



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

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Dooplaya District Interview: 16-year-old boy killed by mortar explosion following SAC shelling, March 2022

This interview describes an incident that occurred in P'Loo Hpa Doh village, also known locally as P'Loo Gyi village, P'Loo village tract, Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District in March 2022. A 16-year-old boy was killed by a mortar explosion following State Administration Council (SAC) shelling while temporarily returning to his village during displacement. Thousands of villagers, including the victim and his family, were displaced by fighting in P'Loo Hpa Doh village in December 2021. The interview also covers air strikes and indiscriminate shelling in the village between January and April 2022, which resulted in the death of one villager and serious injury of another.¹

Interview | P'Loo Hpa Doh village, P'Loo village tract², Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District (March 2022)

Name: Naw M---

Gender: Female

Age: 24

Religion: N/A

Ethnicity: Karen

Family Status: Married

Occupation: N/A

What is your name, sister?

My name is Naw M---

How are you related to the boy who was killed by the explosion?

He is the son of my big brother.

Does he still have his parents [are his parents still alive]?

Yes, he still has parents but his parents are divorced.

Where are you living currently?

¹ The present document is based on information received in April 2022. 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 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.

I am now in Ler Khaw village [known as Ya Paw in Thai], Thailand.

Where were you when the fighting happened [in P'Loo Hpa Doh village in December 2021]?

When the fighting happened [between the State Administration Council (SAC)³ and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁴], I was in P'Loo Hpa Doh village and then I was displaced to Ler Khaw village [in Thailand] right now.

Do you remember the date of the incident [involving your nephew]?

I do not remember exactly. I think the incident was on March 19th 2022.

The incident took place in P'Loo Hpa Doh village, right?

Yes, the incident took place in P'Loo Hpa Doh village.

Do you remember the time when he [the victim] got injured?

He was injured at 1:00 in the afternoon.

Was he injured from the shelling or other causes?

I did not witness it myself so I am not sure whether he was injured when touching an unexploded mortar shell or during the shelling. When people heard the explosion, they went to check and saw him injured already.

Did anyone witness it?

No one witnessed how he was wounded.

Did fighting happen in the area at the time of the incident [the shelling that killed your nephew]?

On the day [that the victim was killed, March 19th 2022], fighting took place in the Myawaddy Town area and Lay Kay Kaw area [over five kilometres from P'Loo Hpa Doh village]. There was no fighting in P'Loo Hpa Doh village [only air strikes and indiscriminate shelling].

What was the name of your nephew who got injured by the explosion?

His name was Say Kyay Wah.

How old was he?

He was 16 years old.

Was he a student?

Yes. However, the school was shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and he was not able to attend school since then.

Was he single?

Yes.

Did he live in P'Loo Hpa Doh village?

Yes. When we were displaced [to the Thai border], he regularly went back to P'Loo Hpa Doh village and took care of the household property so that nothing got stolen. He stayed at the K'Chaw Wah Lay IDP site [just an informal, temporary set up for IDPs who fled there] near P'Loo Hpa Doh area, Kaw T'Ree Township and sometimes he came to stay with me in Ler Khaw village

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.

⁴ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

[Thailand]. The incident happened to him without any witnesses on the day he went back to visit P'Loo Hpa Doh village.

Were you displaced due to the fighting [in December 2021]?

Yes, we were displaced.

When did you start fleeing?

I started to flee on the day when the fighting broke out in P'Loo Hpa Doh village [on December 19th 2021].⁵

How long had you been displaced when the incident happened to your nephew?

The incident happened to him around three months after fleeing.

You mentioned that he [the victim] was displaced to K'Chaw Wah Lay village. Is that right?

Yes, his father lived in K'Chaw Wah Lay village. When we were displaced, he sometimes visited his father and sometimes he stayed with me. He [the victim] always stayed with me in P'Loo Hpa Doh village before we were displaced.

Did other villagers also flee?

Yes, all villagers [over 3,000 people in total]⁶ from P'Loo Hpa Doh village fled because the village was attacked [on December 19th 2021 by the SAC, followed by ongoing sporadic fighting with the KNLA and shelling]⁷. We ran during the firing [of mortar shells].

Do you often go back and check on your village since you fled?

Yes, we [villagers] go back and forth. At that time [since we fled in December 2021], we went back to the village every 15 days or once a month. I went back two or three times but now, I do not dare to go back anymore as the road is restricted [likely by the Karen National Union (KNU)⁸ or KNLA to protect villagers from the frequent shelling and fighting]. My nephew mostly stayed with me [in Thailand] and sometimes visited his father and also went back to P'Loo Hpa Doh village. On the day when he went back to the village, we were informed by phone that he was hit. He lost one hand and his whole face was destroyed.

