



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

June 22nd 2022 / KHRG # 22-75-S1

Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Fighting and displacement, property damage, deaths caused by landmine explosion, travel restrictions, and the COVID-19 situation, December 2021 to February 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Ler Doh Soh (Dawei), K'Ser Doh (Thayetchaung), Ler Muh Lah (Palaw) and T'Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi) townships, Mergui-Tavoy District during the period between December 2021 and February 2022, and includes information on fighting and displacement, property damage, a landmine incident that resulted in two deaths, the COVID-19 situation, and travel restrictions. Ongoing fighting between the State Administration Council (SAC) and the People's Defence Force (PDF) across Mergui-Tavoy District resulted in the displacement of many local villagers. Following fighting between the SAC and PDF, SAC soldiers burned down villagers' houses. Villagers also faced travel restrictions and were questioned and threatened by the SAC at checkpoints when they travelled. COVID-19 has been spreading across the district.¹

Fighting and displacement

On January 19th 2022, fighting occurred in Yay Waing and Pyin K'To villages, K'Mo Thway area, Ler Doh Soh (Dawei) Township, and over 600 villagers have been displaced. Villagers who have been displaced because of the fighting include villagers from Khaung Taing Pyin, Myin Mat Tat, Ku La Khyang, and Myin Ka Ni villages. They sought refuge in E--- village. On January 20th 2022, fighting broke out again in Ha Myin Gyi village, and some of the villagers there fled to E--- village. There were more than [an estimated] 800 people displaced in K'Mo Thway area, Ler Doh Soh Township, and they were mostly [ethnic] Tavoy people.

On February 17th 2022, fighting broke out in P'Wa Hta village, P'Wa area, Ta Naw Th'Ree (Tanintharyi) Township, and the villagers there had to flee to other places. Some villagers fled to F--- Town and some moved to other villages such as G---, H--- I---, J---, K---, L---, and M---. There were over 380 displaced people who came to seek refuge in L--- village and around 300 people (or more) who fled to M--- village. Villagers who sought refuge in L--- village and M--- village were mostly from N---, O---, P---, Q---, and R--- villages. After fighting broke out between

¹ The present document is based on information received in March 2022. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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.

State Administration Council (SAC)² soldiers and People's Defence Force (PDF)³ members in P'Wa area, Ta Naw Th'Ree Township, SAC soldiers shot dead three villagers and arrested three others. These SAC military activities have been terrorizing civilians.

Fighting between SAC soldiers and PDF members also resulted in the displacement of more than 800 local villagers in P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township. IDPs from K'Mo Thway area, Ler Doh Soh Township received support from individual local villagers, K'Mo Thway civil society organizations, the Karen National Union (KNU)⁴ government, and other organizations. Similarly, IDPs from P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah (Palaw) Township received support from individual donors, local villagers, organisations [CSO/CBOs], and the KNU government. According to the people who are in charge at those IDP settlements, shortage of food is the biggest issue faced by IDPs, and they need people to support them. [There are two main IDP settlements here. One is in S--- village, K'Mo Thway area, Ler Doh Soh Township, and the other one is in T--- village, P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township. Displaced villagers at S--- IDP site were allowed to stay in the schools, school hall and staff houses. For villagers who sought refuge at T--- village, small huts were built for them as an IDP site outside of the village.]

Property damage

On January 8th 2022, SAC soldiers staying at Kee Nee village, Ler Muh Lah Township stepped on a landmine planted by the PDF when they were on their way from Kee Nee village to Ka Wer village. As a result, fighting broke out that same day from 6:30 pm to 9:45 pm between SAC soldiers and PDF members in the area between those two villages. At 9:00 pm, SAC soldiers burned down five houses in Ka Wer village. The villagers whose houses were burned down were Saw U---, Saw V---, Saw W---, Saw X--- and Saw Y---. These villagers were ordinary villagers who work as day labourers and who secure their livelihood by planting betel nut trees. After their houses were burned down, these villagers had to stay with their relatives. [Since the 2021 coup, fighting has been happening frequently in the area.] Whenever there has been fighting between SAC soldiers and the PDF in P'Law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, SAC soldiers have arrested the local people and burned down villagers' houses.

On January 21st 2022, fighting broke out in Ha Myin Gyi village, which is located in the eastern part of Tavoy Town, Ler Doh Soh Township. After the fighting happened and villagers [from the town area] fled from their village, SAC soldiers burned down one of the villagers' houses and destroyed the betel nut that villagers had harvested. When fighting occurred in Saw Khay Htoh Proh area, K'ser Doh (Thayetchaung) Township in the past SAC soldiers also blocked the road, checked the local villagers and terrorized them. Whenever there was an incident, SAC soldiers would terrorize the local people who lived near the place where the incident took place.

Landmine incident

² 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.

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 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.

After fighting broke out between the SAC and PDF on January 8th 2022 in Ler Muh Lah Township, SAC soldiers increased their movement in the area during the night. They [SAC soldiers] planted a landmine beside a villager's house, and at around 5:30 pm on January 23rd 2022, a mother and her child stepped on that landmine. The mother died immediately and the child also died, shortly after being taken to P'Law Hospital. After this incident, fear and worry increased among the villagers.

Travel restrictions

Due to the recent fighting, local villagers in K'ser Hkler area in K'Ser Doh Township started facing travel restrictions because SAC soldiers came and set up their checkpoints on the road and threatened civilians. If villagers wanted to travel to other places, they had to go and get a travel recommendation letter from the village head. If villagers went to buy food, SAC soldiers would also check them, ask them questions, and threaten them by accusing them of buying food for the PDF. Another issue that local villagers faced regarding transportation was that they were checked to see whether they had already received the COVID-19 vaccine or not when they travelled. Local villagers in other parts of Mergui-Tavoy District also faced travel restrictions and were checked by the SAC at checkpoints when they travelled from one place to another. The things checked were phones, motorcycle licenses, car licenses, and COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

COVID-19 situation

COVID-19 has been spreading throughout the entire district of Mergui-Tavoy, and many people have been infected with the virus. Some of the local people went to get treatment at SAC government hospitals, while others received treatment at private hospitals and clinics, or at the local health centres in KNU-controlled areas. Some villagers just used traditional/herbal medicines [to treat the symptoms]. However, during the period between December 2021 and February 2022, there were no COVID-19 related deaths. The SAC has set up centres for people to get COVID-19 vaccines in every local area [in the district], but no awareness training regarding the COVID-19 vaccination has been provided to local civilians. In KNU-controlled area, a list of local villagers has been collected for the vaccination, but villagers didn't know when the vaccination program would begin in their local area.

Further background reading on the human rights situation in Mergui-Tavoy District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: SAC militia shoots teenage villager, CDM and protester protection, SAC troop movement, arbitrary taxation and livelihood, healthcare and education challenges, March 2021"](#), January 2022.
- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Attendance at KECD schools, the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and the movement of SAC troops \(March to June 2021\)"](#), September 2021.
- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021"](#), May 2021.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. 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.khrg.org.

Mergui-Tavoy (Tanintharyi) District

