



Situation Update

August 24th 2022 / KHRG # 22-161-S1

Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Shelling, displacement, threats, arrest, travel restrictions and telecommunication shutdowns in Ler Doh Soh Township, April to May 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Ler Doh Soh (Dawei) Township, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between April and May 2022. State Administration Council (SAC) troops fired mortars into civilian areas causing damage. SAC troops also threatened to burn down entire villages. This SAC activity forced villagers to displace. Villagers were also arrested. While two were released the same day, four others were taken to an army camp where they were tortured, with one villager being tortured to death. The three other villagers were transferred to an unknown location and are presumably still being detained. Furthermore, the SAC cut off phone and internet connections, so villagers could not easily communicate with others and find out what was happening in other areas. Villagers are in fear of shelling and air strikes and are mentally exhausted by the ongoing violence.¹

Shelling, threats and displacement

On April 26th 2022, the local People's Defence Force (PDF)² based in Htee Ler Klay (Da Thway Kyauk) area burned down a State Administration Council (SAC)³ police station near Pa Ka Yi village, Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh (Dawei) Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. That same day, in response, SAC troops based at Tha Byay Chaung army camp in Dawei Town indiscriminately fired [an unknown number of] mortar shells into Pa Ka Yi, Yay Waing, Anya Pya and Htee Ler Klay villages [that are located] to the east of the army camp in Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh Township. The SAC troops based at Tha Byay Chaung army camp are from Infantry

¹ The present document is based on information received in May 2022. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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 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 formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

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.

Battalion (IB)⁴ # 401, #402, and #267, and Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁵ #25, all under Military Operation Command (MOC)⁶ #8.

As a consequence of the shelling, two houses in Pa Ka Yi village were damaged, and some villagers' farms, plantations and fruit trees, including their betel nut trees, were damaged by the mortar explosions. All of the mortar shells that were fired exploded, so there are no unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the area. However, the SAC planted landmines beside Shay Mai (Si Pin Kaung) Road between Meh Chaung village, located in Htee Ler Klay area and Za Lon village [near Dawei Town], so villagers do not feel secure travelling along the road and working on their farms and plantations [near the road] for their livelihoods.

Moreover, SAC IB #402 threatened villagers who they met, [telling them] that they would burn down everything [in the villages] in the area to the east of the army camp [in Htee Ler Klay area].

Due to the shelling and threats, villagers, especially in the eastern part of Htee Ler Klay area [near Tha Byay Chaung army camp], including Pa Ka Yi, Yay Waing, A'Nya Pya, Mae Chaung and Htee Ler Klay villages, fled from their villages to other nearby villages, the monastery in U--- village, their relatives' villages, as well as to the forest and plantations. All women [including pregnant women], children and elders had to flee for their safety. Local PDF soldiers guarded IDPs on their way to seek refuge in other villages in order to ensure that they arrived safely. One of the villagers, U⁷ N---, from I--- village explained that villagers worry about their safety and the dangers that they face. U G--- from Y--- village also said that he worries for the future of the children in the village [including their education and livelihood].



These photos were taken on May 20th 2022 in Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photos show the temporary shelters set up by IDPs from Htee Ler Klay area when they fled to the forest due to fighting and shelling in April 2022. [Photos: KHRG]

On April 27th 2022, following the fighting, the SAC sent more soldiers from IB #267, LIB #25 and IB #401 (all under MOC #8) from Tha Byay Chaung army camp in Dawei Town to Htee Ler Klay

⁴ 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 A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. 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, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁶ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

⁷ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

area. [It takes approximately one day to travel between the two points by foot.] They divided their troops into two groups and marched on different roads to Htee Ler Klay area. The first group was IB #267, who left from Tha Byay Chaung army camp and went to Htee Ler Klay area on foot, along Yay Waing Road (which is unpaved). They arrived at Htee Ler Lay area the same day. However, they were attacked by the PDF on their way. [The location and details of the attack is unknown, but villagers nearby could hear the gunfire.]

The second SAC group, consisting of LIB #25 and LIB #4, left Tha Byay Chaung army camp [also on April 27th] and travelled along Myitta Road by truck and stopped at Za Lon village. They slept in Za Lon monastery in Za Lon village on the night of April 27th. During the night of April 27th 2022, they indiscriminately fired about 15 mortar shells into Htee Ler Klay area. [It is unknown whether it resulted in any damage to the village. Villagers were told in advance by other villagers that SAC soldiers were coming so they had already fled the village when the shelling began.]

On April 28th 2022, this group [LIB #25 and #4] divided themselves into two groups; one of the groups went to Htee Ler Klay area on foot along Zi Pin Kauk Road and the other group went to Htee Ler Klay area by truck along Myitta Road. They [both groups] threatened villagers they saw on the way, stating that they would burn down the villages [in the area] if they were attacked by the local PDF.



