



Situation Update

March 11th, 2024 / KHRG # 23-24-S1

Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: SAC shelling into villages in Tha Htoo Township, causing injuries and destruction (September 2022 to February 2023)

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Tha Htoo (Thaton) Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, during the period between September 2022 and January 2023, including constant indiscriminate shelling committed by the State Administration Council (SAC) resulting in property destruction, casualties and fear. On November 10th 2022, SAC Military Training Number #9 arrested Kaw Kya Ther villagers by accusing them of being informants for the People's Defence Force (PDF) and detained them in the camp. As a result, fighting broke out between SAC and PDF, and SAC conducted indiscriminate shelling in the area. On January 11th 2023, the SAC indiscriminately shelled mortars into Maw Lay village tract in three different instances, injuring three villagers, after a drone attack by the local PDF and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). On February 9th 2023, SAC Artillery Unit #314 fired mortars into plantations in Shwe Young Pya village tract, injuring another civilian. Villagers are facing livelihood insecurities as a result.¹

Arbitrary arrest of villagers, fighting and shelling

On November 10th 2022, State Administration Council (SAC)² Military Training Number #9, under Light Infantry Division (LID)³ #44, based in Ah Lan Ta Ya camp arrested Kaw Kya Ther (Htoe Bo Lin) villagers [unknown number], from Way Raw (Win Yaw) village tract⁴, Tha Htoo

¹ The present document is based on information received in December 2022 and January 2023. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha 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 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 A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Burma Army is commanded by a brigadier general and consists of ten light infantry battalions specially trained in counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, search and destroy operations against ethnic insurgents. They were first incorporated into the Tatmadaw 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).

⁴ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

Township, accusing them of being spies for the People's Defence Force (PDF)⁵. The next day, on November 11th at about 8:42 pm, fighting broke out between PDF forces, combined with the local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁶, and SAC Military Training #9 at Ah Lan Ta Ya camp, which is led by the Deputy Battalion Commander [unknown name] and Major Chit Win Thu. During the fighting, SAC shelled eight rounds of mortar into Kaw Kya Ther village, Way Raw village tract, Tha Htoo Township. Therefore, six houses owned by Kaw Kyaw Ther villagers were damaged by the mortar shells' explosion. During the fighting, three SAC soldiers including Major Chit Win Thu were killed, PDF soldiers confiscated some ammunition from the SAC, and rescued the detained Kaw Kya Ther villagers.

Constant shelling conducted by SAC soldiers into villages

Since the 2021 coup in Burma, indiscriminate and deliberate shelling conducted by the SAC has been one of the most common attacks [against civilians] happening in Tha Htoo Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. For instance, the SAC K--- army camp, under the command of LID #44, is located in the centre of K--- village, Maw Lay village tract, Tha Htoo Township, beside the village's main road. SAC troops usually conduct shelling in K--- village [since their camp is located in the centre, and so they shell the surroundings]. One villager from K--- village, Naw⁷ H---, reported to KHRG: *"I can't even count [the number of shelling incidents]. Sometimes, they [SAC] shelled every day. [...] Three months ago [around September 2022], a mortar landed on my house. And the shrapnel hit my aunt's house too. [...] They [SAC] shelled [mortars] regularly."*

Since the [2021] coup, SAC soldiers in Tha Htoo Township have conducted shelling into the villages surrounding their army camps as retaliation after being attacked by local KNLA or PDF soldiers. Other times, they [SAC soldiers] have done it [conduct shelling] when receiving information from their informants about an imminent attack by KNLA and PDF. However, sometimes the SAC has conducted shelling for unknown reasons. Some of the mortars landed on farms and plantations owned by villagers and nearby villages, such as Y--- village, P--- village, L--- village, or K--- village. Some mortars landed in the villages, beside houses, schools and monasteries. Therefore, local villagers, especially villagers who live close to the army camps, have been facing high [security] risks to their lives and fear. They have also suffered injuries and property damage and destruction. According to Naw H---, the witness from K--- village: *"Sometimes [mortar shells landed] in our village, near the school, near the monastery, ... Children who attended school know best [have experienced it]. Children [in school] were scared and cried loudly. [...] During a shelling [incident in 2022], young children like my nieces were only seven and nine years old. They told me: 'Moegi [term of affection for women]! [Hearing] mortar shells' [explosion] sound makes me feel scared. We dare not to walk on the first floor [of the school]; we stay on the ground floor under the bed. Moegi! When the school closes, pick me up, okay?'. I feel pity for the children. [...] My niece is only nine years old. She is very intelligent. She said: 'Moegi, once the shells landed nearby, and I was scared, so I cried and the teacher hugged me. [All children in] the whole school were crying.' When I heard that, my heart Ummm [felt worried; anxious]!"*

In January 2023, the army camp in K--- village was operated by SAC battalions under LID #44 and some of their soldiers were based in the monastery. On the morning of January 11th 2023, local PDF and KNLA attacked K--- army camp with a drone. As retaliation, the SAC

⁵ 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.

