



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Fighting, indiscriminate shelling, displacement, air strikes, and limited access to education, August to September 2022

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Moo (Mone), Ler Doh (Kyaukkyi) and Hsaw Htee (Shwegyin) townships, Kler Lwee Htoo District during the period from August to September 2022. As a result of fighting between soldiers of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and State Administration Council (SAC), villagers were displaced from their villages. After the occurrence of fighting on August 5th 2022, SAC soldiers from Toh Thay Poo army camp fired mortar shells into Meh Saw village, Than Seik village tract, resulting in the injury and death of villagers as well as in the destruction of their houses. In September, SAC military jets conducted air strikes and reconnaissance operations in Ler Doh Township. Due to SAC indiscriminate shelling and air strikes, villagers from Ler Doh and Moo townships were afraid to stay in their villages and many decided to flee.¹

Fighting, shelling, and displacement

At 5:00 am on August 5th 2022, fighting occurred between soldiers of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)² and soldiers of the State Administration Council (SAC)³. Fighting took place at Than Seik army camp in Than Seik Min Lan village, Than Seik village tract⁴, Hsaw Htee Township, between soldiers of KNLA Battalion #7 and SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)⁵ #350 and Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁶ #20. As a result of the fighting, villagers living in Than Seik village

¹ The present document is based on information received in September 2022. It was provided by a community member in Kler Lwee Htoo 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 Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

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.

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

⁵ An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Burma Army 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.

⁶ 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

tract, Hsaw Htee Township, had to be displaced. There are 166 households and over 370 households in Meh Saw village and Than Seik Min Lan village respectively, both located in Than Seik village tract. [All villagers were displaced due to the fighting. Some have returned as of January 2023.]

During and after the fighting, SAC soldiers of IB #350 from Toh Thay Poo army camp in Toh Thay Poo village, P'Deh Kaw village tract, fired approximately 40 mortar shells, some of which landed into A--- village, Than Seik village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, destroying five houses, killing three villagers including two children, and injuring five others. One of the villagers, 62-year-old Ko⁷ B---, was instantly killed by the shelling. Among the villagers who were injured by mortar shells fragments were two children, both of whom later passed away. The two children who died were Maung⁸ C--- (11 years old) and Ma⁹ D--- (4 years old). These two children were sent to a hospital on the day they were injured. The other five villagers who were injured are U¹⁰ E---, U E---'s two children [unknown names], Ma F---, and Ma G---. After the incident happened, villagers from around that area no longer dared to stay in their villages and fled to other places. Villagers from Than Seik Min Lan and Meh Saw villages sought refuge in H--- (H---) monastery, which is located in I--- Town (J--- Town), as displaced people.

On September 2nd 2022, fighting happened between SAC soldiers from LIB #590 and #599 and the combined forces of KNLA Battalion #8 and Company #1 and #3 [KHRG was unable to precisely identify where]. After the skirmish, the SAC soldiers based in Toh Taw [Moo special area, Moo Township] and Yay Ao Si village indiscriminately fired mortar shells into Q--- village, Paw Pee Der village tract, Moo Township, as well as towards villagers' plantations outside the village. At around 8:30 pm on September 2nd 2022, SAC soldiers from LIB #590 indiscriminately fired mortars, one of which landed beside Daw¹¹ K---'s house in Q--- village, Paw Pee Der village tract, Moo Township. The owner of the house, Daw K---, sustained injuries to her head by fragments of the mortar shell. She was admitted to L--- hospital, where she got three stitches. Due to the SAC's indiscriminate mortar shelling, villagers were afraid to stay in their village. Some villagers are now staying in the forest while others are staying at their plantations. Although villagers are no longer in the village, they are still afraid of SAC indiscriminate shelling.

Air strikes

Between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm on September 14th 2022, SAC soldiers who returned from Brigade 5 [Mu Traw (Hpapun) District] encountered KNLA soldiers in an area of Kwee Lah village tract, Ler Doh Township, and a skirmish then took place near Ler Wah village, Hsaw Htee Township. On the day when the fighting happened, SAC soldiers [unknown unit] indiscriminately fired many mortar shells [in the area, the exact number of mortar shells is unknown,] and two SAC military jets came to conduct air reconnaissance as well as air strikes in and around the area where the fighting was happening. Air strikes were conducted three times on that day [following the clash]. During the first two rounds of the air strikes, SAC military jets used machine guns and in the last round [third round], they [fighter jets] dropped bombs [unknown number of bombs]. SAC military jets frequently came to conduct reconnaissance operations following this incident.

For example, SAC military jets came to monitor the area for two days in a row on September 14th and 15th. As a result, villagers from M--- and N--- villages no longer dared to stay in their

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 *Ko* is a Burmese title meaning older brother. It can be used for relatives as well as non-relatives.

⁸ *Maung* is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁹ *Ma* is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

¹⁰ *U* is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before a person's name.

¹¹ *Daw* is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

villages and fled to the forest. Villagers went back to their villages occasionally to check on their pets and livestock that were left behind. However, women and children were not among those who temporarily returned to the villages [to check on their pets and livestock]. In M--- village, there are 37 households in total, where over 191 villagers reside. If villagers from N--- village and family members of district leaders were included, there would be more than 1,000 people [in M--- and N--- villages]. [Not all villagers were displaced, although some fled to other villages or hid during the night and returned during the daytime.]

Villagers from O--- village, Kwee Lah village tract, Ler Doh Township, have also been displaced from their village [due to the air strikes] and some of them are currently seeking refuge in M--- village tract. Some villagers started fleeing from September 17th 2022, while some fled as early as September 14th 2022. Villagers who displaced to the forest are facing many difficulties. Since it is rainy season [during the reporting period], displaced villagers face challenges in building their shelters. Most of the villagers are farmers and access to food is now a big issue for them, because the price of food has dramatically increased. Some villagers have livestock that they need to take care of but due to the current situation, they cannot go back to their village to look after them. Their crops have been damaged by their livestock. Children also face difficulties in continuing their studies in the forest because they don't have school supplies and they don't receive any support [from external organisations]. [As of late September 2022,] the group of SAC soldiers [who returned from Mu Traw District] were still based [and patrolling] where the fighting happened in Kwee Lah village tract. Villagers remained afraid to return to their village. [As of January 2023, most villagers returned to their village, although some stayed at their plantations outside of the village.]

Education

Due to the fighting and air strikes, M--- Middle School, N--- Primary School, and Kler Lwee Htoo Junior College (KJC) in P--- village, Ler Wah village tract, had to be closed down as students in the area no longer dared to go to school to study. In M--- Middle School, there are over 197 students and 11 teachers, while there are 150 students in KJC. The students could no longer continue their studies because SAC military jet(s) came for reconnaissance almost every day. [As of January 2023, M--- Middle School and N--- Primary School are still closed. KJC has already reopened.]

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

- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: SAC arbitrarily killing of a villager near his farm hut, Moo Township, September 2022"](#), February 2023.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: SAC soldiers shot dead a female villager in Moo Township, November 2022"](#), February 2023.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Fighting and displacement, air strikes and SAC indiscriminate shelling, July to September 2022"](#), February 2023.
- ["Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: Disappearance of villagers after being arrested by SAC soldiers, August 2022"](#), February 2023.

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

