



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

August 29th 2022 / KHRG # 22-199+183-S1

Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: SAC air strikes, shelling and fighting, displacement, insecurity, and livelihood, education and healthcare challenges in Ler Doh Township, February to May 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District between February and May 2022, including air strikes, fighting, indiscriminate shelling, displacement and injury. It also describes the livelihood, education and healthcare challenges faced by villagers due to State Administration Council (SAC) activity. From late February 2022, SAC air forces increasingly conducted reconnaissance missions in the area. This was followed by air strikes, fighting and indiscriminate shelling into civilian areas in Ler Doh Township. Due to increased SAC military operations, the armed conflict escalated among armed groups from March to May, resulting in displacement and obstacles to earning a livelihood for villagers. Access to schooling and health care has also become a big challenge for local civilians in Ler Doh Township.¹

Introduction

This situation update describes incidents that occurred in Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District. The information was collected from February 1st 2022 to May 27th 2022. It describes [State Administration Council (SAC)²] aircraft activity, shelling and fighting, and challenges for villagers in terms of livelihood, education, and health care.

SAC air strikes and aircraft activity

At the beginning of February 2022, aircraft activity increased in our [the researcher's] area [Ler Doh Township]. On February 22nd 2022, two aircraft from the SAC flew over Kheh Der village tract³, Ler Doh Township. The aircraft flew close to the ground and conducted reconnaissance over Kheh Der village tract for about 10 minutes. The type of aircraft that was used could not be

¹ The present document is based on information received in May 2022. It was provided by a community member in Kler Lwee Htoo 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 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.

³ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

seen by villagers. At 5:00 pm, some villagers in Kheh Der village tract moved out of their villages [to their farm huts outside of the village]. While displaced, some villagers would return to their village during the day to check their livestock and return to their farm huts in the evening.

On March 19th 2022, at 2:00 am, SAC aircraft conducted air strikes around [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁴] Battalion #9 army camp which is situated close to Kwee Lah village, Kwee Lah village tract, Ler Doh Township. [They dropped two bombs. There were no casualties.] After that, almost all the villagers in Ler Doh Township became displaced and as of May 2022, some had still not returned to their villages.⁵

On May 12th 2022, at around 2:00 pm, an SAC unit [unknown battalion number] in Ler Doh Township sent one of their drones, which dropped [an unknown number of] bombs in Ain Net village, Ain Net village tract, Ler Doh Township. The SAC also conducted ground attacks using guns. According to a villager, a monastery was damaged and a child was injured from the attacks.

SAC shelling, fighting and displacement

On May 11th 2022, at about 5:30 pm, troops from the Burma army [SAC] Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁶ #20, #57 and #350, all led by Deputy Battalion Commander Nada Aung, encountered local KNLA armed forces. Then, fighting broke out at a farm known as Ku Done, located between P'Reh Loh River, near Lay Pay Weh village, Lay Pay Weh village tract, Ler Doh Township. During the fighting, the SAC fired six mortar shells into Lay Pay Weh village; five of the mortar shells exploded and one mortar did not explode. This unexploded mortar shell remained in the village. [Villagers knew that six rounds of mortars were fired and that one did not explode. However, it was raining so the ground became wet and soft, and the unexploded mortar sunk into the ground and could not be found.]



These photos were taken on May 16th 2022 near Lay Pay Weh village, Lay Pay Weh village tract, Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The photos show the crater from an explosion of a mortar shell that was fired by the SAC during fighting with the KNLA on May 11th 2022. [Photos: KHRG]

On May 12th, fighting also broke out beside Lay Pay Weh village. Troops from SAC LIB #20, Infantry Battalion (IB)⁷ #57 and IB #350 indiscriminately fired [an unknown number of] mortars into Lay Pay Weh village tract, with one landing close to Lay Pay Weh village.

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

⁵ See also, KHRG, "[Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: SAC airstrikes destroyed two houses and resulted in the displacement of villagers in Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee townships, March to April 2022](#)", June 2022.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

Additionally, at 8:00 am on May 17th 2022, the same troops [SAC LIB #20, IB #57 and IB #350] returned to [Lay Pay Weh] village. As a result, the remaining villagers fled and many villagers [who had been displaced on May 11th and had already returned to their village] fled again. Now, the Burma army [SAC] soldiers have taken position [in the village], camping and patrolling around the village, so villagers who remain in the village do not dare to leave their houses and are living in fear.

