



## Short Update

March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022 / KHRG # Log# 22-76-D1

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## **Taw Oo District Short Update: Killing, shelling, displacement, and the destruction of a COVID-19 screening checkpoint and villagers' belongings by SAC soldiers, March 2022**

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*This Short Update describes events that occurred in Daw Hpa Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District in March 2022. In early March, skirmishes broke out between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and State Administration Council (SAC). In response, the SAC fired mortars at civilian areas. Due to the shelling, local villagers fled in fear from their villages. In addition, the SAC burned down a COVID-19 screening checkpoint and villagers' belongings, including a shop. An SAC soldier also shot dead a villager in his home and then dragged the body to where fighting had taken place earlier.<sup>1</sup>*

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On March 7<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 3:15 pm, fighting broke out near A--- village, Chin Thu Saw village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District between Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>2</sup> Battalion #5 from Brigade 2 and State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>3</sup> Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>4</sup> #604. SAC LIB #604 is based at Day Dah Hkoh army camp, which is very close to A--- village [SAC LIB #604 is also based at D--- village, K'Lay Hkoh village tract<sup>5</sup>, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township]. SAC LIB #604 is led by Battalion Commander Hain San Tun (who is based at the Day Dah Hkoh army camp). After the fighting, SAC LIB #604 from Day Dah Hkoh army camp fired mortars at nearby villages. Local villagers were very afraid that they would be hit by the mortars. No villagers were injured, but their plantations (cardamom, turmeric and coffee) were damaged by the shelling.

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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 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 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> 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.

<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.

On the morning of March 8<sup>th</sup> 2022, soldiers from SAC Support Unit #930 from Southern Command Headquarters went back to Toungoo Town after they transported food and ammunition to their Ta Bwe Klo and Thauk Yay Khat army camps in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township. While they were returning, they encountered local KNLA soldiers, and an armed clash occurred around 7:45 am. During the fighting, more than five SAC soldiers were killed and one SAC truck was destroyed. The fighting took place between B--- village and C--- village, Kweh P'Loh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township. After the fighting, SAC LIB #604, based in D--- village, K'Lay Hkoh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, about 10 miles [16.09 km] from where the fighting took place, indiscriminately fired about 15 mortars from their army camp at nearby villages, including D---, C---, A--- and E--- villages. The shelling damaged villagers' plantations. The blasts also shook villagers' houses, leading villagers to flee their villages out of fear.

According to local villagers, on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2022 at around 12:00 pm in B--- village, a soldier from SAC LIB #604 went to the house of villager Saw Aung Aung and shot him five times [villagers found five bullet wounds on his body], killing him. He was about 30 years old and a father to one son. The order to shoot and kill Saw Aung Aung came from Battalion Commander Hain San Tun. After Saw Aung Aung was shot dead, they [SAC soldiers] took his phone and the money found on his body. Then, they dragged his dead body along the road from Htah Thaw Hphoh Lee village to the place of that day's earlier armed clash [most likely to make it appear as though he was killed in the fighting]. On March 13<sup>th</sup> 2022, local villagers found the dead body of Saw Aung Aung there. His body was already rotting and sticky [decomposing].



This photo was taken on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2022 in a place near B--- village, Kweh P'Loh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. It shows the dead body of Saw Aung Aung. A soldier from SAC LIB #604 killed him at his house on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2022 and dragged his body to another location where fighting had occurred earlier in the day. His dead body was found on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2022. [Photo: Local villager]

On March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 6:30 pm, about 20 soldiers from SAC LIB #604, led by Battalion Commander Hain San Tun, entered D--- village, K'Lay Hkoh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township. They then fired more than 100 rounds from small arms and six artillery shells into plantations between D--- village and F--- village, Htee Thar Saw village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township. Villagers from both villages and the plantations fled as they were very afraid. After firing those shots, Battalion Commander Hain San Tun and 11 of his soldiers went to meet the Section #3 SAC administrator in D--- village at 7:30 pm but the administrator was not at his house. However, the administrator's wife was at the house at that time. Therefore, they [the SAC commander and his soldiers] talked to the administrator's wife and asked her about Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>6</sup> members and family of KNU members in the village. She said she did not know any members of the KNU. Then they pointed a gun at her and asked her to show them the houses of KNU members. [Out of fear] she showed them [the SAC soldiers] a house [without knowing anything]. Later, they [the SAC] burned and destroyed food, clothing, house

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<sup>6</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.

materials, pots, bowls and about 300 viss [480 kg]<sup>7</sup> of dried turmeric from that house. (Villagers sell dried turmeric for income in order to support their livelihoods.) They also confiscated a smartphone from the house.



These photos were taken on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022 in D--- village, K'Lay Hkoh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. They show the villagers' property that SAC LIB #604 burned, including food, clothing, house materials, pots, bowls and dried turmeric. [Photos: KHRG]



These photos were taken on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022 in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. They show villagers fleeing from their villages due to the shelling by SAC LIB #604. [Photos: KHRG]



<sup>7</sup> A viss is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg or 3.52 lb.

At 8:30 pm on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022, they [SAC LIB #604] fired warning shots using artillery fire to encourage villagers to leave their villages. They [SAC LIB #604 soldiers] told villagers that they should leave with their belongings to other places by 10:00 am on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022 because they will fire mortars into Section #3 of D---- village and clear the area after 10:00 am on that day. In the early morning of March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022, some villagers fled to other safe places by car and motorbike; while others fled by foot. They did not even cook or eat breakfast [that morning before fleeing].

