



**Karen Human Rights Group**  
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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## Situation Update

January 12<sup>th</sup> 2024 / KHRG # 22-376-S1

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# **Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: villagers used as human shields, forced labour and navigators; SAC shelling and looting; and forced displacement in Bilin Township (July 2021 to September 2022)**

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District during the period between July 2021 and September 2022. The State Administration Council (SAC) increased operations, including regular troop rotations and transportation of rations between Meh Pray Hkee and Na Kyi army camps. SAC soldiers also entered villages and committed looting and deliberate shelling, causing displacement, and arrested at least 45 villagers to use them as human shields, forced labour and navigators. At least two elder villagers died due to shock. Several incidents of landmine explosions were also reported.<sup>1</sup>*

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### **Background information:**

After the State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>2</sup> seized power in Burma in February 2021, military activities have been increasing both in rural and urban areas throughout Burma. The SAC, in cooperation with the Border Guard Force (BGF)<sup>3</sup>, is mainly reinforcing its troops and army camps, and conducting regular military patrol and movements between camps in ethnic states.

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received between July 2021 and September 2022. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha 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.

<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 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>3</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.

Meanwhile, ethnic armed groups (EAGs) are also defending their territory and administration, so the increase in SAC's activities and intrusion into the EAGs-controlled territories results in armed conflict, dramatically impacting local civilians. This Situation Update is based on a document written by a local villager, and further KHRG documentation conducted in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District, recording human rights violations committed by SAC troops operating between the Meh Pray Hkee army camp, Meh Pray Hkee village tract, and Na Kyi army camp, Na Kyi village tract, in Bilin Township from July 2021 to September 2022.

### **Military activities between Meh Pray Hkee and Na Kyi army camps**

Na Kyi army camp base is located in Na Kyi village, Na Kyi village tract, Bilin Township. Since the coup, the SAC military with some BGF soldiers patrolled between the Na Kyi and Meh Pray Hkee army camps, and used the paved road for military purposes. Whenever SAC troops patrolled, between one to seven BGF soldiers would accompany them, as the SAC did not feel safe to travel between the army camps. [The BGF soldiers] helped with [communication in] the local language and [shared knowledge on] the situation in the area. In the first four or five months [after the coup], the local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>4</sup> did not ambush them [SAC soldiers], only warned them [to not enter the areas under Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>5</sup> control]. But around July 2021, during the rainy and flooding period, the tension between the SAC and the local KNLA combined with People's Defence Force (PDF)<sup>6</sup> forces came to a head. The SAC also set up a new temporary army camp to carry out their military operations close to H--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, and armed clashes constantly happened afterwards. The consequences of the skirmishes and the new temporary army camp being set up are that villagers had to displace themselves. Indiscriminate shelling caused damages [on civilian property], injuries, and the deaths of villagers and their livestock. Soldiers conducted looting [of villagers' property], and arrested local villagers to use them as human shields and navigators. This occurred alongside landmine incidents and livelihood challenges [faced by villagers].

### **Villagers used as human shields, forced labour, navigators and porters**

[While the SAC conducted military activities between Na Kyi and Meh Pray Hkee army camps,] whenever SAC troops were patrolling, or attacked by local KNLA soldiers, they arrested any villagers they encountered on the way and in the villages to use them as human shields, while claiming to use them as navigators. As explained by a villager, the arrest of local villagers was not [to use them] as navigators, because the [BGF and SAC] soldiers knew the area well. Instead, whenever SAC troops travelled, they would usually arrest any villagers they would find to follow them as human shields. For instance, during the rainy season of 2021, the SAC from Na Kyi army

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<sup>4</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>5</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 government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Burma 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>6</sup> 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.

