



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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**Interview**

December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022 / KHRG # 22-203-A1-I1

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**Dooplaya District Interview: SAC air strikes damaged buildings in Thay Baw Boh village, Kaw T'Ree Township, May 2022**

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*This interview describes events that occurred in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District in May 2022, including air strikes and shelling, which resulted in the destruction of local community buildings and displacement.<sup>1</sup>*

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**Interview | Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract<sup>2</sup>, Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District (May 2022)**

**Name:** Saw<sup>3</sup> A---

**Gender:** Male

**Age:** N/A

**Religion:** Christian

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Family Status:** Married

**Occupation:** Pastor

**Could you please introduce yourself to me? What is your name? Where are you from?**

My name is Saw A---. I am a pastor. I live in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District.

**What is your position in the village?**

My position in the village is secretary of the school committee.

**Could you please tell me as much information as you know about the air strikes [on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022]?**

When the air strikes were conducted, I was in Meh K'Neh village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township but my wife was here in Thay Baw Boh village. The air strikes began between 9 am and 10 am on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022. I knew that there was an aircraft doing reconnaissance on

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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 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.

<sup>2</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>3</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

the targets of the air strikes; and three aircraft conducting the air strikes. The air strikes were conducted almost 20 times [20 separate attacks of gunfire and/or bombs]. [The interviewee heard this information from others as he was not in Thay Baw Boh at the time. It is unclear how the number of aircraft involved was determined.]

**What type of aircraft conducted the air strikes?**

It was fighter jets. All four aircraft were fighter jets, including the aircraft that conducted reconnaissance.

**Were three aircraft conducting air strikes?**

Yes, three were conducting air strikes and one was determining the target for the air strikes.

**As you mentioned, the air strikes were conducted almost 20 times. How many days did it take to carry out the air strikes?**

The air strikes were conducted on just one day [May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022] at 9 am and ended at 3 pm.

**Do you know the battalion number of the SAC [State Administration Council]<sup>4, 5</sup> battalion that conducted the air strikes?**

I do not know about that.

**Can you please tell me a bit regarding the property damaged in the village?**

No villagers were injured but some houses around the Bamar<sup>6</sup> [SAC] military outpost were damaged. There were about seven or eight houses damaged. The monastery was also damaged by the gunfire [from the fighter jets], not [bombs from] the air strikes. Our church was hit by the air strikes. As we know exactly, three bombs [from the fighter jets] hit our church [the total number of bombs dropped that day is unknown]. The church community hall was hit by one bomb but plenty of gunfire hit its walls. Mirrors, doors, ladders [stairs], and instruments [musical equipment] such as an amplifier, piano, drum, and loudspeaker were damaged. The piano cannot be used anymore. The loudspeaker could probably be fixed and used again. We'll just keep the damaged instruments as a memory [of the church property we had].

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<sup>4</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>5</sup> The term most commonly used in referring to Burma/Myanmar's armed forces is Tatmadaw. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Burma, Burma's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Burma military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas

<sup>6</sup> The majority ethnic group in Burma/Myanmar, also known as ethnic Burmese or Burman.



This photo was taken on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022 in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the electronic piano damaged by the air strikes. *[Photo: Local villager]*

**As you mentioned gunfire, was it from the fighter jets or guns?**

It was from the fighter jets. The fighter jets used both machine guns and air strikes [bombs].

**What kind of bombs did the fighter jets use?**

The bombs which were dropped by the fighter jets were similar to RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] shells but they were a bit bigger and longer. The shell was made from metal.



This photo was taken on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022 in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the exploded shrapnel from the air strikes. *[Photo: Local villager]*

**What is the cost [value] of the damage to the instruments?**

We bought the piano for 35,000 baht [USD 964.72].<sup>7</sup> The drum was 17,000 baht [USD 468.58]. The drum was hit a bit. We can use it again if we fix it.

**How about the amplifier?**

The amplifier was not hit by the air strike shrapnel. It was just hit by the falling of timber [from the building] so it was not completely broken. It just got flattened a bit. One guitar was not hit by the fallen timber or the shelling fragments. We can use some of the instruments such as the electric guitar and amplifier.