On March 11<sup>th</sup> 2022 at 11:00 am, SAC LIB #604 burned down a shop owned by a villager who lives in B--- village, Kweh P'Loh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township. The shop is worth more than 3,000,000 kyats [USD 1,687.00].<sup>8</sup> After the SAC burned down the shop, B--- villagers fled to the nearby forest in order to avoid future violence because they were very afraid of SAC activities. This village is located near where fighting broke out between the KNLA and SAC a few days earlier [on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2022]. Also, they [SAC soldiers] restricted the villagers' movement by not allowing any villager to leave the village [some villagers already fled when the fighting happened]. Later, they [the SAC] allowed villagers to leave, but almost everyone in the village had already [covertly] fled due to ongoing indiscriminate shelling near the village. In addition, on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, they [LIB #604] also burned down a COVID-19 screening checkpoint near D--- village, K'Lay Hkoh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township.



This photo was taken on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022 near D---village, K'Lay Hkoh village tract, Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District. It shows the burnt COVID-19 screening checkpoint that SAC LIB #604 destroyed on March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022. [Photo: KHRG]

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

- *“Taw Oo District Incident Report: A villager’s house was damaged by indiscriminate gunfire from a drunk SAC military officer in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, August 2021”*, December 2021.
- *“Taw Oo District Incident Report: Killing case in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, July 2021”*, December 2021.
- *“Taw Oo District Incident Report: Rape case in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, August 2020”*, February 2021.

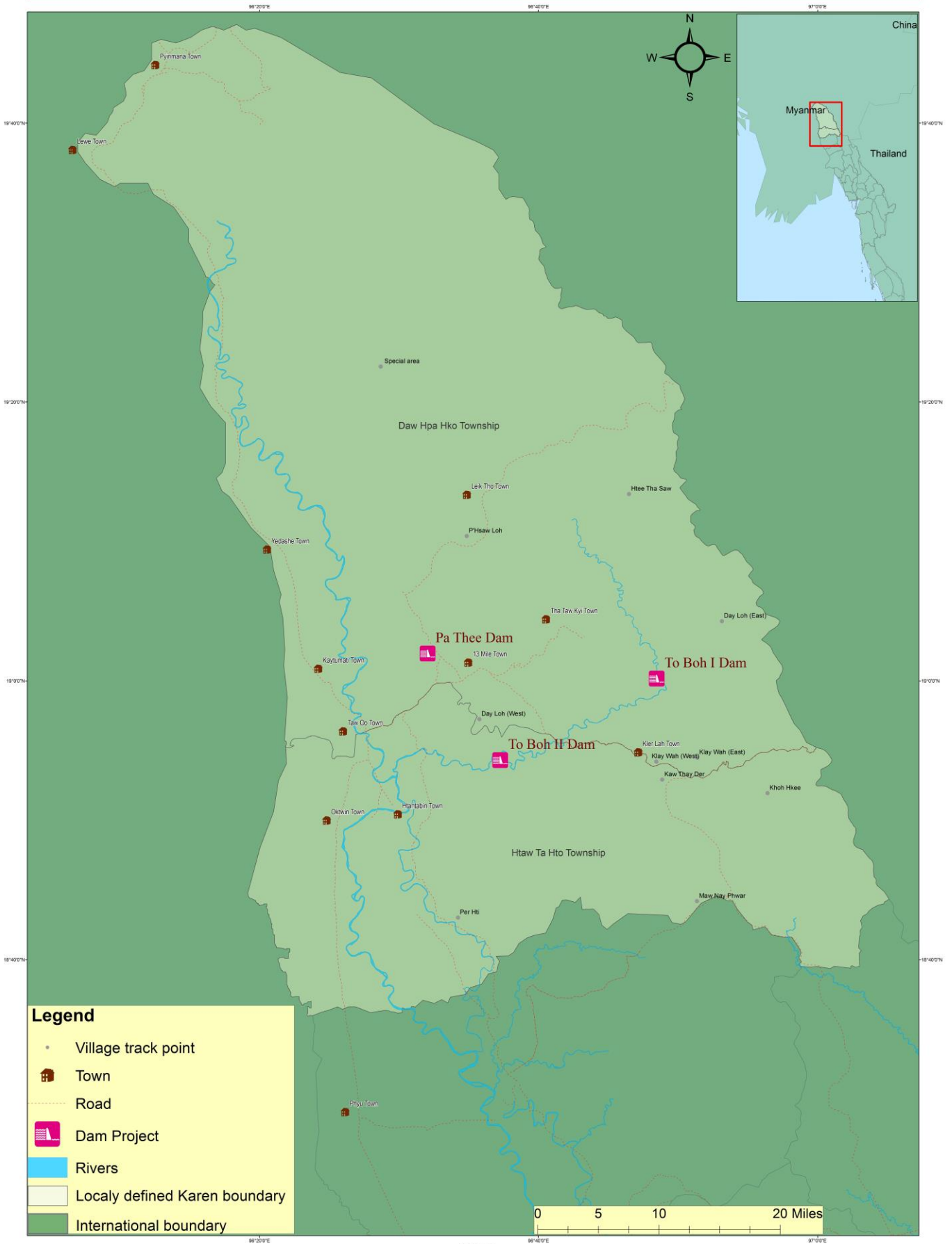
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<sup>8</sup> All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the March 30<sup>th</sup> 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.56 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

## 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



**Legend**

- Village track point
- 🏠 Town
- Road
- 🏗️ Dam Project
- 🌊 Rivers
- Locally defined Karen boundary
- 🌿 International boundary

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