camp arrested two villagers from H--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, at their houses, [and ordered the villagers] to follow them as human shields to Meh Pray Hkee army camp.<sup>7</sup> These villagers were Saw<sup>8</sup> E--- and Saw F---. On the way to Meh Pray Hkee army camp, one of the SAC soldiers who was walking in front of Saw F--- stepped on a landmine. A piece of shrapnel from the landmine explosion hit Saw F---'s eye and burst his eye. That SAC soldier lost one foot. After the incident, an SAC soldier injected Saw F--- with an unknown medicine, and Saw F--- then had to follow the SAC soldiers until they arrived at the Meh Pray Hkee army camp, at night. When they arrived at the Meh Pray Hkee army camp, the SAC troops released the two arrested villagers and gave Saw F--- only 100,000 kyat [48 USD]<sup>9</sup> to treat his injured eye. Saw F--- went to several clinics in Bilin Township and SAC-controlled territory in Na Kyi Town. As the medical treatment fee in Town was too expensive, the villager went to the G--- clinic, under the KNU, and was able to access free medical treatment. He took a very long time to recover and suffered pain throughout the recovery process. Saw F--- became blind in one eye.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022 [exact date unknown], at 3pm, SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>10</sup> #403 troops, under Military Operation Commander (MOC)<sup>11</sup> #8, combined with Light Infantry Division (LID)<sup>12</sup> #44 and BGF Battalion #1011, from Meh Pray Hkee village (Meh Pray Hkee army camp), returned to Na Kyi army camp. On the way, before they arrived at J--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, two of their soldiers stepped on a landmine. When they were about to arrive at J--- village, they arrested two villagers [from an unknown village] they encountered on the way and tied the two villagers to follow them. Then the SAC troops entered J--- village and looted the stock and belongings from one of the shops owned by a villager. They also entered villagers' houses and looted their belongings, including chickens and phones. The SAC soldiers were looking for male villagers to arrest as human shields, but they only saw one villager, Saw I---, from J--- village, because most of the men had fled before the SAC entered the village, fearing arrest. Saw I--- could not flee before the SAC arrived in the village, so the SAC shouted at him, violently slapped his face and ordered him to follow the troops as a human shield, from J--- village to T'Ray Loo Hkoh hill. They then released him.

On May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, the local KNLA attacked BGF troops combined with SAC troops under LID #44 that were travelling from Meh Pray Hkee army camp to Na Kyi army camp, while the soldiers were on the road beside H--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. After the fighting, at

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<sup>7</sup> KHRG: "[Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Killing, torture and use of human shields and navigators by the SAC and BGF in Bilin Township, May to June 2022](#)", August 2022

<sup>8</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>9</sup> All conversion estimates for Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate as of July 26th 2023 at 1 USD = 2,098.95 MMK, conversion rate available at <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>.

<sup>10</sup> A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Burma military 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 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

<sup>11</sup> Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

<sup>12</sup> A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw is commanded by a brigadier general, and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw in 1966. LIDs are organised under three Tactical Operations Commands, commanded by a colonel, three battalions each and one reserve, one field artillery battalion, one armoured squadron and other support units. Each division is directly under the command of the Chief of Staff (Army).

about 3:20pm, the SAC/BGF soldiers entered H--- village and ordered all villagers to gather at a particular place, and they then arrested seven male villagers to follow them as human shields. The seven H--- villagers were Saw K---, Saw L---, Saw M---, Saw N---, Saw O---, Saw P--- and Saw Q---. One of the BGF soldiers, who patrolled with the SAC, slapped Saw L---'s face two times because he could not reply to the questions immediately as he was scared. This BGF soldier is from La Nay village [in Hpa-an District]. The seven male villagers who could not flee before the SAC arrived at the village were arrested as human shields by the SAC/BGF. They were released after arriving at Na Kyi army camp.

On June 17<sup>th</sup> 2022, another SAC troop from the Meh Pray Hkee army camp returned to Na Kyi army camp. When they arrived at J--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, they entered the village and arrested nine male J--- villagers they saw in the village. All the other male villagers had already fled to another place before the SAC arrived. The nine villagers were Saw R--- (age 55), Saw S--- (age 48), Saw T--- (age 45), Saw U--- (age 19), Saw V--- (age 20), Saw W--- (age 27), Saw X--- (age 24), Saw Y--- (age 36) and Saw Z--- (age 66). They ordered the nine villagers to follow them to Na Kyi army camp as human shields. As villagers were used as shields, the local KNLA did not attack the SAC going back to their base in Na Kyi Army camp. On June 18<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC released the nine villagers when they arrived at the Na Kyi army camp.

Due to the practice of the SAC of arresting villagers in the community, whenever villagers received information about SAC troops patrolling and passing [through nearby] villages, men who live in the villages close to the vehicle road between Na Kyi and Meh Pray Hkee army camps would flee from their villages to avoid being arrested by the SAC and used as human shields. [This time], the male villagers returned home only a couple of days after the SAC passed their villages. However, on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC encountered four of the J--- villagers in a farm tent, as they were fleeing from the SAC, and arrested them. The four villagers were Saw A--- (age 62), Saw B--- (age 53), Saw C--- (age 22) and Saw D--- (age 25). The SAC also confiscated one machete, valued at around 10,000 kyat [4.76 USD], and one watch, valued at around 12,000 kyat [5.71 USD].

