



Situation Update

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Taw Oo District Situation Update: Fighting, displacement, killing, and villagers' livelihoods in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, April to July 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District during the period between April and July 2022, and includes incidents of killing, fighting, displacement, and State Administration Council (SAC) military activity. On April 14th and May 23rd, two local villagers suspected of being SAC informants were killed in Hper Htee area. Since the SAC presumed the People's Defence Force (PDF) to be responsible for the deaths, they tried to arrest villagers whom they suspected of supporting the PDF. A separate killing incident took place on May 11th, when a drunk SAC police officer shot dead a 14-year-old student in A--- Section, Zayet Gyi Town. Later the perpetrator escaped to avoid being punished, thus justice has not yet been achieved for the victim or his family. The SAC set up more checkpoints in the area, forcing local villagers to pay arbitrary taxes. This has contributed to restrictions on villagers' movement and livelihood challenges. This update also covers health care, education, and other livelihood issues in Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township.¹

State Administration Council (SAC)² military activities

Between April and June 2022, tensions rose between the SAC and People's Defence Force (PDF),³ which increasingly became a problem for villagers. On April 14th 2022, a villager suspected of being a *da lan* [SAC informant], who lived in a majority ethnically Burmese village [Shwe Nyaung Pin village] near B--- village, Mo Kaung village tract,⁴ Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District, was shot. [The SAC presumed that the *da lan* was killed by a PDF member.] On the morning of April 15th 2022, SAC soldiers patrolling outside of B--- village entered villagers' [farm] huts and rummaged around them [likely looking for evidence of

¹ The present document is based on information received in July 2022. It was provided by multiple community members in Taw Oo 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 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 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.

⁴ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

PDF members]. After they finished searching villagers' huts, more than 10 SAC soldiers entered B--- village but no one knew exactly which unit they were from. They carried weapons with them when they came. There was a communion in an Anglican church around 11 am that day, and people who were in the church were worried and afraid because of the presence of SAC soldiers outside of the church. The soldiers returned to the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁵ #73 army camp later that day on April 15th.

On April 16th 2022, the SAC soldiers came back to B--- village again because they heard that there were PDF fighters or Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁶ participants in the village. When they were in the village, they randomly entered a villager's house, and one of the soldiers pointed his gun at a young boy who was in a hammock underneath the house [unclear if they had a reason to suspect that he was a PDF member]. However, the soldiers finally left the house because the boy, who was the son of the house owner, did not do anything. Since the SAC soldiers came and conducted an investigation in the village, the village schoolteachers who participated in the CDM were afraid and worried [about being targeted and arrested by the SAC but remained in the village]. [Other] villagers no longer dared to stay in their huts [villagers displaced temporarily into the forest].

On May 23rd 2022 at 5:56 pm, another villager suspected of being an SAC *da lan* [informant] was shot dead on the vehicle road in front of Nyaung Pin Zay market, Kin Mun Chon village [Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township]. The [suspected] SAC *da lan*, Zaw Lin Htawy, was 45-years-old and lived in Zayet Gyi Town. The person who killed the [suspected] *da lan* was a member of a Da Lan Clearing Team [multiple armed groups are emerging targeting SAC informants]. However, this information is uncertain [nobody knows what happened or how and why it happened]. Following this incident, the SAC would occasionally arrest local villagers, alleging that they were providing support to or communicating with the PDF. The SAC also tried to look for CDM schoolteachers in order to arrest them, however none were arrested.

Fighting and shelling

On May 8th 2022 at around 9 pm, fighting [between the SAC and combined forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁷ and PDF] took place in the army camp of Infantry Battalion (IB)⁸ #73 in the vicinity of Zayet Gyi Town. [PDF and KNLA soldiers attacked the army camp.] It lasted almost one hour. On June 12th 2022, fighting broke out again at the army camp of IB #73. During this skirmish, mortar shells and small guns were fired many times. The fighting started at 8 pm and finished at 9:30 pm [on June 12th 2022]. As the army camp of IB #73 is close to villages, villagers were full of fear and concern. [There was however no damage to the village or casualties].

⁵ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. Most Light Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are understrength 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 On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging.

⁷ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

⁸ An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are understrength 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.