As a result of the armed conflict and indiscriminate shelling by SAC soldiers, most Lay Pay Weh villagers had to flee from their village during the month of May and took refuge in a safer place in nearby forests, farming huts and villages. Some fled to their relatives' houses in cities and towns, including Nyaunglebin and Pin S'Lone. Before displacing, some villages had prepared their farm huts with supplies in case they had to displace. Currently (as of May 2022), there are about 3,012 villagers, or 645 households, from Lay Pay Weh village who are displaced. There were only a few elders who remained in the village. Most villagers returned to the village when the situation became calmer in late May. [In June, villagers had to displace again to the Thai-Burma border.]

Villagers were worried and scared [due to the fighting and shelling]. Even though it was their [the villagers'] time to prepare for seasonal farming, they could not start and they felt insecure going to their farms. The villagers [from Lay Pay Weh village] were not able to work in their rice paddy fields, even though the time for ploughing and growing [planting] crops had come. Villagers also expressed that if the fighting continued [fighting also happened in areas where they had to displace], they would not know where to flee next.

Furthermore, on May 21st 2022, the combined forces of SAC LIB #35, LIB #439, IB #60 and the Pyu Saw Htee⁸ occupied C--- monastery [in C--- village, Ain Net village tract, Ler Doh Township] and were attacked by the KNLA. During the attack, the Burma army [SAC] indiscriminately fired [an unknown number of] mortars directly towards Theh Koh village, and T'Ray Shee Law village in Ain Net village tract, Ler Doh Township. Saw⁹ A--- [16 years old], Saw B--- [38 years old] and some livestock [cows] were injured. Buildings were also damaged.

Insecurity and livelihood challenges

The SAC's air and ground attacks from February to May 2022 created many difficulties for villagers [in Ler Doh Township]. Rural villagers in mountainous areas had to displace to the forest to avoid air strikes. As of May 2022, some villagers still do not feel secure returning to their village.

Due to the Burma army [SAC] entering, occupying and patrolling the entrance of villages and monasteries, villagers in the plains areas [of Ler Doh Township] faced problems and obstacles. SAC activity made them concerned and fearful about travelling, [especially] if fighting happened. Moreover, villagers are concerned about their livelihoods. They worry that if fighting breaks out when they are in their workplace [on their farms or plantation fields], they could be affected by the fighting. Therefore, SAC activity brought challenges for villagers because they could not carry out their livelihoods.

Education

⁸ The first Pyu Saw Htee groups were officially formed in mid-May 2021 in response to the National Unity Government's call for the formalisation of a People's Defence Force to resist the military regime following the 2021 military coup. The Pyu Saw Htee is made up of military veterans and Buddhist ultranationalist pro-military supporters whose aim is to counter and control opposition to the military regime.

⁹ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

After the military seized power in February 2021, students who attended school in villages such as F---, G---, and H--- villages, Ain Net village tract, in Ler Doh Township had to reschedule their exams, as well as conduct school closing ceremonies in the forest, in order to complete the 2021-22 academic year. Standard [Grade] 8, 9 and 12 students [from these villages] were supposed to take a final examination during March 2022. However, due to air strikes at the time, in Ler Doh Township, Standard 8 and Standard 9 students could not continue with their exams because their parents did not feel secure allowing their children to go to school. [These students' exams were scheduled to happen when air strikes were taking place, most likely those that took place on March 19th. Many of those students ended up having to reschedule the exams and take them in the forest at a later date. Students in other grades were able to take their exams prior to the air strikes.]

Furthermore, in May 2022, with the ongoing military coup, children and young adults did not get to attend school, so villagers [from E--- village, Ain Net village tract, Ler Doh Township] set up a self-funded school. According to them [E--- villagers], the children and teenagers are behind in their education [due to the coup], so villagers [local Karen authorities and villagers] came together to establish this school, with over 300 students and 15 teachers. As it is a very new school, it requires a lot of support.

Health care

With the increase in Burma military [SAC] activities, many villagers [from Ler Doh Township] who displaced to their hill farms and plantation fields have now experienced sickness including malaria and fever.

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

- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: SAC airstrikes destroyed two houses and resulted in the displacement of villagers in Ler Doh and Hsaw Htee townships, March to April 2022"](#), June 2022.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: Violation of the right to information, travel restrictions, torture, increased SAC activities and displacement in Ler Doh and Moo Townships, August 2021 to February 2022"](#), April 2022.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: SAC troops fired mortars into a village, injuring three villagers, December 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.

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District



KHRG