**Have the damaged parts of the church and hall been fixed?**

We have not fixed them yet. We are waiting for the situation now [for the attacks to reduce]. When the situation gets better, we will fix it. As I have checked, if we repair both the [church community] hall and the church, it will cost not less than 500,000 [baht (USD 13,781.70)]. It cost us 1,280,000 baht [USD 35,281.15] when we built the church.

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<sup>7</sup> All conversion estimates for the baht in this report are based on the August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022 official market rate of 1 baht to USD 0.027 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/thb-to-usd-rate>).





These photos were taken on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022 in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The four photos show the damage to the church caused by the air strikes, including the stairs (top left and right), roof (bottom left), and banister (bottom right). *[Photos: Local villager]*

**Was anyone in the village displaced?**

During the incident, there were some villagers who were displaced. After the Bamar [SAC] military camp in Thay Baw Boh [village] was occupied [by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>8</sup> on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022]<sup>9</sup>, every villager was displaced. Now [as of June 1<sup>st</sup> 2022], 75 per cent of villagers have returned to the village.

**From your perspective, why were the air strikes launched upon Thay Baw Boh village?**

From my perspective, the air strikes were conducted so that their [the SAC's] soldiers in the Thay Baw Boh army camp would be able to escape from attack [by the KNLA].

**Which side [of the village] is the army camp located in?**

The Bamar [SAC] army camp is located right in front of the church.

**Do you know the battalion number of that SAC camp?**

No, I do not know it.

**What did you think when the SAC camp in the village was occupied [by the KNLA]?**

What I mean [think] is that, the soldiers [the SAC] from this army camp always threatened villagers by firing guns and carrying out indiscriminate shelling in and around the livelihood areas and the village since December 2021. Because of that, our people's combined forces

<sup>8</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>9</sup> Information taken from a [Cobra Column Facebook post](#) dated May 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, last accessed August 9<sup>th</sup> 2022.

[KNLA and Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)<sup>10</sup>] were trying to occupy this army camp. We are happy about this, but even with this [SAC] army camp gone [taken], we still have to live in fear of attacks from the air.

**When saying “the army camp is gone”, do you mean that they [the SAC] withdrew their soldiers?**

It is not that they withdrew their soldiers. During the fighting, they [the SAC] had around 70 soldiers in the army camp. According to the frontline [KNLA] soldiers who occupied this army base, there were six SAC soldiers who died in the fighting and seven who were captured alive. [There has been no update on what happened to the captured SAC soldiers]. Most of the other soldiers fled to escape. The KNLA and KNDO soldiers saw when they fled and tried to chase them but they could not make it [catch the soldiers]. I would say that they [the SAC soldiers] escaped; some crossed the Moei River to Thailand and some fled to their comrades [in other units]. Then, some fled toward Aoo Kray Hta village [where an SAC army camp is located].

**How long has the [SAC] army camp been based in Thay Baw Boh?**

This army camp has been based in Thay Baw Boh [village] since 2010.

**Since this army camp has existed since 2010, I would like to know the relationship between Thay Baw Boh villagers and the SAC soldiers.**

Before the coup, the relationship was good. There is no more peace, unity and love in our relationship since the fighting started. As they [the SAC] have a lack of trust, they carry out pressure and threats [put pressure on us and make threats].

**As you mentioned previously that eight houses were damaged, were the houses damaged by the air strikes or ground shelling?**

The houses were not damaged by shelling. As I mentioned to you earlier, the houses were shot by Oerlikon [machine guns on the fighter jets]. The church was hit by both Oerlikon [gunfire] and three bombs [dropped by fighter jets], the hall was hit by one of the fighter jet bombs. Altogether, four bombs hit the church and hall.



These photos were taken on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2022 in Thay Baw Boh village, Thay Baw Boh village tract, Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photos show the damage to the community hall caused by the air strikes. [Photos: Local villager]

**Have the displaced villagers returned to the village?**

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<sup>10</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.