This photo was taken on May 20th 2022 in Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photo, taken at night, shows IDPs from Htee Ler Klay area who fled to a nearby village as a result of fighting and shelling. They had to rely on other villagers for food, water, shelter and clothes. [Photo: KHRG]

Then, on April 28th, all three SAC troops met at Mae Chaung village, Htee Ler Klay area and they set up a temporary army base at Mae Chaung monastery. They also set up temporary checkpoints along Myitta Road, between Dawei Town and Pa Ka Yi village, Htee Ler Klay area. Moreover, SAC soldiers in civilian clothes were also patrolling the villages. Soldiers checked the 'Wave Money' [money transfer agency] shop in Pa Ka Yi village in order to block funding to the PDF. As the SAC soldiers did not see any money transferred to the PDF, they did not do anything [harm] to civilians. [When transferring money to the PDF, villagers usually transfer larger sums of money in the form of cash. The SAC soldiers did not see a large amount of cash at the shop, so did not suspect that villagers were transferring money to the PDF.]

The SAC frequently use Myitta Road to send military reinforcements [to Htee Ler Klay area]. One of the villagers from Htee Ler Klay area, U N--- from I--- village, said, "SAC soldiers that are based in Mae Chaung monastery fired mortars in the direction of Pa Ka Yi and Htee Ler Klay villages. They should not fire mortars to[ward] civilian areas like that. They have to fire at the PDF. The SAC fired at the people, as they think people are their enemies. The main purpose of this update about the [local] situation is to let the SAC know that they should respect human rights."

As the SAC were operating in Htee Ler Klay area and perpetrating violence against civilians, on April 28th 2022, fighting broke out between the PDF and SAC in Mae Chaung village. Because the SAC were now based in the village [Mae Chaung monastery], fighting broke out in civilian

areas many times each day in multiple places in Htee Ler Klay area, through April 29th 2022 [thus, for two days straight].



These photos were taken on May 20th 2022 in Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. The photos show the temporary shelters of IDPs from Htee Ler Klay area. These shelters are located in plantations outside their villages. [Photos: KHRG]

On April 30th 2022, the SAC [unknown battalion number] under MOC #8 threatened villagers who they saw while they were travelling [between Htee Ler Klay and Dawei Town], including villagers from P’Kant, Htee Ler Klay and other villages in Htee Ler Klay area. They told villagers that they would come to burn down the villages and accused the villagers of supporting the PDF.

As fighting stopped on April 30th, the SAC withdrew their soldiers from the villages in Htee Ler Klay area on May 1st 2022, and the situation became calmer in the area.

On May 6th, as the fighting had stopped for five days, some villagers returned to their villages to check their houses and livestock. On May 9th 2022, all of the villagers returned to their villages. However, on May 10th 2022, the day after local villagers in Htee Ler Klay area returned to their villages, SAC soldiers [unknown battalion number] under MOC #8 from Tha Byay Chaung army camp, fired [an unknown number of] mortar shells into Htee Ler Klay area. Villagers had to flee for their lives again to other villages and to their hiding sites in the forest. [It is unknown which villages the mortars landed in and if there was any damage or casualties in those villages.]

On May 11th 2022 at 6:30 pm, the SAC [unknown battalion number] from Tha Byay Chaung army camp indiscriminately fired 15 mortars into Oo Yin Gyi village, Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh Township. Therefore, Oo Yin Gyi villagers had to flee from their village. Between May 12th and 17th 2022, villagers continually heard the sound of mortars being fired in Htee Ler Klay area. This was very terrifying. Villagers, especially children, felt very frightened.

On May 20th 2022, SAC soldiers from IB #401 based at Tha Byay Chaung army camp, went to Htee Ler Klay area; some of them went in trucks and some of them went on foot. The trucks were loaded with ammunition including mortar and machine guns. On this day, when they arrived at Htee Ler Klay area, they burned four houses [to the ground] in Mae Chaung village, Htee Ler Klay area and burned one house [to the ground] in Wa Gone village, K’Moh Thway area, Ler Doh Soh Township.

On approximately May 30th [exact date unconfirmed], some of the soldiers from SAC IB #401 travelled further [to other places], and villagers assumed that these SAC troops might go and attack the KNDO in other areas of KNU territory. After that, there was no fighting and shelling in Htee Ler Klay area, so villagers returned to their villages on May 30th 2022.

Need for international action

IDPs [from Ler Doh Soh Township] requested that KHRG inform international humanitarian organisations about the difficulties that they are facing. SAC troops blocked the road [going to Dawei Town] and prohibited the transportation of food over five sacks of rice [rice being the main food transported] and [all] medical supplies. As many villagers' farms and plantations are located beside the road, they could not work on their farms and plantations for their livelihoods. IDPs could only bring enough food for a short period of time [a few days]. IDPs are now facing high security risks, insufficient shelter when it rains, and lack of food and medicine in their hiding sites. The IDPs would like to go home, live in peace and in a secure environment. Villagers from Htee Ler Klay area, Ler Doh Soh Township, KNU Brigade 4 [Mergui-Tavoy District] expressed that they are afraid to go back to their villages due to indiscriminate shelling conducted by the SAC.

