



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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### Short Update

March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022 / KHRG #22-72-D1

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## **Mu Traw District Short Update: SAC troops fired mortars into a village, killing seven villagers and injuring four, March 2022**

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*This Short Update describes events that occurred in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District in March 2022. Seven villagers, including three children and a woman six months pregnant, were killed, and four villagers, including two children, were injured by mortars that State Administration Council (SAC) troops fired into their village following a skirmish between the SAC and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 6:30 pm. Fearing an escalation of SAC shelling into the village, villagers living in W--- village fled to nearby forests and fear working on their farms.<sup>1</sup>*

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On March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 6:30 pm, following a skirmish with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>2</sup> [battalion unknown], State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>3</sup> Military Operations Command (MOC)<sup>4</sup> troops based in Hpapun Town deliberately fired two rounds of 120 mm mortars into W--- village, Meh K'Law village tract<sup>5</sup>, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District, killing seven villagers and injuring four.

The villagers who were killed and injured in the shelling had just returned to the village after working in their fields. The mortars fell and exploded where they were living. The seven villagers killed were: Naw<sup>6</sup> Tah Loo (aged 2), Naw Htoo Paw (aged 5), Naw Tay Nee Lar Way (aged 14), Naw Paw Wah (a 32-year-old mother to three children who was also six months pregnant) and her sister Naw Eh Moo (aged 22), Saw<sup>7</sup> Hpah Day Poe (aged 19), and Saw Kay (aged 40).

The four injured villagers were Naw P--- (age 17), Naw R--- (age 29), Saw K--- (age 3), and Saw O--- (age 28). Naw P--- was struck by shrapnel on her left calf and was sent to T--- Hospital

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in March 2022. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw 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 Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>3</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.

<sup>4</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>5</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>6</sup> Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>7</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

where she had to stay for more than two weeks to recover. Naw R--- was struck by shrapnel on her right knee and was hospitalised at T--- Hospital; she was discharged from the hospital on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2022. Saw K--- was struck by shrapnel on his right foot and Saw O--- was struck by shrapnel on the left side of his back. They both were brought to a hospital in Thailand for treatment and discharged in March 2022 [exact date unknown]. However, they were required to come back to the hospital two weeks from the date of their release for a check-up.

Each injured villager was given 200,000 kyats [USD 112.48]<sup>8</sup> by the Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>9</sup>. The KNU also gave 300,000 kyats [USD 168.71] to each family of the villagers who were killed by the SAC shelling to be able to cover funeral expenses [same amount even if multiple family members were killed].

On the day of the shelling, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022, some villagers from W--- village fled. The following day, on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2022, the rest of the villagers from W---village fled. In total, 39 households comprising a total of 308 villagers fled to nearby forests.

The villagers living in W--- village are now afraid of going to work in their fields and sleeping in their huts. They fear that the SAC troops will fire mortars [at the village] if they [SAC soldiers] see there is a light turned on in the huts. Villagers usually clear their fields [prepare their fields for the next harvest by clearing long grass and bushes and then burning the fields] during the summer, but they fear that they will be fired at by SAC troops while they are working.

The villagers feel they are not at risk of stepping on landmines in their fields because they are avoiding prohibited areas that are contaminated by landmines [which the KNLA have told the villagers about]; the villagers are only afraid of SAC shelling.

The villagers say that international organisations and local KNU leaders have not done anything yet to resolve the matter of SAC troops shelling and killing many civilians. The villagers believe that if they [international organisations and KNU leaders] had taken action [to avoid fighting in civilian areas], more villagers would not have been killed by SAC shelling. Villagers ask whether there is anyone monitoring the situation on the ground. The villagers are hoping that international organisations and local KNU leaders will find a solution.



<sup>8</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the March 30<sup>th</sup> 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.56 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

<sup>9</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.