At the beginning of July [2022], SAC troops from Toungoo Town passed through Zayet Gyi Town when they travelled to Ler Doh area [Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District]. As fighting also happened in Ler Doh area, some villagers from Leh Doh came to seek refuge in Zayet Gyi Town, while others went to seek refuge in Taw Oo P’Ku School’s compound, in Toungoo Town. It is a bible school. Local church committee members and villagers in the area provided the displaced villagers with food and other support. However, as of late July, some displaced villagers from Zayet Gyi Town already returned to their villages [in Ler Doh area].

Killing case

On May 11th 2022 at around 8:30 pm, Maung⁹ Myo Myat Htun (also known as Paul Tar Gyi) was killed in his house in A--- Section, Zayet Gyi Town, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. The victim was a 14-year-old Bamar¹⁰ villager who lived with his parents and siblings in a house next to the Zayet Gyi police station. His parents are U¹¹ Poe Hla Min and Daw¹² Maw Maw Oo. On the day in question, Maung Myo Myat Htun was looking after his sick mother and feeding her porridge. At night [on May 11th 2022], the electricity was cut off [in their house]. Therefore, Maung Myo Myat Htun turned on the flashlight on his phone in order to be able to see. When he [the victim] was feeding his mother porridge, a drunk [SAC] police officer, Htun Htun Win, shot at him from the police station. Maung Myo Myat Htun was hit by two bullets and died at once. During the incident, the victim’s two sisters and father were not at home. On that night, only Maung Myo Myat Htun and his mother stayed at home.

The next morning [May 12th 2022], the victim’s grandfather went to ask Htun Htun Win, the police officer responsible for the killing, why he shot and killed his grandson. The police officer replied that he just shot people because he could not see people clearly [he could not distinguish between people at night]. Then, they [Htun Htun Win and Maung Myo Myat Htun’s grandfather] held an [informal] meeting with U Poe Hla Min, Maung Myo Myat Htun’s father. The police called his father to come to the police station for a negotiation meeting. His father was told that they [the police] would give him 500,000 kyats [USD 238.09]¹³ as compensation for his son’s death in order to settle the case. However, U Poe Hla Min did not accept their offer. He replied, *“I have lost my son. My son’s life is not worth only 500,000 kyats. I cannot accept it.”*

The victim’s father could not follow up in order to file a complaint against the police officer [due to a lack of finances for the court costs and doubt over whether the process would achieve justice]. Furthermore, the chief of police at the Zayet Gyi police station was not present in the police station [making it challenging to file a complaint]. During that time, Htun Htun Win, the police officer in question, fled from the area [in order to avoid punishment]. On May 13th 2022, Maung Myo Myat Htun was buried.

⁹ Maung is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person’s name.

¹⁰ The majority ethnic group in Burma/Myanmar, also known as ethnic Burmese or Burman.

¹¹ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

¹² Daw is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person’s name.

¹³ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the November 29th 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.48 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).



KHRG received these photos on May 21st 2022. The photos show the dead body of 14-year-old Maung Myo Myat Htun. On May 11th 2022, a drunk SAC police officer from Zayet Gyi police station shot him dead in A--- Section, Zayet Gyi Town, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. He was at home at the time, taking care of his sick mother. *[Photos: Local villager]*

Travel restrictions

The situation regarding SAC activity [in Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District] has not improved yet. The SAC tried many ways to impose restrictions on the villagers' freedom of movement [between May and July 2022]. At their checkpoints, they [the SAC] increased the questioning and interrogation of local villagers in the area. They increasingly demanded local villagers [transporting items] to pay toll fees [at their checkpoints]. Sometimes they also asked local villagers to provide them with alcohol and beer when villagers travelled [through their checkpoints].

Due to SAC activities, it is not easy to travel freely for trade [livelihood activities] like before. As the SAC also set up more checkpoints in the area, they increasingly asked villagers to pay them taxes (toll). This made it increasingly difficult for villagers to travel for trade.