Yes, some have returned and are living in the village now. But, we have not started to practice farming for our livelihood again. Seventy-five per cent of displaced villagers have returned to the village.

**How is the security in Thay Baw Boh currently?**

For the security situation, our brothers [KNLA, KNDO] who are based in this area are taking care of our security. They have set the defensive position [are taking protection measures, for instance, by occupying the SAC's army camp] probably for our civilians to live peacefully and are taking full responsibility for the security issue [the protection of civilians].

**How many households and people are there in Thay Baw Boh?**

Before there were 236 households but I do not remember the number of people in the village.

**What is your perspective as a pastor in seeing the damage [to the church, hall and houses] in the village from the SAC air strikes?**

I feel bad in seeing the damaged church and houses. However, I have realized one thing: that the SAC tries to use violence to obtain power and get control of the country. It is not a strategy for peace and love. For our [Karen] people, our demand is justice and equality but the Bamar [SAC] is controlling us without equality.

**What is your perspective on why the SAC uses air attacks as part of the civil war?**

In my perspective, they [the SAC] use air attacks in the civil war because their armed forces on the ground have become weakened. They use air attacks to be able to resist and invade our people's [Karen] areas. It is the only way for them because just a few soldiers remain on the ground. Using air attacks has a big impact on our people [Karen], who adore peace and fight for equality. We [Karen people] also try to abide by the UN policy [of democracy and human rights]. However, since their [the SAC's] future objective is not what we [Karen people] agree with, they try to destroy our region with air strikes.

**Why do you think the civil war is happening [in Burma]?**

The current civil war is being carried out because of the coup. For Karen people, we do not see ourselves as dictators. Instead, we want to gain unity for civilians [all ethnic groups] and we want our country to cooperate with the UN [for democracy and human rights]. For Bamar soldiers [the SAC], they want to take over power and control the country as a dictatorship.

**Would you like to suggest or say anything else to the international community or the UN regarding the civil war and air strikes in Thay Baw Boh village?**

We want our brothers [KNLA/KNDO], and our people who are living in second [Thailand] or third countries [other international countries], to cooperate and look for a way to report cases [of air strikes on civilians] to the UN or other international communities [organisations] so the world will know and be aware of the situation affecting our people [Karen]. We need them [the UN or international community] to put pressure on the SAC, so that our people will gain freedom, equality and be released from persecution. What I want to say is that the SAC is increasing air strike attacks. There should be no more of these activities [air strikes]. If possible, democracy shall be upheld to solve the political issue together in order to achieve equality. This is what I want to say and let everyone know.

**Do you want to add any other things to all authorities in the country [Burma] for Thay Baw Boh villagers to live peacefully?**

In Thay Baw Boh village, as well as every brigade/district where Karen people live in Karen State, even in Htee Hta Sway [Irrawaddy Division], I hope that everyone [Karen people in Burma] participate in the movement for us to gain peace. I hope that the governing authorities shall not take illegitimate power as dictators. If so, we will build up peace, love, harmony, and unity. That's what I want others to hear. May they [authorities who stand against the dictator] also stand with God. There may be many different religions in Burma such as Christianity,



Buddhism, Islam and others. But, may we put God first in our own way [belief] and build up unity. That is what I want to say for today.

### **Do you have any other things to say?**

Yes, I would like to thank God because he has done great things for me. I have been working here [Thay Baw Boh village] as a pastor since 2001. It is about 20 years by now so I would like to thank God for keeping me alive. I would also like our siblings [Karen people around the world] to remember us in their prayers based on the current situation. Then, I want our brothers also to remember us in their prayers for what we have go through today. For the future, we wish that we will get to live under peace and freedom of movement. That's what my wish is for today.

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

- ["Dooplaya District Incident Report: A 15-year-old female student reported being sexually assaulted by a school committee member, November 2021"](#), July 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.
- ["Dooplaya District Interview: The SAC's indiscriminate shelling killed a 17-year-old girl and injured three other villagers, 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](http://www.khrq.org).

# Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