These photos were taken on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 in W--- village, Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The photos show villagers who were killed or injured during the SAC shelling. [Photos; KHRG]



These photos were taken on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 in W--- village, Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The photos show villagers who were injured or killed during the SAC shelling. [Photos; KHRG]







This photo was taken on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2022 in W--- village, Meh K'Law village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. The photo shows a villager who was injured being sent to T--- Hospital. [Photo; KHRG]

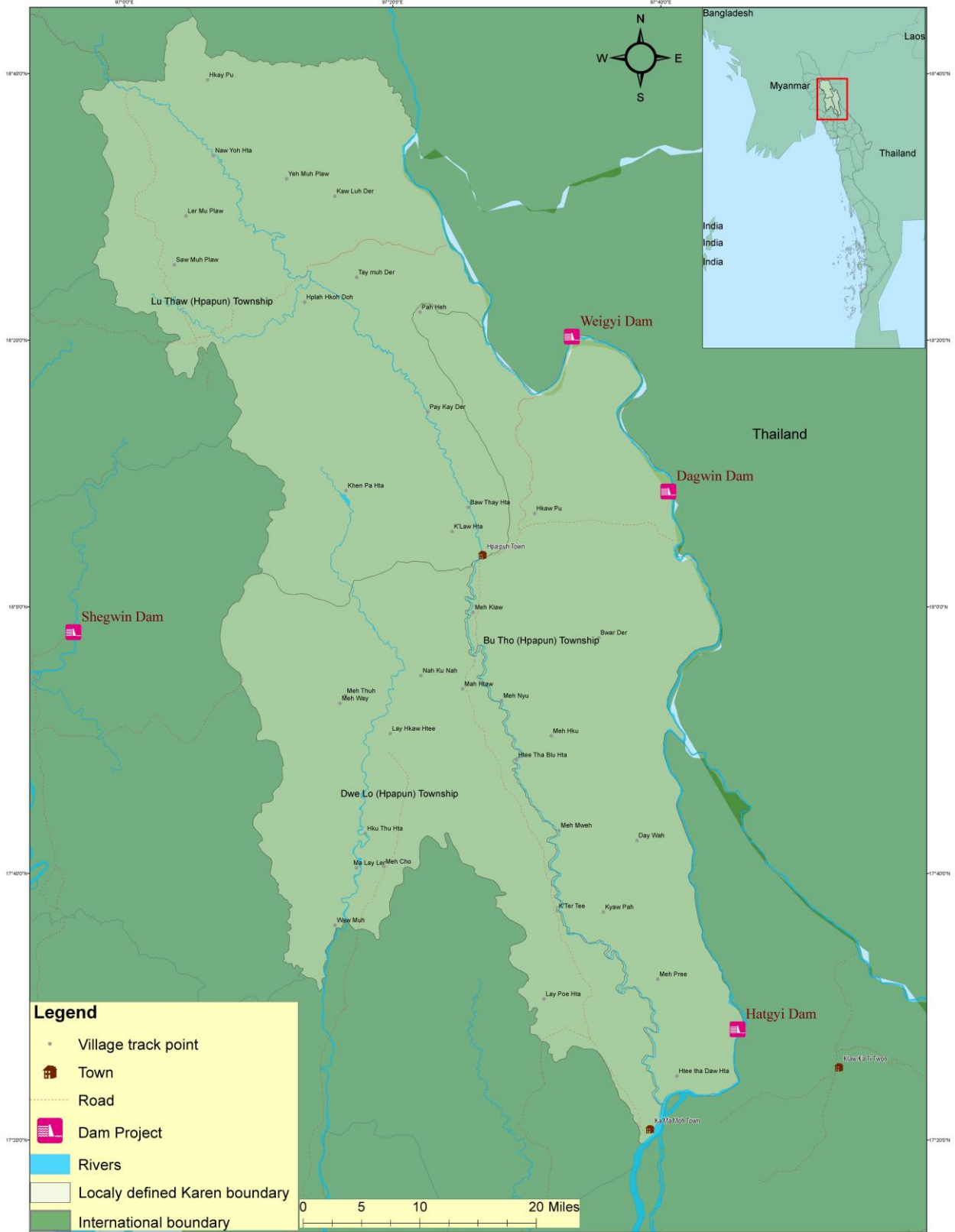
Further background reading on the situation of militarisation and human rights violations in Mu Traw District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Mu Traw District Incident Report: A villager died due to a landmine explosion in Bu Tho Township, January 2022”](#), February 2022.
- [“Mu Traw District Situation Update: Human rights violations including looting, killing, arbitrary arrest and torture, and the burning of houses and villages, April to July 2021”](#), January 2022.
- [“Mu Traw District Incident Report: Torture of three villagers in Dwe Lo Township by an SAC officer, August 2021”](#), January 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).

# Mutraw (Hpapun) District



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