Where was he injured?

His whole chest and his legs were destroyed. His whole face was terribly injured and he also lost one hand.

Was he still alive when people saw him?

He still had shortness of breath [was still breathing] when people saw him. One of his friends found him injured and called for help from nearby [KNLA] soldiers. When they [the soldiers] came to check, he had already passed away.

Who informed you that he passed away?

The people who were in P'Loo Hpa Doh village phoned me and said that he passed away.

Do you know which groups fired mortars into the village?

⁵ Date information comes from KHRG, "[Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations, July to December 2021](#)", March 2022.

⁶ Displacement number comes from KHRG, "[Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations, July to December 2021](#)", March 2022.

⁷ See also KHRG, "[Dooplaya District Situation Update: Fighting, indiscriminate shelling, displacement, landmine injuries, travel restrictions and torture, December 2021 to February 2022](#)", June 2022.

⁸ 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 Burma 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.

I am not sure which groups fired mortars into the village. [Several news sources have pointed to the SAC as being responsible for firing mortars into P'Loo Hpa Doh village on March 19th 2022 period.]⁹

What type of weapon was he hit by?

I heard that he was hit by a mortar shell. The air strikes happened two or three times by the time he went back [on the day he died].

Can you guess whether he was hit by air strikes or shelling?

I am not sure if it was an unexploded bomb dropped by fighter jets that exploded when he touched it, or if it was an unexploded mortar from shelling.

What did the local villagers and KNLA soldiers say about the incident?

They assumed that he was injured when he touched an unexploded mortar shell which was fired by Bamar soldiers [the SAC]. However, no one witnessed it. His father said that the fragments [of the exploded mortar] were also stuck in the motorbike that he took along with him.

Did the explosion also destroy his motorbike?

Yes, it hit the motorbike. The fragments hit the under part of the motorbike and the bike broke into a lot of small pieces.

Where was the incident location?

It was just in front of the house next to my house.

How about the house?

The house was not damaged by the explosion [that killed the victim]. The explosion was on the main road, which is a bit distant from the house.

Who took his corpse away [for burial]?

The ambulance took his corpse and he was cremated [as Buddhist practice] on the same day. He [his body] was not kept for a day as the situation was unstable. The fighting was constantly taking place [through the time of the interview].

Did you hear anything from the soldiers [any armed groups], that is, how they described the situation related to the incident involving your nephew?

After the incident, I did not hear anything but the soldiers tried to clear the shrapnel [from the exploded mortar shells or bombs].

Was it the KNLA soldiers who cleared it up?

Yes, the KNLA cleared it. I am not sure whether the shells fired were from Karen [KNLA] or Bamar soldiers [SAC]. Unexploded ordnance was cleared by Karen soldiers and the villagers were not allowed to return to their village often since then because it was risky.

How many shells landed in the village on that day?

There was one that exploded [immediately] and landed close to a house. Another mortar landed near another house, but it did not explode when it landed [and later hit the victim when it did explode]. We could not tell whether he [the boy] touched it or not [triggering the explosion].

Was there any damage to houses by the shelling?

The shelling damaged the rooftop of my house. The front wall of my sister's house was destroyed.

Were there any other houses damaged?

⁹ “[ဖလူးတိုက်ပွဲ ပြင်းထန်လာ၍ စစ်ဘေးရှောင် တစ်ထောင်ကျော် ထိုင်းဘက် ညာအချိန်ထွက်ပြေး ခိုလှုံနေရ](#)”, Karen Information Center, March 26th 2022.

Yes, the other houses were also damaged. Some houses' rooftops were wiped out and crumbled by the air strikes [three air strikes took place on March 19th].

You mentioned that all the villagers fled when the fighting happened, right?

Since we fled, we did not dare to go back as the Bamar soldiers [SAC] were in the village. But now, since the unexploded ordnance was cleared out and the Bamar soldiers [SAC] have gone, some villagers are going back to the village, especially the people who are single or do not have small kids. For families with small kids, they are not encouraged to return yet because if fighting happens, young kids/babies are more likely to get hurt.

When did they start returning to the village?

It has only been ten days since villagers started returning to the village. We did not dare to stay in the village when air strikes were being conducted constantly. It was already terrifying to hear the explosion sounds from a distance. I do not dare to go back and I cannot do anything about this. Also, I cannot practice farming [likely from her current displacement location].

How do you stay in the place you were displaced?

I am staying at a friend's house. I requested to stay temporarily at her home.

Who is with you there?

I just stay with my mother, one kid [one of my children] and two of my nephews. My child is just two years old. For my husband, he is serving on the frontline. My nephew's father has also been staying with me for a few days already.

