



## Short Update

January 20<sup>th</sup> 2023 / KHRG # 22-477-D1

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## Taw Oo District Short Update: Skirmishes, injuries due to SAC shelling and gunfire, threats against villagers and restriction of freedom of movement in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, December 2022

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*This Short Update describes events that occurred in Daw Hpa Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District in December 2022 including skirmishes between armed groups, threats and retaliatory shelling and gunfire into civilian areas, and restriction of freedom of movement. Following a skirmish in Day Law Mu Nu Lar area between State Administration Council (SAC) troops and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops, SAC troops deliberately fired mortar shells into A--- village, destroying property and injuring a 50-year-old villager. They also fired retaliatory gunshots in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, injuring one civilian. In addition, villagers were stopped along the road, questioned and searched for weapons by SAC soldiers. Local villagers feel unsafe and many have fled to stay in their plantations.<sup>1</sup>*

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On December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022 at around 8:30 am, State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>2</sup> Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>3</sup> #604 patrolled on a well-travelled vehicle road [between Toungoo Town and Thandaunggyi Town, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township]. There, they encountered Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>4</sup> Company #3 under Battalion #5, Brigade (2). As a result, fighting happened between SAC LIB #604 and KNLA Company #3. The fighting lasted 15 minutes. SAC LIB #604 is based in Sa Nay Kone army camp. This army camp is one mile away from A--- village (also known as B---) in Day Law Mu Nu Lar area, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. Sa Nay Kone army camp is a temporary frontline army camp. The incident location was five furlongs [1 km / 0.63 miles] away from A--- village. As Sa Nay Kone army camp is located relatively far from the village, local villagers were unaware of the fighting between SAC [LIB #604] troops [and KNLA Company #3].

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

<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> 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 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.

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

At around 9 am [on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022], following the skirmish, SAC [LIB #604] troops fired mortar shells into A--- village in response to the fighting. [LIB# 604 Battalion Commander Hein San Htun previously warned the villagers that the SAC would attack the village if SAC soldiers were attacked by the KNLA.] The first mortar shell landed on a hill near the village and exploded. No local villagers were injured [by this explosion]. The second mortar shell landed on the house of Saw C--- [a villager] and exploded. [Saw C--- was not injured because he was at church during the shelling.] As a result of the explosion of the second mortar shell, Saw D---, a 50-year-old villager who lives near Saw C---'s house, was mildly injured on his upper left arm by the shrapnel. After the shelling incident, local villagers had to hide in the village as they did not dare to go out of their houses. The wounded villager received medical treatment [on the same day] from a female health worker who had previously received medical training in A--- village. [The victim fully recovered.]

[After the skirmish on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022,] LIB #604 soldiers also indiscriminately fired their weapons more than 30 times in the air in Thandaung Myo Thit Town. [Local villagers believe that this was an act of retaliation as Battalion Commander Hein San Htun had previously ordered his soldiers to engage in threats against villagers if SAC soldiers were attacked by the KNLA.] The gunfire mildly injured one Telenor Myanmar telecommunications worker from Toungoo Town in the belly. [The victim went back to Toungoo Town. His whereabouts are unknown as of January 2023.]

Battalion Commander Hein San Htun is the battalion commander of LIB #604. LIB #604 also has troops deployed in Thandaung Myo Thit army camp [which is located in Thandaung Myo Thit Town, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township], and in [three army camps located on a road between Thandaunggyi Town and Toungoo Town]: Shel Chout Mine army camp, Sa Nay Kone army camp and Taw Pyar Gyi army camp. Battalion Commander Hein San Htun is based in Thandaung Myo Thit army camp.

[That same day, on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022, in Thandaung Myo Thit Town] the soldiers also stopped villagers on a road as they [the villagers] returned from a local church. They questioned those villagers [to investigate whether they were somehow involved in the skirmish]. They also conducted body searches of the villagers, checking for weapons such as guns. In addition, they restricted the movement of villagers [by forbidding them to travel to Thandaunggyi Town and Toungoo Town]. Because of this, local villagers [from Thandaung Myo Thit Town] were afraid to travel and did not feel secure living in their houses. These villagers went to hide in their rubber and betel nut plantations.

[Since early December 2022], LIB #604 troops regularly patrolled in the area [in Thandaung Myo Thit Town] during nighttime. During daytime, they were watching local villagers' movement. [Following the skirmish], they increasingly stopped and questioned villagers who travelled in the area when they suspected villagers [of having connections with the KNLA]. Due to this activity, local villagers felt unsafe and insecure.