Health care

There have been small changes [improvements] in the healthcare situation in the area [Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District]. In the past, local villagers could not travel freely in the area due to the COVID-19 pandemic and they could not freely go to church [due to COVID-19 regulations on mass gatherings]. Nowadays, there are just a few positive COVID-19 cases found in the area and almost every villager in Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township received a COVID-19 vaccination [from either the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) or the SAC Ministry of Health, as the area is under mixed control]. The SAC also tried to improve the healthcare situation in the area by rebuilding two hospitals: Zayet Gyi (Zayatgyi) public hospital and Htantabin General Hospital. The healthcare situation has slightly improved for local villagers. If villagers are sick, they can go to the hospital to get medical treatment [villagers in Hper Htee area are now willing to seek treatment at SAC-run hospitals because SAC soldiers are not present at the hospitals anymore, and the fees are cheaper than at private clinics]. Between May and July 2022, villagers also could go to church. Villagers do not face many barriers if they have to travel for health reasons.

Education

The education situation has improved slightly as well in the period between May and July 2022. In the past, students could not go to school due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the political situation. At the time of reporting in July 2022, the COVID-19 situation has been getting better. Therefore, local villagers were able to open schools. In Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, some Karen villagers opened a self-funded school. They used the Karen Education

and Culture Department (KECD)¹⁴ education system and KECD curriculum in their school. Some villagers who live near the KNU-funded [KECD] Hto Lwee Wah school sent their children to that school. In some villages, SAC-run schools were also opened. [According to local villagers], students who attend self-funded schools receive high quality education as they use the KECD curriculum. Students who attend SAC schools do not receive quality education as they use the SAC curriculum. In some SAC schools, they did not have sufficient schoolteachers. Also, some teachers did not teach students well [as the teachers showed up late to class and were not invested in students' progress, according to villagers]. However, this year the education situation has improved a bit because students have been able to go and study at [all of] the schools [whether KNU/KECD, self-funded or SAC].

Most of the villagers said that they wished the political situation would get better as soon as possible. Local villagers were criticized by fellow villagers if they sent their children to [SAC] schools as they were accused of supporting the SAC. However, if they did not send their children to school, their children would not know how to read and write. Therefore, villagers had many concerns when they sent their children to SAC schools. They were also worried that a bomb would explode [near the SAC schools], or that there would be gunfire. Villagers wanted to send their children to Hto Lwee Wah High School [a KECD school] but some of their children were just in primary school, therefore, they could not attend Hto Lwee Wah High School [and there is no KECD primary school in the area]. Villagers faced many challenges in their daily lives.

Livelihood challenges

At the time of reporting in July 2022, it was not easy for villagers to earn a livelihood because the political situation was not good and the price of commodities increased. In addition, day labourers and workers had not gotten a salary [wages] increase [likely due to the ongoing economic crisis]. Therefore, it was not easy for them to support their families' livelihood.

On July 11th 2022 at around 12:30 pm, [SAC] soldiers and traffic police tried to catch three-wheel motorcycle drivers in Zay Lay area [a market] in Toungoo Town. Some three-wheel motorcycle drivers earned their livelihood as transporters [offering transportation services to people] and some three-wheel motorcycle drivers earned a living as food sellers. If [SAC] soldiers and traffic police caught a three-wheel motorcycle driver, they would fine the driver 20,000 to 30,000 kyats [USD 9.52 to 14.29]. It became difficult for local people to earn a livelihood. In every job that local villagers did, they could not do their work freely. They had to work for their livelihood full of fear and anxiety. [In Hper Htee area, villagers were required to have a COVID-19 vaccination certificate from the KNU in order to travel, which cost 1,000 kyats [USD 0.48]. In order to travel and work far from the village, villagers were required to have a work travel document, which villagers had to pay for. In addition, hill farmers were interrogated on their way to their farms, restricting their ability to safely travel to work]. As some villagers did not have jobs or could not work freely, they left their homes and villages and then they went to other countries, including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, to get jobs. Some villagers also had financial issues and they had to borrow money [from others].

Conclusion

In my opinion [according to one KHRG researcher], the people in the country [Burma] will have a very small percentage [chance] to get peace if the SAC continues to take the [hold onto] power. In Hper Htee area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, we feel like we still have to live full of fear and anxiety. We face many challenges in our area. We do not get full freedom and rights in terms of livelihood, education, health care, and movement.

¹⁴ 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/Myanmar, 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 government.

