



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: Arbitrary arrest, shelling, air strikes and displacement, November 2022

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Hsaw Htee and Ler Doh townships, Kler Lwee Htoo District, in November 2022, including fighting, shelling, air strikes, arbitrary arrest and movement restrictions. Thousands of local villagers were displaced by the constant fighting and shelling. Moreover, the SAC arbitrarily arrested four villagers and restricted movement following the skirmishes.¹

Displacement of villagers

This report covers the challenges that villagers had to face when fighting occurred between the joint forces of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)² battalions #7, #8 and the People's Defence Force (PDF)³ against the State Administration Council (SAC)⁴, in Hsaw Htee Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The fighting happened after the combined forces of KNLA soldiers and PDF attacked the SAC army camp located in Than Zein village, Than Zein village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District.

On November 12th 2022, at 3:00 am, the KNLA and PDF combined forces attacked the SAC army camp known as Baw K'Hta army camp located near Baw K'Hta village, P'Deh Kaw village tract,⁵ Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. After they [combined forces of KNLA and PDF] attacked Baw K'Hta army camp, they also attacked Toh Thay Poo [Ton T'Da] army camp which was located in Toh Thay Poo village, P'Deh Kaw village tract. On the same day, at 7:00

¹ The present document is based on information received in November 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 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 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.

⁵ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

am, KNLA battalion #7 and #9 and PDF combined forces attacked the SAC army camp in Than Zein village, Than Zein village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, where SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)⁶ #350, #57 and #349; Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁷ #20; and Light Infantry Division (LID)⁸ #77 were based.

Due to the fighting [that erupted after this latter attack on the SAC army camp], villagers from 17 villages in four village tracts in Hsaw Htee Township, and some other villages in Ler Doh Township, fled the area in fear. Displaced villagers sought refuge in 11 monasteries nearby A---Town [skirmishes are less likely to occur in towns than in rural areas], whereas some villagers sought refuge in the nearby villages where their siblings and relatives live.



⁶ An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most 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 NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

⁷ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. 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 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.

⁸ A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Burma military is commanded by a brigadier general, and consists often light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Burma military 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).

On the day that the fighting happened, three SAC military jets conducted eight rounds of air strikes in the area. The SAC military jets dropped bombs and fired machine guns when they conducted air strikes. There were no [civilian] casualties from the fighting and air strikes but some villagers' houses and plantations were damaged and destroyed. In particular, three houses, one monastery, one warehouse in Than Zein village, and one clinic in Meh Zaung village, were damaged or destroyed by the SAC air strikes and shelling.



This photo was taken in November 2022. This photo shows the destroyed house of a villager in P'Deh Kaw village tract, Ler Doh Township, after the SAC conducted air strikes and shelling on November 12th 2023. [Photo: local villager]

Number of displaced villagers and their villages from Hsaw Htee Township

Date	Village tract	Name of the village	Number of (displaced) households	Number of (displaced) villagers
12/11/2022	Than Zein village tract	Than Zein	315	1,502
		Than Zein Ywa Ma	220	953
		Than Zein/Min Lan	61	258
		Meh Saw	126	560
		Kan Nee	193	1,218
		Pah Aay	168	688
	Aay K'Nee village tract	Ainy K'Nee		
		Kyauk Tan	753	3,504
	Aaw P'Lah village tract	Aaw P'Lah	238	1,296
		Koh Kah (Chaung Kyo)	43	230
		Meh Th'Daw Hkaw (Pu Zwun Aaing)	37	187
	Th'Yeh Chaung village tract	Th'Yeh Chaung	149	801
		Kyauk Poh Seik	79	382
		K'Say Pay (K'Zin Pin)	33	161
		Than T'Dah	11	63
		Nun Aaing	8	36
		Yone Taing	175	821
Total	4 village tracts	17 villages	2,609	12,660

Destruction of villagers' buildings and plantations

Date	Owner	Village	Destruction	Causes
12/11/2022	Maung ⁹ Than Chaung	Meh Zaung	House	Shelling
	Ma ¹⁰ Tin Tin Aay	Meh Zaung	House	Shelling/Airstrike
	Than Naing	Meh Zaung	House	Shelling/Airstrike
	Din Lu	Meh Zaung	House	Shelling/Airstrike
		Than Zein	Monastery	Shelling/Airstrike
		Than Zein	Monastery prayer room	Shelling/Airstrike
	Ma Thin Thin Ma	Shwegyin	Rubber plantation (10 acres)	Shelling/Airstrike
		Meh Zaung	Clinic	N/A

For the following several days the situation did not ameliorate. Due to the constant fighting, villagers from villages in [nearby] Pyin Yay village tract also had to flee. There are four villages in Pyin Yay village tract and Pyin Yay village tract is in Hsaw Htee Township. Some of the villagers [from Pyin Yay village tract] also sought refuge in A--- Town while others sought refuge in their relatives' villages.

As of November 2022, there were no specific non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing support such as food and other necessary items to these displaced villagers. These displaced villagers have to support and help each other during displacement. In Aaw P'Lah village tract, there is a social group [community initiative] that takes the lead in arranging and distributing humanitarian aid to villagers whenever villagers are in a difficult situation. They prepared basic food [for displaced villagers in the area], including rice.

Number of villagers from four villages in Pyin Yay village tract

Village name	Households	Female	Male	Total
Pyin Yay village	411	1,071	884	1,955
Waing Kyun	225	538	542	1,080
Theh Tuh Kon	88	189	204	393
Nyaung AEain	130	310	296	606
Total	854	2,108	1,926	4,034

Arbitrary arrest of villagers

On November 15th 2022, SAC soldiers arbitrarily arrested four villagers [as they mistakenly thought that these villagers were affiliated with armed resistance groups] from Chay Taw Ya village, Shan Ywa village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. The four villagers who were arrested are Ko¹¹ B--- (55 years old), C--- (28 years old), D--- (26 years old), and E---

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

¹⁰ 'Ma' is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

¹¹ 'Ko' is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

(27 years old). The SAC soldiers who arrested these villagers are from Infantry Battalion (IB) #350 and these arrested villagers were kept in the army camp where IB #350 is based [in Than Zein village, Than Zein village tract, Hsaw Htee Township]. [As explained by the arrested villagers], the SAC soldiers also checked these villagers' phones. These villagers were released on November 19th 2022, at 2:00 pm.

Movement restrictions and overall situation

After the three SAC army camps were attacked on November 12th 2022, the SAC set up their checkpoints in the area, restricted villagers' movement, and increased their checking [of villagers travelling through the checkpoints]. A few days after the fighting, some villagers returned to their village, whereas some did not [some remained displaced and waited for the situation to get better]. However, the villagers who had already returned to their village had to flee again when they heard that fighting happened [small fighting continued to happen in the area during the next days].

The situation of constant skirmishes and insecurity in the area continued until the end of November 2022. Due to the fighting, shelling, and air strikes, 3,463 households from 31 villages in five village tracts [Than Zein village tract, Aay K'Nee village tract, Aaw P'Lah village tract, Th'Yeh Chaung village tract, and Pyin Yay village tract, Hsaw Htee Township] had to flee. A total of 16,694 villagers were displaced from Hsaw Htee Township, Kler Lwee Htoo District. [KHRG was not able to document the total number of displaced villagers in Ler Doh township].

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, 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.

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District