On July 14<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops LIB #402 from Noh Hpa Htaaw army camp and LIB #403 entered H--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township and ordered all men and women in the village to stay in the area surrounding them in the village, as human shields. As explained by a local villager named Saw Zz---: *"Then they released all the women during night time and ordered the male villagers to sleep [in this place] one night. I also was in this incident [used as a human shield]. The next day, they came to my house and set up their base as an army camp for several months [until September 2022]."*

### **Setting of a new temporary camp in Aee Sooh Hkee village tract**

[As explained previously], in July 2022, the SAC LIB #403 and LIB #402 troops entered H--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township and slept [there] one night. The troops included about 40 soldiers. The next morning, some of them went to Meh Pray Hkee army camp, but the LIB #402 troops remained in the village. The SAC LIB #402 troops, set up their temporary army base at a place outside of the H--- village, where there are six villagers' houses, situated close to the main paved road between Na Kyi army camp and J--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. According to a local villager, the SAC soldiers used two of the six villagers' houses, including their farm tents and gardens, for their army base. There, they had a good water

supply from the stream, and safety provided by the mountains surrounding the area, which hindered any attack. The SAC settled there for their security and for troop reinforcement, ration and ammunition transportation between Na Kyi and Meh Pay Hkee army camps, so that KNLA soldiers could not easily ambush them. During night-time, SAC soldiers took security [rounds] separately, in different places surrounding their camp.

The SAC also set up a checkpoint on the road and conducted troop rotation based on their schedule, and sometimes as a monthly troop exchange. The SAC Artillery Unit #402 had been based in this temporary camp for five days before SAC LIB #405 exchanged places with them. The SAC LIB #405 was then based in the temporary base for about one month and five days. Then the SAC LIB #404 exchanged places with the SAC LIB #405 [again], and they stayed in this army base for over a month before exchanging with SAC LIB #403. The SAC also dug communication channels in the villagers' gardens.

Due to the SAC setting up the camp in the villager's houses, all villagers from the six houses moved to other places for safety. After the villagers left, the local KNLA ambushed the SAC many times, to force the SAC to withdraw from the villagers' houses. As a result of several skirmishes between the SAC and the local KNLA, both armed groups planted landmines, so villagers felt even less safe to return to their houses. Moreover, the SAC looked for the houses of KNLA soldiers' families, and asked villagers to tell them where they were, but villagers could not provide such information. Saw Zz---, a villager living in one of the houses outside of H--- village, said: *"I continued to live in my house with them [SAC soldiers] for about one month [for a couple of weeks]. I was fearful, and they [SAC] were always asking me for information on [KNLA] soldiers' houses and relatives in the village. The [KNLA] soldiers also [advised] me to move because it was inconvenient [for KNLA to attack SAC] when I stayed with them [SAC soldiers]. Therefore, I did not feel safe living in my house anymore, so I left my house when I could find a way to get out with my family, and go live in H--- village, at my mother's place. Since then, I have not returned to my house."* As of September 28<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops were still based in this [temporary] camp, as reported by a local villager to KHRG. The KNLA also ambushed them [SAC soldiers] several times, and so he [the local villager] does not feel safe to check his house anymore. He was unsure about whether the fighting had hit [destroyed] his house.

### **SAC soldiers using human shields to move between army camps**

[Between June 18<sup>th</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC conducted military operations between Na Kyi and Lay Kay army camps and the surrounding villages. During these operations,] they arrested 24 villagers in total [from different villages] to follow them as human shields, and forced them to work by clearing vegetation on the way for the SAC, and by carrying ammunition, food and materials they looted from villages on the way. The SAC soldiers were accompanied around the forest from J--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, to the Lay Kay army camp by villagers, to avoid being attacked by the local KNLA.

#### **A. SAC use of villagers as human shields from Na Kyi army camp to Lay Kay army camp**

On June 18<sup>th</sup> 2022, more SAC troops such as LIB #207 from Thein Za Ya Base, Kyeh Htoh Township, LIB #102 from Thaton army base, Tha Htoo Township and Infantry Battalion (IB)<sup>13</sup> #2

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<sup>13</sup> 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,

from Kyaikto base, Kyeh Htoh Township which are under control of SAC LID #44, left Na Kyi army camp. They entered and patrolled in KNU-controlled territory in Bilin Township, [with the intent] to go [all the way] to Lay Kay army camp for troop reinforcement. Villagers did not feel safe staying in the village. Villagers were also worried that major fighting was to happen in their village. Therefore, all 1,189 J--- villagers fled to the forest and to different villages nearby for their safety.

