



# Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Situation Update

July 21<sup>st</sup> 2022 / KHRG # 22-188-S1

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## Mu Traw District Situation Update: SAC shelling, displacement of villagers, livelihood challenges, healthcare and education situation, and landmine incidents, April to May 2022

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District during the period between April and May 2022. As a result of State Administration Council (SAC) shelling, a villager's house and other property, including a rice barn and a rice mill, were destroyed. This constant shelling created fear and resulted in the displacement of villagers. Villagers in the area have also been facing livelihood challenges as they have been afraid to tend their crops. Villagers also do not dare to use light at night these days because they are afraid that their place will be shelled or bombed if they are seen by SAC drones. Although Karen Education and Cultural Department (KECD) schools have already reopened in Bu Tho Township, villagers fear that the schools will be bombed or shelled by the SAC. Villagers, including those who have been displaced, face difficulty accessing medical care. The use of landmines by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) has resulted in multiple landmine incidents, including the death of one villager and injury to another.<sup>1</sup>*

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### State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>2</sup> shelling

In order to move more freely from one place to another in the area of Bu Tho Township, SAC troops have been using both big and small weapons [mortars and guns] to frighten civilians as well as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>3</sup>. On April 28<sup>th</sup> 2022, SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>4</sup> #407 which is under Military Operations Command (MOC)<sup>5</sup> #8 and led by

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in May 2022. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

Battalion Commander Zaw Min Htaik, launched [an unknown number of] 81 mm mortars into Htee Ber Hka Hta village, Meh Klaw village tract<sup>6</sup>, Bu Tho Township. As a result of this shelling, the house of a villager named Saw<sup>7</sup> A--- was burned. Almost everything inside the house was destroyed as well.

Again, on April 29<sup>th</sup> 2022, the same LIB [LIB #407] fired [an unknown number of] 81 mm mortars into Meh Nyoo Hta village [Meh Nyoo village tract, Bu Tho Township], destroying a rice barn and a rice milling machine. The owner of the property that was destroyed is Saw B---.

On May 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, SAC troops based in Ku Seik, Ma Htaw village tract, fired [an unknown number of] 81 mm mortars into Day Law Poo village [Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township], killing one pig and three chickens. The owner of the pig that was killed is Saw C--- and the owner of the chickens is still unknown.

During the period between April and May 2022, SAC troops constantly shelled mortars into and near villages [in Bu Tho Township], causing fear in mothers and children. Some children would shake and their hands and legs would become cold whenever they heard the sound of mortar shelling, gunfire, and military aircraft.

SAC troops have not only used weapons [mortars and guns] but also used military aircraft [in their offensives], therefore, villagers have constantly lived in fear and worry since the military coup.

### **Displacement of villagers and livelihood challenges**

There are 11 village tracts in total in Bu Tho Township. During the period between April and May 2022, villagers who live in villages from three of the village tracts, Meh Klaw, Meh Nyoo, and Meh Hkuh, faced challenges as they had to flee and seek refuge in forests and along riverbanks. Although the situation in villages in other village tracts was still okay [not as critical], villagers from other villages have also lived in fear and have had to constantly stay alert.

Since January 2022, villagers have been facing difficulties carrying out their livelihood activities because of the SAC military. [In the current reporting period, villagers continue to face difficulties.] Some of the villagers no longer dare to go and work on their farms because their farms are located near SAC army camps. Some villagers chose places that are far from SAC army camps for their cultivation but they are still afraid of SAC indiscriminate mortar shelling and air strikes.

The SAC military also uses drones these days to take pictures of the places where villagers are hiding. Villagers are afraid to use lights at night these days because they are worried that they will be seen by SAC drones and thus, will be bombed or fired at. As a result of the livelihood challenges that villagers have been going through, villagers might face food issues in 2022-2023.

### **Education and healthcare situation**

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

<sup>7</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

Children have not been able to study properly due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and SAC military activities since the military coup. Karen Education and Cultural Department (KECD)<sup>8</sup> schools in Bu Tho Township have also reopened [since June 2022] but villagers are afraid that they will be shelled or bombed by SAC military aircrafts. As a result, we cannot say that children from those areas have freedom to study.

The situation of health care varies from one village to another [in Bu Tho Township]. Since some villages are located near the local clinic, it is easier for the people from those villages to go and get medical treatment. For the villagers who live in villages that are located very far from the clinic, it is difficult for them to receive medical treatment. Due to the SAC military activities in the area [Bu Tho Township] since the military coup, villagers from many villages have fled to the forest. These displaced villagers, especially pregnant women and women with newborn babies, are really in need of medical care.

### Landmine incidents

[According to the community member preparing this report,] soldiers from the KNLA and the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)<sup>9</sup> have been trying their best to protect villagers. One of the ways that KNLA and KNDO soldiers protect their territory and villagers is by using landmines. However, the use of landmines has created problems because villagers have often been the victims of landmine explosions. In March 2022, landmine incidents occurred twice in Bu Tho Township. In both cases, villagers stepped on landmines [planted by KNLA soldiers]. One of these villagers, a 46-year-old married man from D--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, died while he was receiving treatment at the SAC military hospital in Hpapun Town. The victim of the other landmine explosion is Naw E---, a 47-year-old married female villager from F---village, Meh Klaw village tract. She stepped on the landmine while she was on her way to pick vegetables from one of her friends' vegetablefarm. The incident happened around 9:00 am between Way Moh and Way Hsar villages in Meh Klaw village tract. The explosion injured her in the chest. She was admitted to the Wah Hka Der clinic in KNLA Battalion #102 area, Dwe Lo Township [Mu Traw District]. [Update from July 14<sup>th</sup> 2022: Naw E-- has already recovered from her injuries, and was released from the clinic.]