Villagers want Karen Information Centre (KIC) [and other media groups] to broadcast the human rights violations committed by the SAC in their area to make their voices heard, because the SAC should not fire mortars in civilian areas.

Arbitrary arrest and torture

On May 21st 2022, SAC IB #401 troops arrested six villagers from Htee Ler Klay village in Htee Ler Klay area, when the villagers returned to their villages to feed their livestock. At first, they arrested two villagers who were feeding their pigs. Another four villagers, who were running to the village monastery when they saw the SAC troops in the village, [were then also arrested]. Later that same day, they released two of the villagers. The other four villagers were kept among the soldiers. [According to an update] on June 24th 2022, some of the SAC soldiers took the other four villagers to Tha Byay Chaung army camp. These four villagers were tortured at the army camp, with one being tortured to death. [It cannot be confirmed whether the body was returned to the family.] The families were able to visit the detained villagers, while they were kept at this army camp. However, on an unknown date, the three villagers were transferred to a prison. Villagers do not know the location of the prison and are not able to visit them. Villagers do not know the reason that these villagers were arrested and detained in this manner.

Travel restrictions and cuts to telecommunication services

Since the coup, the situation has been getting worse. People cannot travel freely because roads are blocked by SAC authorities and people are often being questioned [by SAC authorities] when they travel. Moreover, starting from May 20th 2022, the SAC cut phone and internet connections in Ler Doh Soh Township. In particular, these connections were cut when the SAC conducted military operations and attacks. They began cutting phone and internet connections on May 20th 2022 in the eastern area of Ler Doh Soh Township. Affected villages in the eastern part of Ler Doh Soh Township are Yay Waing, Pa Ka Yi, A'Nya Hpya, Htee Ler Klay, Seik Chaung, Nyaung Chaung, Pa Hkaik, and Ya Ma Zu villages in Htee Ler Klay area; and Tha Yet Ngout, Leik Kyel Pyaung, Thin Kan Ton, Wa Kon, Taung Thon Lon, Kyauk Mel Taung, Shwe Chaung, Hindu Chaung, Hindar, Hindar Pyin and Yay Pu Wa villages in K'Moh Thway area.

Access to information and communication services are very important because people need to contact each other when anything [incidents] happens in their area and they need to inform their relatives [by phone or via the internet]. They also need to share and receive updated information from each other [about military activity in other villages]. If fighting happens, they can flee or escape from the danger in advance if they know ahead of time, [as they can estimate] where and when the SAC will approach their area. They also need these services to contact [people, including friends from other villagers] for [to share] food [between each other]. According to local villagers, people from Pyin Tha Taw, Tha Phyu Chaung, Gin Tha Inn, Myin Hka Baw, Nyaung Ton, Thit Ket Chaung and Htan Ta Lon villages in K'Moh Thway area, Ler Doh Soh Township also did not have access to phone or internet connections.

Due to phone and internet connections being cut while they were displaced, villagers from four villages (Pa Ka Yi, Yay Wine, A'Nya Pya and Htee Ler Klay villages) who fled from their villages on May 10th, and remained displaced until the end of May 2022, did not know whether other villagers or their houses were hit by the SAC shelling and whether villagers died or not due to the shelling. A grandmother from Htee Ler Klay area said, *"We don't know whether any villager from other villages died or not from the SAC shelling"*.

Between May 17th and 19th 2022, the phone and internet connection was restored in Htee Ler Klay and K'Moh Thway areas. However, on May 19th 2022, at 10:00 pm the internet and phone connection was cut off again. The internet [connection] was restored again at 1:00 am on May 20th. Then, it was cut off again in the afternoon. Between May 21st and 23rd 2022, the internet was completely cut off. Local villagers were really worried that the SAC would conduct air strikes when the phone and internet connection was cut. [The SAC frequently cuts off the internet in order to restrict communication between members of the opposition during air strikes and fighting.] It was cut off in a KNU-controlled area of Brigade 4 [Mergui-Tavoy District]. Villagers wonder and fear when the SAC will fire mortars. Villagers are mentally exhausted. They cannot live in peace.

Shelling and a lack of communication services were the main challenges for civilians [in this reporting period] and they were frustrated with the situation. The situation was very terrifying. Villagers who live near the main road [between Htee Ler Klay area and Dawei Town] were afraid to stay in their houses because they were worried that they would be arrested to be used as porters and would be tortured by the SAC when the SAC were operating on the road. They [villagers] went to stay in the village monastery and their relatives' houses nearby.

Further background reading on the human rights situation in Mergui-Tavoy District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["*Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Fighting and displacement, property damage, deaths caused by landmine explosion, travel restrictions, and the COVID-19 situation, December 2021 to February 2022*"](#), June 2022.
- ["*Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: SAC militia shoots teenage villager, CDM and protester protection, SAC troop movement, arbitrary taxation and livelihood, healthcare and education challenges, March 2021*"](#), January 2022.
- ["*Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops \(March to June 2021\)*"](#), September 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.khrg.org

Mergui-Tavoy (Tanintharyi) District