On June 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, these three SAC troops from Na Kyi army camp arrived at Aee Sooh Hkee village tract and entered J--- village. On June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, they looted villagers' belongings and food, and they also arrested four villagers [who had returned to the village to check their houses and livestock, where the SAC found them] to serve as porters, navigators and human shields. These four villagers were Saw A---, Saw B---, Saw C--- and Saw D---, [previously mentioned].

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022, the SAC [arrested] three PDF members and a villager from Ab--- village, named Saw Ai---, who was a driver for them, on Ac--- road, Ta Au Hkee village tract.<sup>14</sup> They tortured the three detained PDF members. According to one of the villagers who witnessed the incident, Naw<sup>15</sup> Ad---, from Ae--- village, Khaw Hpoee Pleh village tract, Bilin Township: *"Because they were tortured, they had bruises all over their body. They were tied with nylon rope around the neck, the armpits and the hands. We did not dare to look at that because it was so terrible. They were full of bruises. The SAC killed them when they left the [Ae---] village [on June 29<sup>th</sup>]."*

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022, these three SAC troops [LIB #207, LIB #102 and IB #2] arrived at Af--- village, Ta Au Hkee village tract. They arrested two civilians from Af--- village, Ta Au Hkee village tract: Saw Ag--- and another villager [unknown name]. On the evening of June 24<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops [together with the arrested villagers and PDF members] reached Ah--- village, Kyon Wine village tract. The Ab--- villager named Saw Ai---, who got arrested [on June 22<sup>nd</sup> on Ae--- Road, while driving the car], escaped when they were in Ah--- village. The SAC arrested two more villagers in Ah--- village, Saw Aj--- and Saw Ak---, and two other civilians, Saw Al--- and his friend, from Am--- village, Hpa-an Township, who were visiting Ah--- village.

On June 25<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops [and the detained villagers and PDF members] arrived at An--- village, P'Ya Raw (Myit Kyo) village tract, Bilin Township, and arrested another three An--- villagers. The three villagers were Saw Ao---, Saw Ap--- and Saw Aq---. One of the villagers was under 18 years old. The SAC released them and the four J--- villagers on the same day when they arrived at Lay Kay camp. They did not release the three PDF members and the Ah---, Af---, and Am--- villagers.

### *B. From Lay Kay army camp to K'Ma Moe [Kamamaung] Town*

After the SAC military troops arrived at Lay Kay army camp, they stayed in the camp for two nights and kept the Ah---, Af--- and Am--- villagers detained in the Lay Kay army camp. Then, on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC went back to [their destination in] K'Ma Moe Town, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, and they ordered the still detained villagers [and PDF members] to follow them. They passed through Ar--- village, and released the Ah--- and Am--- villagers. On the same day of June 27<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops arrived Ae--- village, stayed in Ae--- village for two nights and

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particularly following the signing of the NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

<sup>14</sup> KHRG, "[Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Killings, landmine injuries, and insecurity in Bilin Township, January to June 2022](#)", July 2023

<sup>15</sup> Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

looted villagers' properties. They also arrested three Ae--- villagers, Saw Au---, Saw Av---, and Saw Aw---, and two [other] villagers, Saw Ax---and Saw Ay---, who were guests from Az--- village, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District, to follow them to Ar--- village and then to Hkaw Taw Town, Dwe Lo Township.

One of the victims from Ae--- village, named Saw Aw---, said: *"I was arrested when I was going to my paddy farm to stop cows [from] eating my paddy plants. [...] We did not do anything, but they told us: 'Don't run! As we are soldiers, if you run, we will shoot you'."* Saw Aw---, from Ae--- village, also testified about walking [amongst] the SAC as a human shield and carrying heavy loads for the SAC on foot for the whole day: *"They asked us to carry loads for them. [...] The weight was above 20 visses [30 kilograms]. [...] It was heavy and we had to carry it with all the energy [villagers' had]. [...] We saw mortars [inside the loads villagers carried]. [...] They did not allow us [villagers] to walk in a group, so we had to walk separately from each other, and walk between them [SAC soldiers]. [...] We did not have to ask for rice because the [soldiers] looted food from villagers [everywhere they went] and did not pay for food, so they had plenty of food for all of us. [...] We slept in villagers' houses so we received blankets. [...] We mainly worried that fighting could happen. [...] They arrested us to walk among them so it means they did it to protect themselves [from KNLA/KNDO<sup>16</sup> attacks] because if the fighting happened, we [villagers] would be shot as well."* Saw Aw--- continued: *"It [the trip] took one day [just between two villages] because they did not travel straight on the road toward [another village]. They travelled in the bushes [so it took more time]. We walked the whole day, we did not stop walking to take a rest on the way."*