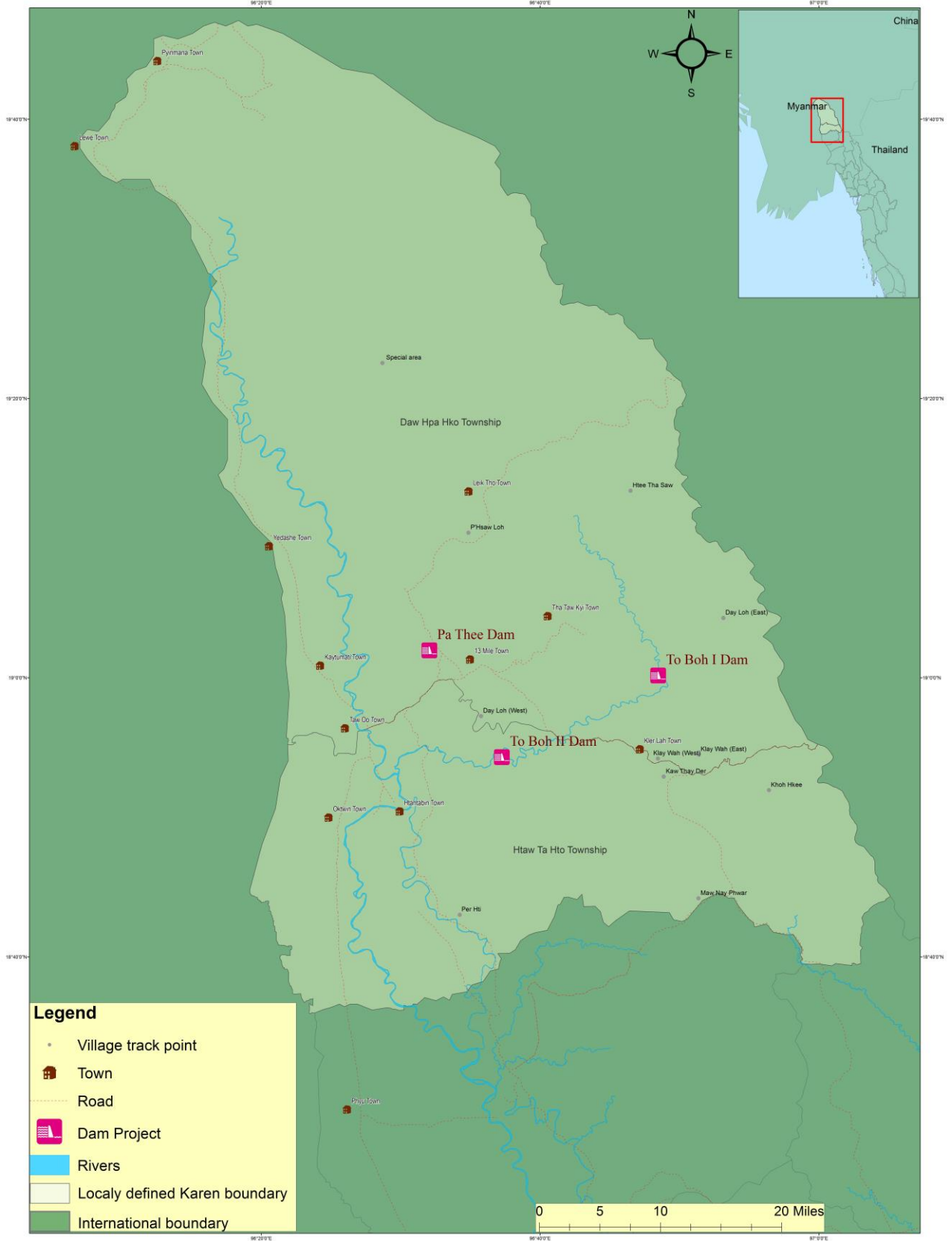
Further background reading on the security and human rights situation in Taw Oo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC activities, March to April 2022"](#), May 2022.
- ["Taw Oo District Situation Update: SAC military activities, SAC attacks on CDM participants, travel restrictions, and livelihood, healthcare and education challenges, December 2021 to February 2022"](#), April 2022.
- ["Taw Oo District Short Update: Killing, shelling, displacement, and the destruction of a COVID-19 screening checkpoint and villagers' belongings by SAC soldiers, March 2022"](#), March 2022.
- ["Taw Oo District Incident Report: A villager's house was damaged by indiscriminate gunfire from a drunk SAC military officer in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, August 2021"](#), December 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.khrq.org.

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



KHRG