



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### **Situation Update**

April 6<sup>th</sup> 2022 / KHRG #22-37-S1

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## **Hpa-an District Situation Update: COVID-19 vaccinations, livelihood, education, and SAC activities, December 2021 to February 2022**

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in T'Nay Hsah (Nabu) and Ta Kreh (Paingkyon) townships, Hpa-an District during the period between December 2021 to February 2022. It covers COVID-19 vaccinations, livelihood issues, school closures, and State Administration Council (SAC) activities. Some villagers received COVID-19 vaccines from the SAC authorities, while others are still waiting to receive vaccinations from the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW). The increase in the price of food and other products has presented local villagers with more livelihood challenges. A recent road widening project in T'Nay Hsah Township by ethnic armed groups damaged civilian farmland, creating further livelihood challenges for some villagers. Since the coup, Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) schools have remained open as usual, whereas SAC-run schools have been closed. The SAC also transported their rations to Mu Traw District in civilian trucks and while wearing civilian clothing.<sup>1</sup>*

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### **COVID-19 vaccinations**

Some of the villagers in T'Nay Hsah (Nabu) and Ta Kreh (Paingkyon) townships, Hpa-an District have already received COVID-19 vaccinations that were provided by State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>2</sup> authorities. However, there were also many villagers who did not dare get vaccinated [by the SAC authorities]. During the last week of January, healthcare workers from the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) took note of the population numbers in each village for vaccination purposes and they will start providing voluntary vaccinations in June 2022. Some of the villagers said that even though they did not want to get the vaccines that the SAC authorities provided, they had to get it because travel is restricted in the local area for those who are not vaccinated. [When travelling to towns or cities, villagers would be questioned and asked to show a vaccination certificate if stopped by the SAC.] Villagers in T'Nay Hsah Township are no longer worried about COVID-19 as it has been a while since it [the pandemic] started and they have become used to it.

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in February 2022. It was provided by a community member in Hpa-an 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 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.

## Livelihoods

Villagers in Ta Kreh Township reported that local travel has become more difficult and livelihoods have been affected due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and the post-coup situation. Local villagers have been facing financial issues because the prices of food and other products have increased. In this situation, it has been more challenging for local villagers to earn their livelihood.

Some of the villagers along the western part of Taw Naw Mountain in T'Nay Hsah Township faced livelihood challenges because they did not have any farmland to work on. Those who have farms grow rice during the rainy season and peanuts in the summer. They use the wages they earn from their cash crops to provide for the needs of their family, including buying food.

In the third week of December 2021, road construction was carried out by local authorities and ethnic armed groups in T'Nay Hsah Township, including the Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>3</sup>, Border Guard Force (BGF)<sup>4</sup> and the KNU/KNLA-Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC)<sup>5</sup>. They widened the road to 40 feet [12.2 metres] [double its previous width], damaging many civilians' farmlands. [No consultation or consent from the villagers was undertaken prior to the road construction.]



These photos were taken on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022 in K'Sar Kloh village, Htee Klay village tract<sup>6</sup>, T'Nay Hsah Township, Hpa-an District. The photos show different parts of the new road after it was widened and the damage to villagers' farmlands that are located along the road. [Photos: KHRG]

Some young people who used to be migrant workers in Bangkok, Thailand cannot travel back there [to Thailand] as easily as before [the COVID-19 pandemic and coup]. This situation has made it more challenging for them to secure their livelihood. Civilians in T'Nay Hsah Township are also living in fear of potential fighting between the SAC and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>7</sup> in the local area.

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<sup>3</sup> The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

<sup>4</sup> Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw.

<sup>5</sup> The KNU/KNLA-PC is an armed group based in the Htoh Kaw Koh village tract area, Hpa-an District. It split from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in 2007, but refused to transform into a Border Guard Force (BGF) in 2010. It signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015.

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

## Education

In Ta Kreh Township, the SAC-run schools have been closed since the military coup and only Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)<sup>8</sup> schools remain open. Due to the closure of some schools, some students got married at a very young age [age 13-17] and some are doing nothing with their time [are not working or earning money for the family]. Students in the K'Ser Ghee Htee area, Ta Kreh Township could still go to school as local KECD schools are open.

## SAC activities

The local villagers in Ta Kreh Township observed that SAC soldiers were wearing civilian clothing and using civilian cars when transporting rations to Mu Traw District. They used the road that goes to Htee Poe Hkler village for this activity.

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

- ["Hpa-an District Situation Update: the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and education, April to June 2021"](#), February 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.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Ongoing fighting in Bilin Township leads to more than 2,000 IDPs, as well as injury and property damage, December 21st 2021 to January 11th 2022"](#), March 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)

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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 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 Myanmar government.

# Hpa-an District (Central Kayin State)



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