⁶ The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU).

⁷ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

indiscriminately shelled about five mortar rounds around K--- village area. Two of the mortar shells landed in K--- village, in the Muslim community area. The mortar shells injured two villagers, and killed two of their bulls -which cost about five million kyat [2,378 USD⁸]. It also destroyed one motorcycle, and several parts of their house. Another house was also damaged. The two victims are married and have children. Their children were safe because they were at school. The damages caused major impacts on the family's livelihood and well-being. After the incident, their neighbours immediately took them to the local W--- clinic, under the Karen National Union (KNU)⁹-controlled territory, for medical treatment.

On the same day, from 7 pm to 11 pm, SAC battalions under LID #44 based in K--- army camp shelled three more mortar rounds in K--- village. Two mortar shells landed on a villager's rubber plantation and one mortar shell landed beside a villager's house. Before this shelling incident [in the evening], no armed group, either PDF or KNLA, had attacked them [the SAC] and villagers did not receive any prior warning about the shelling. Villagers do not know why the SAC indiscriminately conducted the shelling [in the evening]. The two mortar shells that landed on a rubber plantation also damaged one farm hut, including the roofing. Fortunately, the hut owner was not in the hut [during the incident] so nobody got injured or killed. At about 11 pm, another mortar shell landed beside a villager's house in K--- village and the shrapnel injured a 52-year-old villager, named Saw¹⁰ O---, on his thigh. The incident happened when he was visiting his friend; the house owner. He was outside of the house chatting with the house owner who was inside the house. The victim explained [to KHRG]: *"When I was going [to the friend's house], [I heard] the sound of [mortars] exploding coming from K--- [army camp] two times. [...] When there were no more sounds, I went to the villager's [his friend's] house in the village. Soon after I spoke one or two words [with the house owner], mortar shells landed [beside me]. And the shrapnel hit me. [...] As soon as I got hit, I fell down. [...] My blood flowed down [he sustained heavy blood loss], so it got dark [he fainted]."*

After, villagers surrounding the incident place went to help Saw O--- by providing first aid, bandaging the wound with a longyi [piece of clothing]. Villagers brought him to a monastery by motorcycle to get medical treatment from an SAC medic who is based in the monastery. The SAC medic injected some [unknown] medication and bandaged the wound. During that night, villagers could not bring him immediately to the Thaton Town hospital [run by the SAC] because of the curfew (enforced by the SAC between 6 pm to 6 am) and the risk of stepping on landmines on the way planted by armed groups. Therefore, he had to wait the whole night and then villagers took him to Thaton hospital the next morning by car. The cost was 50,000 kyat [23.78 USD] for transportation and he had to be in the hospital for eight days. The total cost was about one million kyat [475.51 USD] for medical treatment. According to the victim, Saw O---: *"When we went [to the hospital] and I got the X-ray, shrapnel was visible [in the test result]. The doctor took out everything [all shrapnel]. The shrapnel was very big and very long."* When KHRG conducted the interview on January 26th 2023, Saw O--- had already been discharged from the hospital. He could not walk properly yet, so he was not able to work on his farm for his family livelihood. He still had to go to the hospital for further treatment and checks. Therefore, he struggled financially to pay the medical fees for the whole medical treatment.

On February 9th 2023, at 10:06 am, SAC Artillery Unit #314 fired 80mm mortars into the rubber plantations near I--- village, Shwe Yaung Pya village tract, Tha Htoo Township, in KNU-controlled territory. Two mortar shells landed in a rubber plantation, damaging 13 rubber trees

⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the February 7th 2024 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.48 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

⁹ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Burma 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.

¹⁰ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

owned by a villager named Naw A---. A 52-year-old villager named Saw B---, from I---, was minorly injured by the shrapnel on his face, near the eyebrow.

Further background reading on the situation of indiscriminate shelling in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Taw Oo District Short Update: House burning, indiscriminate shelling and air strikes by the SAC in Htaw Ta Htoo Township \(September to November 2023\)”](#), March 2024
- [“Dooplaya District Situation Update: SAC indiscriminate shelling and healthcare and livelihood challenges \(February to April 2023\).”](#), February 2024.
- [“Mu Traw District Situation Update: SAC air strikes, arrest of villagers, and indiscriminate shelling causing casualties, and landmine explosion, March 2022 to February 2023”](#), January 2024.
- [“Striking Fear: Impacts of State Administration Council \(SAC\) shelling on villagers’ lives in Southeast Burma \(January to October 2023\)”](#), December 2023.

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.khrg.org.

