



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

July 19th 2022/ KHRG # 21-313-A6-I1

Taw Oo District Interview: Suspicious death of detainee in police custody in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, November 2021

This interview describes events that occurred in Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District in November 2021. On November 8th 2021, State Administration Council (SAC) soldiers and police arrested a 27-year-old Muslim villager, most likely due to a bomb explosion earlier that day in A--- village, Nat Ywar village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township. He was taken to Htantabin police station, and died while in custody. On November 9th, his family members were told to come to the police station. When they arrived at the police station, they found out that the arrested villager had died. The time and manner of his death are unknown.¹

Interview | B--- village, Lay Thit village tract², Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District (November 10th 2021)

Name: C---

Gender: Male

Age: 37

Religion: Islam

Ethnicity: Muslim

Family Status: Married

Occupation: Transporter

Could you please tell me your name and your full address?

My name is C--- and I live in D--- section, A--- village [Nat Ywar village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District].

How old are you?

I am 37 years old.

How is O---, the person who passed away, related to you? [O--- is the individual who died in police custody]

He is my cousin.

¹ The present document is based on information received in November 2021.. It was provided by a community member in Taw Oo 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 staff.

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

When or why was he arrested? What crime did he commit for being arrested [What crime was he suspected of committing]? What reason was he killed? Could you please provide the information fully?

He was arrested on Monday, on the same day that the bomb exploded at 8:00 am. That day is November 8th 2021. A bomb exploded between the village school and community office. After the explosion, he was arrested at 8:30 am as he was suspected [of being involved in the explosion]. He was told to follow them [State Administration Council (SAC)³ police and soldiers] for a moment.

Who came for him?

Soldiers and police from Htantabin [Town].

Do you know which battalion?

I do not know their battalion [number] but the police based at the Htantabin police station were also involved.

Were you there when he was arrested?

[If you mean the moment] when he was arrested, I was not there because it was at the time when I arrived in Zayet Gyi village [near A--- village]. I left [A--- village], and 10 minutes later he [O---] was arrested by the police [in A--- village]. At first, I was eating Burmese noodles and then left from that [Burmese noodle] shop [in A--- village] as I also had to transfer money [in Zayet Gyi village]. After I left, I heard that he had been arrested.

Had the bomb not exploded yet when you left?

It had already exploded. About 30 minutes after the bomb explosion, I went to Zayet Gyi village and then I heard that he had already been arrested when I arrived in Zayet Gyi village.

What are the reasons that he is suspected [of involvement with the explosion]? What kind of person is he? How did they come to arrest him?

He did not have any particular things [he was not involved in any bad activities] and he was not tied to any organisations as well. He just stayed on his own. Sometimes, he also engaged in having fun like drinking. Although he likes drinking, he was also involved in doing all kinds of social work such as helping people. He was included everywhere in doing that [social work]. I do not know the reason why he was arrested. I also do not know what section of the Penal Code was applied in order to arrest him.

Was he the only one arrested in D--- section [of A--- village]?

Yes, he was the only one arrested.

Could his parents go with him?

His parents followed him [went to the police station] but they were unable to meet with their son.

How did he die then?

How he died was that at 4:00 pm, a phone call came from Htantabin police station that they [the police] wanted to meet with his [O---'s] parents. Then, his relatives came later to the police station. However, his father was on the mountain [doing plantation work] when his son was arrested. [When his father learned that his son was arrested], his father came back [from the mountain] to go to the Htantabin police station [he was just coming back on that day but he could not go to the police station yet]. One of his [O---'s] older sisters and his uncle went to the

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 Burma/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.

police station. His uncle is my [the interviewee's] father's brother. When they arrived there at about 8:00 pm, a phone was rung [the interviewee got a phone call from his own father] and said that O--- had died. He [O---] was already at the morgue.

Is it that he was arrested on the 8th and died on the 9th?

Yes, he died on the 9th but I am not sure whether he passed away in the morning or later. We just learned [that he had died] when we [the other family members] arrived at the police station.

Could his parents take his body back home then?

[You mean] whether his parents could bring his body back or not? On the day when they [police] rang [his family members], I am not sure whether they [police] said they would return the body to [his family members] or not, or whether they [police] just phoned [his family members] to sign and release him. [The police did not say why they were calling, just told them to come to the police station]. We just learned that he had died after we [the other family members] arrived there.

Do you know anyone who is responsible for arrests in the police?

Yes, I know some of them. It is the [local] police station where they work.

Could you please tell me the names of the police officers?

[I heard that] the names of the [local] police officers are Yar Zar Gyi, and the other one is Lin Han Htun. [These local officers accompanied the SAC soldiers and police officers from Htantabin for the arrest.]

Do these police officers live in A--- village?

Yes, they were assigned to A--- police station. The other one, Lin Han Htun, married a A--- villager.

Have they been assigned to duty in A--- village, currently?

They have currently relocated; they were re-assigned to Htantabin police station.

Does he [O---] have any conflicts with anyone?

He does not have any conflicts. He only drinks [alcohol]. He does not do such kind of things [bad things/get in trouble].

O--- was arrested and he passed away the next day. How about you? Do you feel secure [after this incident]? How does O---'s family carry on?

O---'s parents are currently still at the mountain [only his father had previously come to the police station]. His mother does not even know that he has died yet. I am not sure whether she was informed or not. His father and sister already know about it. Currently, we have to avoid the situation [avoid drawing attention to ourselves]. I am not sure whether I will be arrested sooner or later but I have to stay away from that [he is worried that he will also be accused of involvement in the bomb explosion].