One of the victims' family members, Naw Ad--- from Ae--- village said: *"When I saw that the SAC [LID #44] commander arrested my son, I climbed down to the ground [from my house]. My son also called me and I ran to him right away. Some rumour had spread that my son was being tortured by the SAC soldiers. However, it was good that I could get to him earlier. Since I talked to the SAC soldiers, they did not torture my son. Otherwise, my son would have been tortured to death. [...] The SAC habit is like that [committing arrest, torture and killing of villagers]. They arrested anyone that they saw, not only my son. They arrested and questioned my son: they asked him to show them the place. So I told the SAC soldiers: 'don't ask my son about that. He doesn't know anything. If you want to know something, just ask me'."*

After the SAC troops left Ae--- village, they killed the three PDF members.

On June 29<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops crossed Baw Naw river, between Ae--- and Moo Day villages, with a bamboo raft during the monsoon flooding, and some of their guns sank into the river. However, they continued their trip until they arrived at Ar--- village, P'Yah Raw village tract. The next morning, on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC returned to Baw Naw river and forced villagers, including two teenagers from Ae--- village, to search for the guns in the river for them, during major flooding. The villagers were able to find the weapons for the SAC. Then, they [SAC] headed toward Aad--- village, Kaw Heh village tract. As per usual, they looted villagers' chicken and food, and they also arrested five Aad--- villagers on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 to follow them. Two of the arrested villagers were under 18 and one of the two was a student. The arrested Ae---, Aad---, Az--- and

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<sup>16</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.



Af--- villagers were released when [on an unknown date] they reached near Hkaw Taw Poo Town, Meh Kye hill, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. One of the victims said: *“Other porters received about 5,000 kyat [2,38 USD] each. As I did not follow them until the end of the trip, I did not receive any kyat [compensation], but I even wanted to pay them to be released.”* This villager was released in Aad--- village, Kaw Heh village tract, Bilin Township as he is older [an elder; facing difficulties to travel long distances]. The SAC soldiers let him stay there.

Due to past [history of] violence [committed by the Burma Army in Southeast Burma], human rights violations are the main root cause of villagers’ trauma. Since the coup, villagers face major security concerns of being tortured and killed by the SAC, especially when they or any of their family members are arrested by the SAC. Many of the victims’ parents worried due to their personal past experiences, and some of them even died from trauma [became sick or died due to shock]. The family member of one of the arrested villagers in Ae--- village, Naw Ad---, reported to KHRG: *“One of the arrested [Az----] villagers’ father was sick at that time. When he heard that his son was arrested by the SAC, he was afraid his son would be killed or tortured. Since he was already sick, he got higher blood pressure and died. He was in my village. Those arrested [Az---] villagers from Hpapun Town were also coming here [Ae--- village] to send the sick mother to the hospital [but they were arrested in Ae--- village]. The mother also died on the same day as the other victim’s father [after her children were arrested by the LID #44].”*

Since January 2023, the SAC and BGF troops have not patrolled by foot in the area, and they have been using aircraft for transporting rations and for troop rotation, so there have not been such incidents for about three months [as reported by local villagers to KHRG on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2023].

**Table 1. Information on villagers arrested as human shields by the SAC in Bilin Township (July 2021 – Sept 2022)**

Date of incident	Place of arrest	Villagers and soldiers arrested	Perpetrator/ army camp	N° of civilians under arrest	Released (villager name and place where released)
<b>Rainy season, 2021</b>	H--- village	Saw E--- and Saw F---	SAC, Na Kyi army camp	2	Saw E--- and Saw F---, released in Meh Pray Hkee army camp.
<b>May 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022</b>	J--- village	2 unknown (unknown village of origin) and Saw I--- (from J--- village).	SAC LIB #44, MOC #8, LID #44, BGF Battalion #1011 Meh Pray Hkee army camp	3	Saw I---, released in T-Ray Loo Hkoh hill. 2 other villagers (unknown names), released in Na Kyi army camp.
<b>May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>	H--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract	Saw K---, Saw L---, Saw M---, Saw N---, Saw O---, Saw P--- and Saw Q---	BGF and SAC, LID #44	7	Saw K---, Saw L---, Saw M---, Saw N---, Saw O---, Saw P--- and Saw Q---, released in Na Kyi army camp.
<b>June 17<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>	J--- village	Saw R--- (age 55), Saw S--- (age 48), Saw T--- (age 45),	SAC	9	Saw R---, Saw S---, Saw T---, Saw U---, Saw V---, Saw W---, Saw X---, Saw Y--- and Saw Z---