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

- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: Arrests, threats and physical assault of villagers, mortar shelling, air strikes and a landmine incident in Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, December 2021 to March 2022"](#), July 2022.
- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: SAC air strikes and indiscriminate shelling into villages in Dwe Lo Township kill three and injure at least 14 civilians, January to February 2022"](#), July 2022.
- ["Mu Traw District Short Update: SAC troops fired mortars into a village, killing seven villagers and injuring four, March 2022"](#), March 2022.

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<sup>8</sup> The Karen Education and Culture Department is the education department of the Karen National Union. Its main goals are to provide mother tongue education services to rural Karen populations in Southeast Burma, as well as to preserve the Karen language, culture and history. Despite being an important education provider in the region, it is not officially recognised by the Burma/Myanmar government.

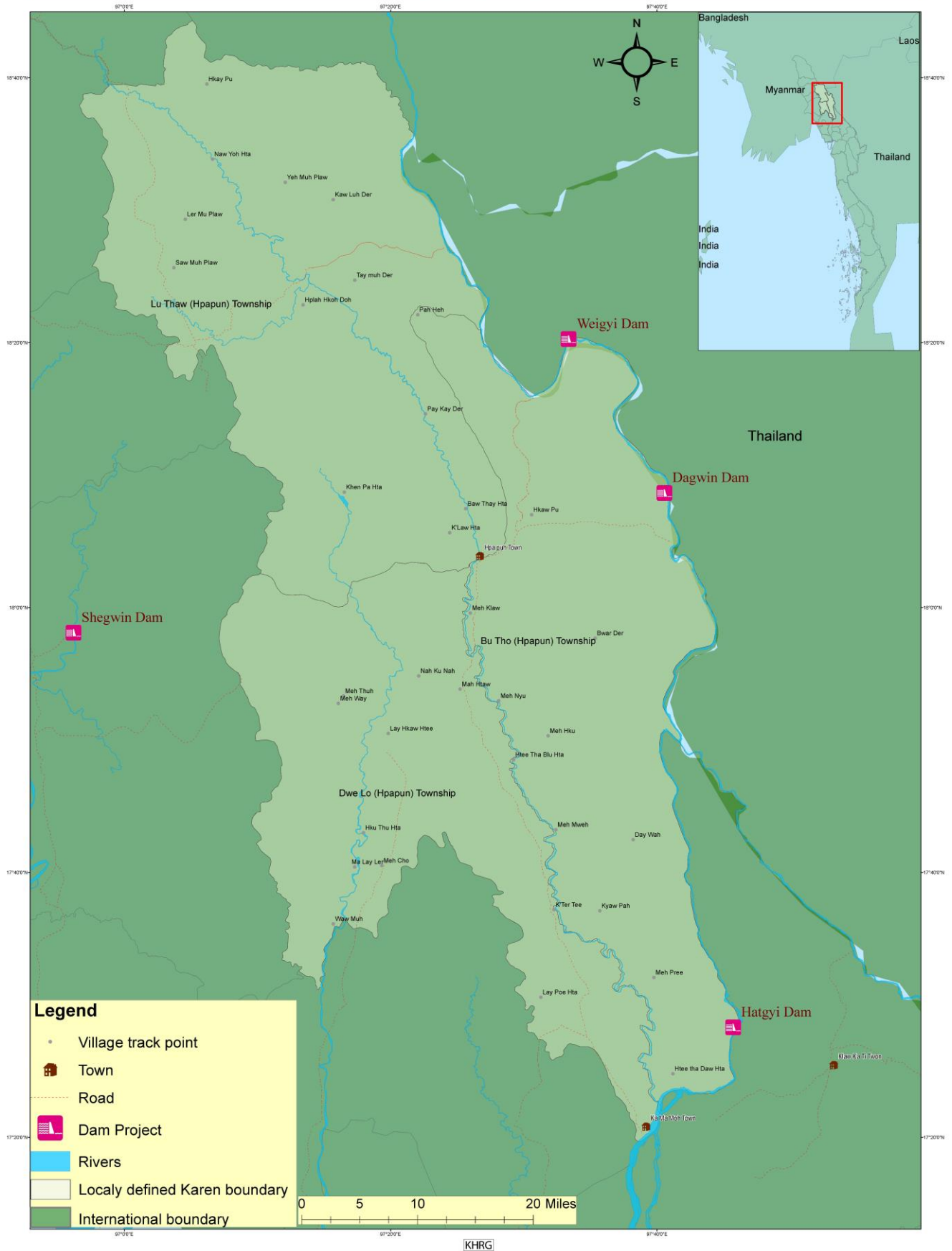
<sup>9</sup> The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: A villager died due to a landmine explosion in Bu Tho Township, January 2022"](#), February 2022.
- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: Torture of three villagers in Dwe Lo Township by an SAC officer, August 2021"](#), January 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](http://www.khrq.org).

# Mutraw (Hpapun) District



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