So, it is likely they will accuse you even though you did not commit any crime and were not involved in the explosion of the bomb, isn't it like that?

Exactly, it is like that. They came to arrest him because of the bomb explosion.

Do you know who was involved in the explosion of the bomb?

I do not know who was involved in the explosion of bomb.

What else do you want to say? You can say whatever you want to.

Even if I talk about this, they [unclear who he is referring to] will not know about it.

What I mean is, what do you want to say regarding this incident?

As a brother has died, various feelings affect me. It is hard for me to control my emotions because I am sad hearing about the death of my cousin. I cannot do anything, like go and help with his funeral as I also have had to flee.

In that case, it is not possible to bring back the body. Did they [SAC police and soldiers] bury the body by themselves?

For the burial, I am not sure who did it. I heard that he has already buried at Htantabin.

The brother who died is O---, right? How old was he?

He was 27 years old.

What was his address?

He lived just inside D--- section in A--- village.

Thank you for the interview.

Yes.

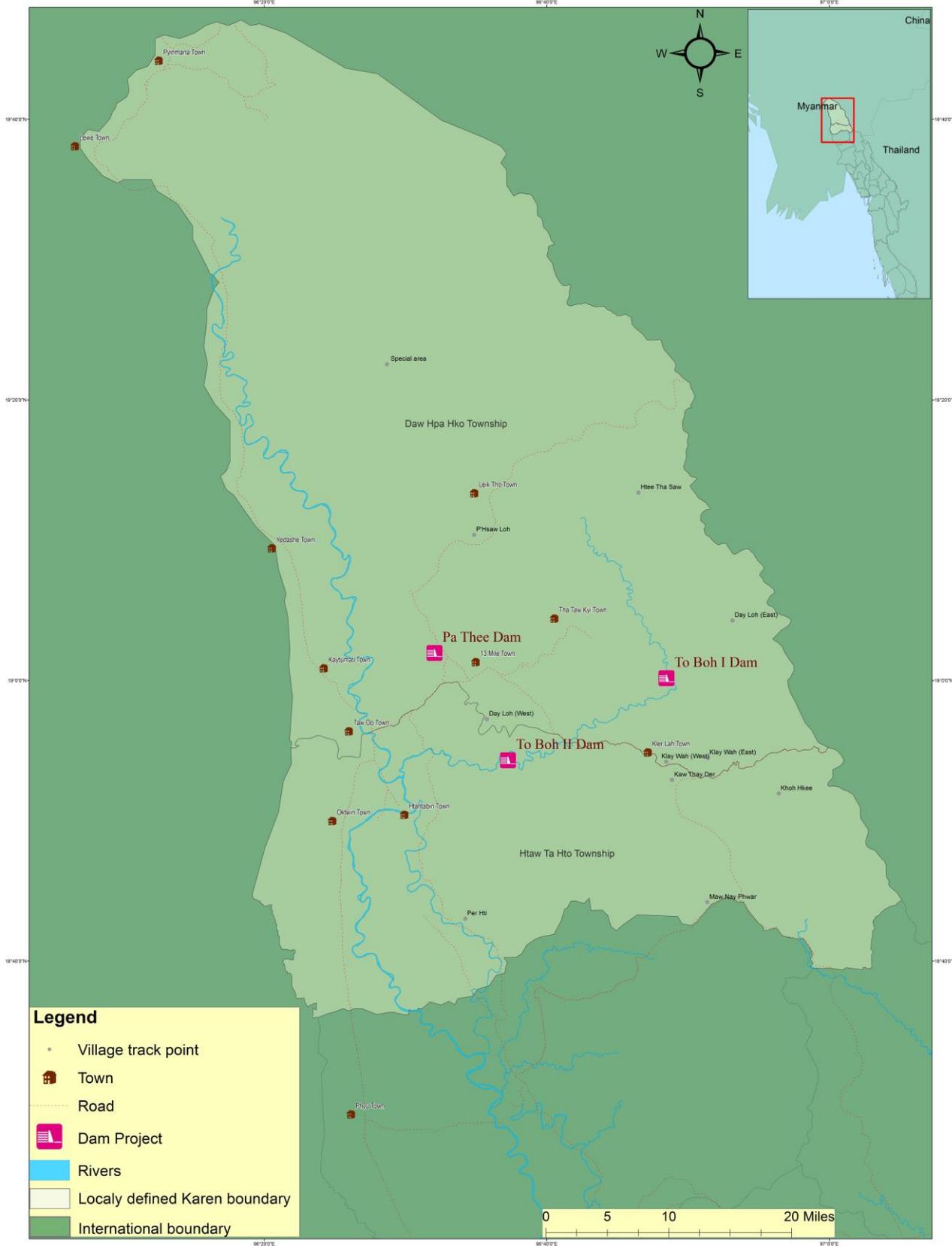
Further background reading on the security situation and human rights violations in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [*“Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC activities, March to April 2022”*](#), May 2022.
- [*“Taw Oo District Short Update: Killing, shelling, displacement, and the destruction of a COVID-19 screening checkpoint and villagers’ belongings by SAC soldiers, March 2022”*](#), March 2022.
- [*“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.
- [*“Taw Oo District Incident Report: Killing case in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, July 2021”*](#), December 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 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.khrq.org.

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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