



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

December 22nd 2023/ KHRG # 23-27+36+77-D1

Dooplaya District Short Update: Killing, house burning, shelling, and displacement, from January to February 2023

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Noh T’Kaw Township, Waw Ray Township, and Kaw T’Ree Township, Dooplaya District, in the period January to February 2023. In Noh T’Kaw Township, State Administration Council (SAC) soldiers shot dead one male villager when he was riding his motorbike. The SAC also burned villagers’ houses and looted villagers’ belongings from their properties. Fighting broke out between Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) forces and the SAC in Waw Ray Township, which caused villagers to flee. In addition, villagers from Kaw T’Ree Township were also displaced because the SAC indiscriminately shelled villages and threatened villagers that they would burn their village down if they were attacked by armed resistance groups.¹

House burning in Noh T’Kaw (Kyainseikgyi) Township

On January 12th 2023, State Administration Council (SAC)² soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³ #32 divided themselves into two groups: one group marched to A--- village and burned two villagers’ houses in A--- village, T’Hka Kloh village tract⁴, Noh T’Kaw (Kyainseikgyi) Township, while the other group marched to B--- village and burned down two Kaw Thoo Lei [Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁵] checkpoints at B--- village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township. A villager from A--- village and a village head from B--- village reported these incidents to a KHRG researcher.

Looting in Noh T’Kaw Township

¹ The present document is based on information received in January and February 2023. It was provided by a community member in Dooplaya 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 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.

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

⁵ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed (KNLA) wing of the Karen National Union (KNU).

On January 13th 2023, SAC soldiers from LIB #32, who were based in B--- village, marched to Wa Ma Hkee village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township. They looted villagers’ belongings, and cooked and ate villagers’ chickens. They damaged several of the villagers’ wooden doors [of their houses] by smashing them. On January 16th 2023, other LIB #32 soldiers based in T’Hka Hkee village, T’Hka Hkee village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, marched to C--- village, T’Hka Kloh village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township. When they arrived, they found a house where the owner was absent and broke the house door, entered the house and looted 600,000 kyat [285.70 USD]⁶ and one telephone. The house owner was in his rubber field and his wife was sheltering at Khoh Ther Pler Town, Noh T’Kaw Township. SAC soldiers also entered another house, but the owner was present, so they did not take anything from the house. This information was given by a villager from C--- village.

Killing of a villager in Noh T’ Kaw Township

On January 13th 2023, LIB #32 encountered a villager named Saw⁷ Leh Htoo, aged 35 years old, who was riding his motorbike near B--- village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township. He was returning to his village, Wa Ma Hkee village, Wa Ma village tract, after he had visited his wife’s village, Meh Theh village, Meh Theh village tract, Kru Thu Township. The SAC asked him to stop but he did not, so the soldiers shot him. Saw Leh Htoo was hit in the back and died immediately. On January 15th, Saw Leh Htoo’s body was collected by his wife along with a Wa Ma Hkee village head from the incident place [B--- village] and on the same day, he was buried at Wa Ma Hkee village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township.



These photos show Saw Leh Htoo (35 years old), who was shot dead on January 13th 2023 by SAC LIB #32 soldiers at B--- village, Wa Ma village tract, Noh T’Kaw Township, Dooplaya District. [Photos: Local villager]

⁶ All conversion estimates for Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate as of December 19th 2023 at 1 USD = 2,100.07 MMK, conversion rate available at <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter>

⁷ ‘Saw’ is male honorific title in S’gaw Karen language.

SAC requested to meet with a village head in Noh T' Kaw Township

On January 16th 2023, SAC LIB #32 from Kya In Seik Gyi Town, Noh T'Kaw Township were conducting military operations in Noh T'Kaw Township and they stopped at T'Hka Hkee church, T'Hka Hkee village, T'Hka Hkee village tract, Noh T'Kaw Township. They asked to meet with the village head, however, the village head had fled before the SAC arrived at the village. Therefore, SAC LIB #32 soldiers talked to a priest from T'Hka Hkee church. The priest explained to the soldiers that the village head had fled earlier because he feared them [the SAC]. Then the SAC soldiers informed the priest, not to be scared of them because they were not going to harm the villagers. The priest asked the soldiers about how the SAC had previously burned villagers' houses in A--- village. The soldiers told to the priest that the SAC did not do this and said not to worry. The SAC spent a night at T'Hka Hkee church. They did not cause destruction but caused fear and intimidation by coming to stay in a civilian building.

On January 23rd 2023, at 8 pm, KNLA troops attacked an SAC police station in Khoh Ther Pler Town, Noh T'Kaw Township, and burned two government administration offices. There were no casualties.

Fighting in Waw Ray Township

On January 10th 2023, fighting broke out between KNLA soldiers combined with People's Defence Force (PDF)⁸ soldiers and SAC soldiers in Lay Naw village, Kwee K'Hsaw Hsee village tract, Waw Ray Township. Villagers from the nearby villages sought shelter three miles away from the fighting area. On January 13th 2023, local authorities distributed rice and other basic foods to these internally displaced persons.

Displacement due to shelling in Kaw T'Ree Township

The situation in Meh T'Ler village, Hter Wa Law village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township has been insecure for villagers since February 2023. In February 2023, Burma Army soldiers [the SAC], stationed in Hpaw Chi Mu army camp, were shelling indiscriminately into villages, resulting in one male villager being injured on his head. The SAC also increased military activities in Hter Wa Law village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. Following the shelling, the SAC soldiers verbally threatened villagers from Hter Wa Law village tract, saying that if the SAC suffered attacks by any armed group while they were traveling, they would shell artillery weapons into the village and would burn down the village. Villagers expressed that they were scared upon hearing these threats from the SAC. Therefore, villagers left the village and took shelter in D--- village, Hter Wa Law village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. On February 17th 2023, 67 households were displaced. As of July 21st 2023, there were nearly 300 households displaced.

This SAC military camp was based very near Hpaw Chi Mu village, Hter Wa Law village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township. The distance between the internally displaced persons' settlement and the SAC military camp is only three miles. Moreover, the displacement camp is not only located very close to the SAC military camp, but also to an SAC checkpoint. Therefore, the displaced population has very poor security and are at high risk of abuse. For instance, the SAC often demands rice and other basic foods from civilians as well as verbally threatening them.

⁸ 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 formalised the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

Further background reading on the situation in Dooplaya District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [*“Dooplaya District Short Update: Villagers’ disappearances and imposition of martial law in Noh T’Kaw Township, from February to March 2023”*](#), June 2023.
- [*“Dooplaya District Situation Update: SAC military activity, displacement, livelihood challenges, travel insecurity and education, March to May 2022”*](#), February 2023.
- [*““Why would they target us?”: Exploring patterns of the Burma Army’s retaliatory abuses against villagers across Southeast Burma”*](#), June 2023.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, 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.