		Saw U--- (age 19), Saw V--- (age 20), Saw W--- (age 27), Saw X--- (age 24), Saw Y--- (age 36) and Saw Z--- (age 66)			released in Na Kyi army camp.
<b>June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>	J--- village	Saw A--- (age 62), Saw B--- (age 53), Saw C--- (age 22) and Saw D--- (age 25)	SAC LIB #207, LIB #102, IB #2, LID #44	4	
<b>June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022</b>	Unknown	Saw Ai--- from Ab--- village. [+ 3 PDF members]		10 (a total of 11 civilians had been arrested since June 20 <sup>th</sup> 2022)	Saw Ai--- escaped in Ah-- village.
	Af--- village	Saw Ag--- and another villager (unknown name).			
	Ah--- village	Saw Aj---, Saw Ak---, Saw Al-- and his friend (both from Am-- village).			
<b>June 25<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>	An--- village	Saw Ao---, Saw Ap--- and Saw Aq--- .		6 remained arrested in the group as human shields (in total, 14 civilians had been arrested)	Saw Ao---, Saw Ap--- and Saw Aq---, released in Lay Kay army camp. Saw A---, Saw B---, Saw C--- and Saw D---, released in Lay Kay army camp.
<b>June 27<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>	Ae--- village	Saw Au---, Saw Av---, and Saw Aw---, Saw Ax--- and Saw Ay--- (2 guests from Az village)		7 (total 19)	Saw Aj--- and Saw Ak---, released in Ar--- village. Saw Al--- and his friend, released in Ar--- village.
<b>June 29<sup>th</sup> 2022</b>				7 (total 19)	[3 PDF members killed in Ae--- village]
<b>July 1<sup>st</sup> 2022</b>	Aad--- village	Unknown (5 villagers, incl. two minors)		12 (total 24)	

Unknown date				0 (in total, 24 civilians were arrested by the SAC and used as human shields in this incident)	Saw Au---, Saw Av---, and Saw Aw---, 5 Aad--- villagers, Saw Ax---and Saw Ay---, Saw Ag--- and unknown name, released near Hkaw Taw Town.
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### Shelling committed by SAC soldiers

Whenever the SAC troops travelled between Na Kyi and Meh Pray Hkee army camps, they shelled mortars to clear the way [of KNLA soldiers] before they arrived to another place, as well as when they received information about potential KNLA activities from their intelligence agents. From July 2021 until September 2022, SAC troops, especially from the Na Kyi army camp, conducted regular indiscriminate shelling in the area in the direction of Meh Pray Hkee army camp. These incidents happened about every day, so villagers could not count how many times [they happened, or give] the date of the incident. Every time the SAC shelled mortars near or in the community, villagers were deeply concerned for the security of their lives, livestock and properties. Many of the mortars shelled by the SAC exploded, but some remained unexploded. Both exploded and unexploded mortars can cause life risks and danger to the local community, so civilians are now living in an unsafe community [area]. Due to the large number of shelling incidents committed by the SAC, a local villager recounted [to a KHRG field staff] some higher-risk shelling incidents, as follows:

Around November 2021, SAC soldiers shelled mortars that landed in H--- village, because they received information that KNLA soldiers had entered the village. No villagers were killed or injured, but one house was damaged by shrapnel and all villagers were in fear.

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022, from 9:17am and 10:55am, SAC soldiers under LIB #404, from Meh Pray Hkee army camp, were bringing their soldiers in need of medical care to Na Kyi army camp. Before they arrived at J--- village, they shelled about five mortars in J--- village. As a consequence, shrapnel damaged one villagers' house and all villagers fled in fear and hid in the bunkers under their houses.

On April 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 9:10am, SAC soldiers from Na Kyi army camp shelled 120mm mortars that landed in Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. One mortar round landed in Aaj--- place name, one round landed in Aak--- village and one round in Aal--- village. The SAC usually conducts indiscriminate shelling near and in communities. Local villagers were not given prior warning, and did not know why they [SAC] conducted the shelling.

