SAC LIB #556 troops entered D--- village and went to the house of one of the villagers who had remained in the village to care for his livestock. His wife and children had already taken refuge in the local monastery [so they were no longer in the village]. The SAC troops went to the villager's barn [where he was caring for his livestock] and asked him, *"Why didn't you flee, [when] other people fled already?"* He replied, *"I cannot flee because I have to take care of my cows."* Then the SAC troops asked him if he had a household registration document and identification (ID) card. Later they told him, *"We will sleep here tonight and you cannot go anywhere. You have to sleep here, too".*

The next morning [October 18th 2021], the SAC troops asked this villager to be a navigator [and intended to use him as a human shield as well]. They said, *"We are leaving [D--- village] so you*

¹² An Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw) 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.

[will] show and lead the way [act as a navigator] for us". They ordered him to check the situation of the road for them [check for KNLA]. When they arrived at the monastery [near D--- village], they released him to go back [to his village]. While the SAC troops stayed at the monastery, there were some male villagers at the monastery. The SAC troops briefly tied the villagers up to prevent them from fleeing, but they later untied them [while the SAC troops stayed at the monastery]. Then they [the troops] left the monastery and went to the stream beside the monastery. The SAC troops then went to return to D--- village.

The SAC troops encountered KNLA soldiers while travelling back to D--- village. They [SAC troops] hid in the bushes beside the road in order to ambush the KNLA. Shortly thereafter, fighting broke out between the SAC and the KNLA near D--- village. There were two groups of SAC troops present. One group, which contained the soldiers that had previously travelled to the monastery, was located beside the road in the village. The other group, which had arrived at D--- from the surrounding area [but from the same battalion as the other group of SAC soldiers], was located on the hill beside the village. During the fighting, more SAC troops were injured than KNLA troops [exact numbers of casualties are not known]. The fighting ended after the KNLA retreated from the village. [Following the fighting] the SAC troops got angry and they stole from one of the villagers' shops. They then burned that shop and a car [in D--- village].

In D--- village on October 19th 2021, they [SAC troops] went to two houses close to the shop [that they had burned the previous day] and destroyed items in the houses. They searched the houses, using the excuse that the KNLA might be keeping things in villagers' homes, and questioned the homeowners, asking if they had household registration documents and ID cards. They also destroyed the villagers' cars and killed cows [KHRG does not have an exact number for the cars destroyed or cows killed]. The homeowners were all female villagers since the male villagers, even those who cared for the livestock, had already fled because they were afraid of being made to serve as forced porters.

The villagers from D---, F---, E---, and C--- villages had to flee. Moreover, because of indiscriminate shelling, many villagers' houses and other property such as motorbikes and cars were damaged or destroyed. Some of their livestock was also killed. The SAC troops also committed other crimes such as theft. They stole villagers' money, rice, plates, pans, clothes, oil, phones, watches, medicine and other items. They also robbed shops in these four villages; in one instance, they took 500,000 kyats [USD 280.90]¹³ worth of goods from one of the shops they looted.

KHRG received a further update on October 29th 2021. D--- villagers who temporarily took refuge at the [D--- village] monastery returned to their village on October 29th 2021. However, villagers do not trust that the SAC troops have completely left the area. SAC troops from LIB #556, which had divided into different groups, are still present [staying] in C--- village school, which is close to F--- village, and in H--- Monastery, which is close to D--- village. The SAC troops that had previously stopped at I--- village [another village in the area, and one from which villagers had fled due to the fighting] went back to [Kawkareik] Town on October 29th 2021. Villagers from other villages [other than D--- village] still have not returned to their villages and are currently afraid to do so [due to the ongoing presence of SAC troops and risk of further fighting].

¹³ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the December 15th 2021 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.56 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).



These photos were sent to KHRG by a local villager in D--- village, C--- village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District on October 12th 2021. The photo on the left shows a piece of a mortar found in D--- village, while the photo on the right shows the damage done to a local villager's house by SAC shelling. [Photos: local villager].

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

- ["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.khrg.org.

Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