Did you get to bring any of your belongings with you?

No, I did not get to bring anything. All the plates and cooking pots were broken. Even if I go back, I have no more belongings.

When was the last time you went back to check on your house?

It has been about 20 days already.

What damage did you find at your house?

The rooftop was damaged and all the plates and cooking pots were destroyed by the air strikes. All the [other] belongings in the house were looted and dismantled. Nothing is useable. I do not dare to go back home much. As no one has stayed in the village [since December 2021], I also feel afraid.

So the whole village might be isolated now.

The whole village has become very quiet and I'm also afraid of stepping on UXO [unexploded ordnance] as the leaves have covered up the ground surface. I'm afraid that risky things [landmines and UXO] have been planted.

What armed groups are operating in the P'Loo Hpa Doh village area?

The Karen armed groups are based in the upper part of the village and the SAC army is based in the lower part of the village.

When you say Karen armed groups, which groups are you referring to?

The Karen army base, which is close to my house, is General Zin Myint, Border Guard Force (BGF)¹⁰ [battalion number not identified], and toward the other side of the river is Column

¹⁰ 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.

Commander Bo¹¹ Sa Lone, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA (Benevolent))¹² Headquarter operations area #1.

Have there been any other incidents [injuries or casualties] similar to what happened to your nephew?

Yes, on another day [February 16th 2022], a man called P--- was hit by shrapnel [from a mortar shell] on his legs and his arm. He was seriously injured and both his legs broke.¹³ [P--- has since been discharged from the hospital.] A 40-year-old woman was killed by the indiscriminate shelling on January 3rd 2022 when she returned to her home in P'Loo Hpa Doh village.¹⁴ As far as I know, three people were hit and died [in P'Loo Hpa Doh village from January to April 2022], including my nephew. [The KHRG field researcher discovered that P--- survived his severe injuries, so only two villagers died between January and April].

How are you surviving for your living during displacement? What challenges are you facing?

The challenge is that I do not have any idea [about how to work here] so I struggle to earn a living. I just stay like this day by day. I do not have any work to get income.

Do you have any support from others?

No, we had a little money with us when we were displaced and we used this money for food. As we stay longer, it is gone now but we cannot do anything.

Where do you stay in Ler Khaw village?

I stay at the back of a village head's house. When I first arrived after fleeing, I stayed in the monastery. Some of the displaced people joined the refugee group [a group headed to the refugee camp] but for us, we did not dare to join [the refugee camp], so we chose to stay in the house [homes of friends or family].

Do you receive any humanitarian aid for IDPs when you are living in someone's house like that?

No, I do not receive it.

Would you like to express anything else related to the incident and your experiences?

I just want to say that I don't like to flee and stay in someone's home like this. I want to stay peacefully with my family in my village. I feel sad that we had to flee and even my nephew had to give up his life. While living in another village, it is hard for us to survive for a living. That's why I want to go back to my own place and stay in my own home peacefully. I wish that this fighting will be done soon.

¹¹ *Bo* is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

¹² In 1994, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) split from the KNLA over religious considerations. In 2010, the majority of DKBA troops transformed into BGFs, but one faction refused and changed its name to Democratic Karen Benevolent Army in 2012. Confusingly, there are currently 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 'Benevolent' DKBA signed the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement but the new 'Buddhist' DKBA splinter faction did not. The latter are still actively engaged in armed clashes with the Tatmadaw in multiple areas in Karen State.

¹³ Previously reported on KHRG's [Facebook](#) page in a post dated February 17th 2022.

¹⁴ For further information, see [စစ်ကောင်စီတပ်ပစ်လိုက်သည့် လက်နက်ကြီးကြောင့် နေရပ်ပြန် အမျိုးသမီးတစ်ဦး ကျည်ထိမှန်သေဆုံး](#), Karen Information Center (KIC), January 4th 2022.



This photo was taken on March 19th 2022 in P’Loo Hpa Doh village, P’Loo village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the injured boy who died from a mortar explosion following SAC shelling. He had returned to his village during displacement. *[Photo: Local villager]*

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

- [“Dooplaya District Incident Report: Killing of a civilian by unidentified assailant\(s\), May 2022”](#), August 2022.
- [“Dooplaya District Incident Report: SAC shot at villagers, resulting in the death of two villagers in Kaw T’Ree Township, April 2022”](#), August 2022.
- [“Dooplaya District Situation Update: Fighting, indiscriminate shelling, displacement, landmine injuries, travel restrictions and torture, December 2021 to February 2022”](#), June 2022.
- [“Dooplaya District Situation Update: Killing, fighting, indiscriminate shelling, air strikes and displacement, March 2022”](#), May 2022.

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.

Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