On April 12<sup>th</sup> 2022, SAC soldiers shelled two mortar rounds that landed in the jungle outside of Aal--- village. One of these rounds landed on Aam--- hill and the other landed in the valley. On April 18<sup>th</sup> 2022, LID #22 [mainly based in Hpa-an District] came to Thaton District and combined with [Infantry] Battalion #24 left Na Kyi army camp and entered Na Kyi village.

On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, these SAC troops and Infantry Battalion (IB) #96, under LID #44, and LIB #404, under MOC #8, came back [from an unknown place] to Aan--- Pagoda place, Aee Sooh

Hkee village tract. On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, the local KNLA ambushed them once as they [SAC] passed through Thaw Kheh Hta valley. Then, on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, at about 9:20am, the local KNLA ambushed them [SAC] again at Aan--- pagoda [place]. The SAC then shelled nine rounds of mortar; three of them exploded, but six of them did not explode [and remained as unexploded ordnances (UXOs)]. Two of the mortars landed on Aam--- [place] and exploded. Three other shells landed at Aaj--- [place]: one exploded and two remained unexploded.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022 at about 10am, the SAC from Na Kyi army camp shelled mortars on the See Hpoee Poo farm, injuring a villager's buffalo [bull] and a bull.

On May 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, SAC troops under LID #44 were travelling from Meh Pray Hkee army camp when the local KNLA attacked them beside H--- village, as the SAC troops were about to arrive at H--- village. As a consequence, three buffalo and one goat died. During the fighting, SAC LID #44 shelled about five mortar rounds in H--- village which damaged one house owned by a local villager called Saw Za---. His house and household materials were damaged, including five dishes, one big plastic cup, the wooden floor, the roof and a ladder. After the shelling, the SAC entered H--- village and confiscated a villager's hen, which [had an estimated cost of] about 15,000 kyat [7.14 USD] and was about 2.30 viss [3.7 kg].

[The SAC also conducted shelling during the operations and movements previously mentioned in this document.] On June 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, SAC troops LIB #207 from Thein Za Ya Base, Kyeh Htoh Township and LIB #102, from Thaton army base, Tha Htoo Township and IB #2, from Kyaikto base, Kyeh Htoh Township under LID #44 [commandment], entered [the KNU-controlled area] and planned to go to Lay Kay army camp. The SAC soldiers took Thaton Road, that passes through J--- village. On June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, when the SAC troops arrived at Toe Thay Ba bridge, near J--- village, at about 2pm, they were attacked by the local KNLA. The SAC shelled mortars that landed in J--- village, so the village's wood bridge was destroyed.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022, at about 4:10pm, the SAC LIB #404 combined with LID #44, temporarily based on Si Kon Taung hill, located close to Aaz--- village, Meh Pray Hkee village tract, Bilin Township, fired one round of 60mm mortar at Aaz--- village. The shelling severely injured two Aaz--- villagers: Naw Aay--- (a 17-year-old) and Saw Aax--- (a 20-year-old). Both injured villagers received medical treatment at the local clinic in Aaw--- village, Ma Lay Ler village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022, at 6:30pm, the SAC LIB #404 combined with LID #44 in Na Kyi army camp shelled mortars at different places outside of Meh Pray Hkee village as well as other places near the army camp. This incident did not cause any destruction or injury, but it made civilians feel unsafe.

On August 8<sup>th</sup> 2022, at about 7pm, the SAC from Na Kyi army camp shelled mortars close to a former KNLA checkpoint in Aal--- [place], close to the village.

On August 9<sup>th</sup> 2022, at about 8:80pm, SAC soldiers in Na Kyi army camp shelled mortars again in Aee Sooh Hkee village tract area.

On August 11<sup>th</sup> 2022, at about 11:15am, SAC LIB #403 combined with LID #44 [commandment] from Meh Pray Hkee army camp returned to the Na Kyi army camp. Before they arrived in J--- village, fighting broke out with the local KNLA on the [main] road in Aee Sooh Hkee village tract area and the fighting took place until 1:30pm. On August 12<sup>th</sup> 2022, from 3pm to 3:15pm, the local

[KNLA troops] attacked them [SAC soldiers] again when they arrived at Na Kyi bridge. During the fighting, the SAC indiscriminately shelled mortars towards the Aal--- village area, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, Bilin Township.

On September 26<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC from Na Kyi army camp shelled four mortars to Aee Sooh Hkee village tract. One mortar landed at the former KNLA checkpoint, in Aal--- [place], close to villages and three rounds landed near J--- village. Two rounds exploded, but one round remained unexploded.

