



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

June 1st 2022 / KHRG #22-124-D1

Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: SAC troops arbitrarily detain seven villagers, March 2022

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Tha Htoo (Thaton) Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District in April 2022. On April 1st 2022, at about 9:30 am, State Administration Council (SAC) troops arrested seven villagers they accused of supporting resistance fighters, beating another villager in the process. On April 5th 2022, six of the arrested villagers were released after a local leader bribed their captors. However, they were forced to flee to Thailand because of death threats by the SAC soldiers. The seventh villager was not released until the first week of May 2022.¹

On March 29th and 31st 2022, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)² and People's Defence Force (PDF)³ fighters ambushed State Administration Council (SAC)⁴ troops from an unidentified artillery unit near H--- pond, L--- village, Sway Yaw Pya village tract⁵, Tha Htoo (Thaton) Township. On April 1st 2022, at about 8:00 am, SAC troops in two military trucks arrived at the scene, set up hidden observation posts, and also patrolled the vicinity of L--- village.

Saw G---, a 22-year-old villager from A--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, was in a nearby field with his parents, his cousin, and two of his friends. A villager from L--- village phoned his mother and informed her that the SAC troops were heading their way. However, the soldiers surrounded them before they could leave. The SAC soldiers asked them about the KNLA and PDF ambushes. They told the villagers that they must know the people who attacked them, since they live in this area. They also accused them of sheltering and helping PDF fighters in the village.

¹ The present document is based on information received in March 2022. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha Htoo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

² The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

³ 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 Burma (Myanmar), which then formalised the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

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 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.

⁵ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

The SAC troops briefly detained the villagers and made them lay on the ground, facedown. When Saw G--- told them that he did not know anything about [the ambushes], the SAC battalion commander hit his head three times with the grip of his pistol, causing him a minor injury. The SAC troops also threatened to burn down A--- village if the PDF attacks them again. There were about 12 to 13 SAC soldiers at the scene, and even more in the areas surrounding the field.

The SAC soldiers eventually arrested and took away Saw G---'s cousin and his friend. They then resumed patrolling the area, arresting four other villagers they found fishing at H--- pond, as well as another villager named Saw O--- [who was reportedly drunk at the time, and is possibly suffering from mental health issues]. Saw G---'s cousin lives in T--- village, and the other arrested villagers live in A--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract, K---village, Moe Kaung village tract, and I--- village, Don Won village tract. The SAC troops took the seven villagers away [on accusations of supporting the PDF], and confiscated three of their motorcycles.

The arrested villagers were:

1. Saw N--- (41 years old), from I--- village, Don Won village tract
2. Saw E--- (30 years old), from T--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract [Saw G---'s cousin]
3. Saw N--- (28 years old), from A--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract
4. Saw B--- (22 years old), from K--- village, Moe Kaung village tract
5. Saw Y--- (23 years old), from A--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract
6. Saw P--- (33 years old), from A--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract
7. Saw O--- (age unknown), from A--- village, Shwe Yaw Pya village tract

When Saw G--- arrived at his village with his parents, he informed the village tract administrator about the incident and told him that the SAC soldiers had asked for a two million kyats ransom per detained villager. However, the SAC troops did not disclose where the villagers would be taken. Family members went looking for their arrested relatives at Artillery Unit #9's camp, but could not find them there. They suspected that the villagers might have been taken to Artillery Unit #3. The location of the arrested civilians remained unknown [presumably for several hours], and [the] soldiers [who arrested the villagers] did not communicate further with the detainees' family members.

Later that day, the family members learned that the villagers had been arrested by the SAC artillery unit which is based at Wa Pa (Win Pa) army camp, Kyeik Kaw in Tha Htoo Town. On April 5th 2022, six of the arrested villagers were released with the help of a local leader [who paid an unknown amount to the SAC soldiers]. Only Saw O--- remained in custody because no one dared to ask for his release. Before they were freed, the SAC troops warned that they did not want to see the six villagers in their villages anymore, saying that they would kill them if they did. The threat prompted the released villagers to flee to Thailand out of fear. Saw O--- was eventually released from custody in the first week of May 2022. The SAC soldiers said that he was no longer of use to them and so released him.

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

- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Deliberate SAC shelling at religious event results in civilian deaths, injuries and property damage in Tha Htoo Township, March 2022”](#), April 2022.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Ongoing fighting in Bilin Township leads to more than 2,000 IDPs, as well as injury and property damage, December 21st 2021 to January 11th 2022”](#), March 2022.
- [“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.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes been the SAC and the KNLA, August 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.

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