These photos were taken on December 11<sup>th</sup> 2022 in A--- village, Day Law Mu Nu Lar area, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District after SAC LIB #604 fired mortars into the village. The photo on the left shows Saw C---'s house, which was hit by one of the mortar shells. The photo on the right shows the tail fin of one of the mortars that exploded in the village. [Photos: KHRG]

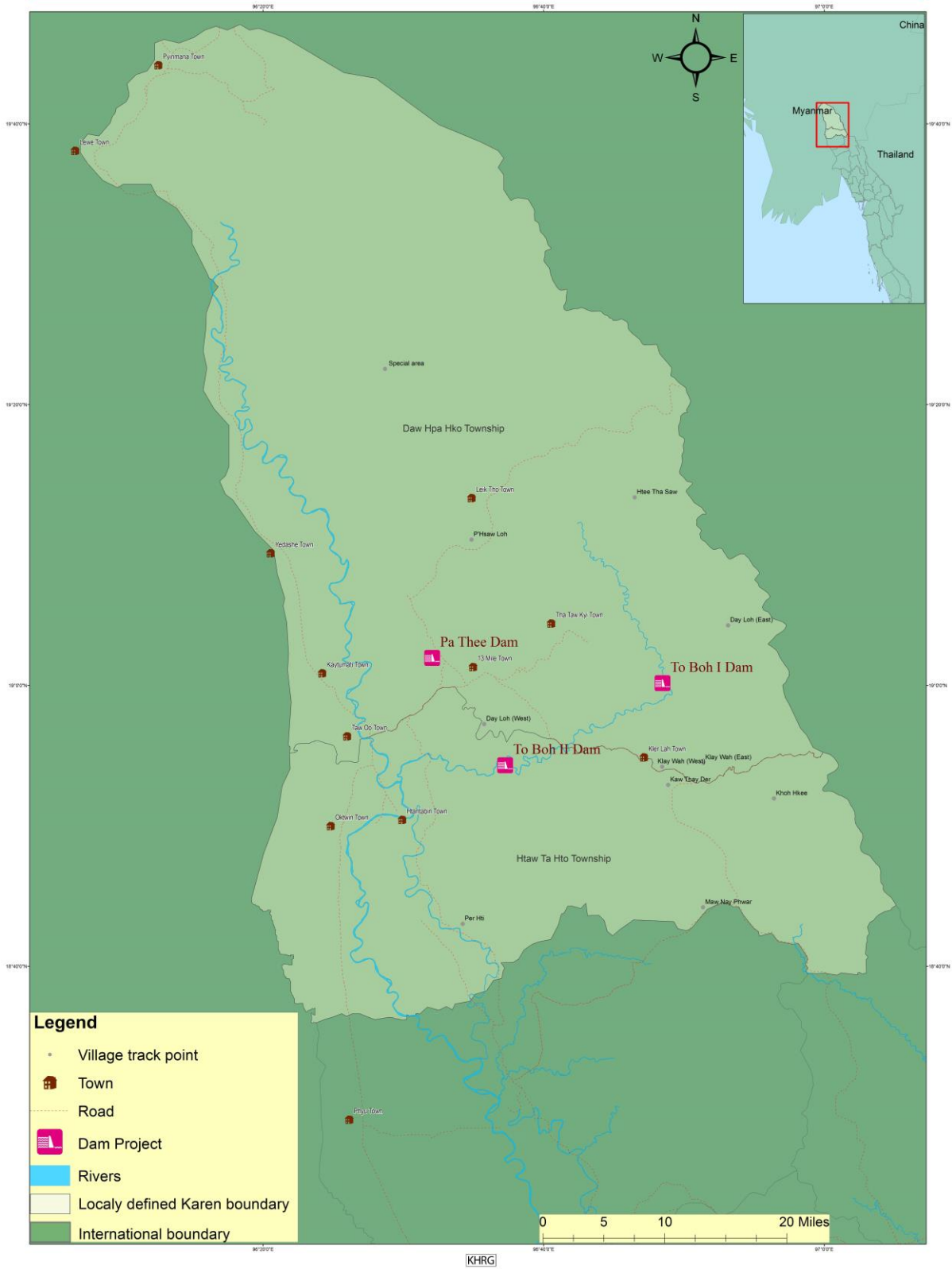
Further background reading on the security and human rights situation in Taw Oo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Taw Oo District Situation Update: Fighting, displacement, killing, and villagers' livelihoods in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, April to July 2022"](#), December 2022.
- ["Taw Oo District Interview: Suspicious death of detainee in police custody in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, November 2021"](#), July 2022.
- ["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.

### 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).

# Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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