### **Looting incidents committed by the SAC**

Looting committed by Burma Army soldiers against villagers in rural Southeast Burma has been one of the [most] common practices documented by KHRG since the 2021 coup. After the SAC seized power, SAC troops under the LID #44 have regularly conducted property destruction of villagers and looting from villagers in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District.

On June 17<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC troops from IB #96, under the Southeast Command Headquarters, and [LID] #44, coming from Hpapun Road, entered H--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract, in Bilin Township. They broke into villagers' houses and looted villagers' properties, including two hot water storage bottles and seven pots. They also destroyed villagers' properties, including six betel nut trees, 35 Hpway trees, and four Bambutan [baby] trees, and destroyed five sarongs [skirts], three shirts, five blankets, two dining tables and two plastic food covers [to protect food from flies]. All these looted and destroyed properties [had an estimated] cost [of around] 646,500 kyat [308 USD].

[As part of the SAC movements described above,] on June 18<sup>th</sup> 2022, soldiers from the SAC LIB #207, LIB #102, and IB #2, under the control of SAC LID #44, left Na Kyi army camp and patrolled in KNU-controlled territory in Bilin Township to go to Lay Kay army camp. The three troops combined comprised around 300 soldiers joining the patrolling trip. On June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, the local KNLA attacked these three combined SAC troops on the main road before they arrived at J--- village, Aee Sooh Hkee village tract. After the fighting, the SAC troops stayed in J--- village and looted villagers' belongings and food. The properties looted from the villagers include three machetes, one torchlight, 19 chickens, one rooster, five pots, two pans, one Vivo smartphone, one longyi, one pack of coffee mix, 1.5 kilograms of onions, one pack of monosodium glutamate [a flavour enhancer], three spoons, four Karen shirts, two t-shirts, 16 eggs, one power bank, and some other clothing. All of this [had an estimated] cost [of about] 290,000 kyat [138.16 USD] in total.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> 2022, when these three SAC troops arrived at Af--- village, Ta Au Hkee village tract, they ransacked Af--- villagers' houses and looted villagers' food and belongings, including money and gold. On the evening of June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, when the SAC troops reached Ah--- village, Kyon Wine village tract, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> [of June], they repeated the same pattern, as they ransacked houses and looted villagers' food and belongings, including money and gold.

After the SAC military troops arrived at the Lay Kay army camp, they stayed in the camp for two nights and then they returned to Na Kyi army camp. Then on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC returned to K'Ma Moe Town and arrived to Ae--- village on June 29<sup>th</sup> 2022. They established a base in Ae-- village for two nights. When they were in the village, as per their habit, they ransacked houses and shops and looted villagers' belongings, including food and anything they wanted from

villagers. These SAC troops were based in Ae--- village for two nights, so the soldiers committed looting and confiscated villagers' food, livestock and properties as much as they wanted all day and night. One of the victims, Naw Ad---, who did not flee as the SAC entered the village said: *"They [SAC] stole and looted [all] the villages they crossed. [...] It was the SAC LID #44. [...] They ate a lot of my chicken. [...] I also heard the sound of looting in the shop and I pointed [at] it with my big flashlight. Then I saw them running away, falling and slipping down. Then I shouted, 'Hey, don't loot other people's property! Put it back [to its place] put it back!' But they did not put it back. [...] They entered people's houses and looted property inside the houses and shops. [What] they looted included my tobacco box and betel nut box. I didn't think they would eat it. I just placed it at the top of my bed. They slept in my bed and took it away. They also took two visses of garlic [3 kg] and around 1 viss of chili [1.5 kg]. I asked it back [saying] 'Give my garlic and chilli back' the whole night; they heard it full in their ears [asked relentlessly]. Then they returned me a few of the remaining garlic and chilli in the morning. I took back as much as was left over. When they killed my chicken, I cursed them [saying] that their children will also be calling for them [when they are killed]. However, I didn't really mean it."*

On June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, the SAC reached Aad--- village, Kaw Heh village tract. They also committed the same violations of ransacking houses and looting villagers' belongings and food, and arresting villagers. They then went to K'Ma Moe Town.

Further background reading on the situation on human rights issues in Doo Tha Htoo District, Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC air strikes killed a villager and damaged civilian property in Hpa-an Township \(March 2023\)"](#), December 2023
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: A DKBA operation commander tortured three villagers in Hpa-an Township \(August 2023\)"](#), December 2023
- ["Striking Fear: Impacts of State Administration Council \(SAC\) shelling on villagers' lives in Southeast Burma \(January to October 2023\)"](#), December 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.khr.org](http://www.khr.org).

# Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

