



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Mergui-Tavoy District Short Update: SAC soldiers forced 13 villagers to act as porters and navigators in Ler K'Saw Township (December 2023)

This Short Update describes events occurring in Ler K'Saw Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, in December 2023. On December 8th 2023, soldiers from the State Administration Council (SAC)'s Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) #559 and #560 arrested 13 villagers and forced them to act as porters and navigators. Firstly, seven villagers from J--- village, Sa Tein village tract, were arrested, and released after they reached nearby L--- village, at villagers' plantations. Then, the SAC soldiers arrested six villagers from L--- village and forced them to carry all the stuff that they brought and to walk in front of them. During the arrest, villagers also experienced physical abuse, including kicking, gun pointing, and verbal threats. The SAC released the six L--- villagers two hours later, after they reached a cell phone tower.¹

On December 8th 2023, the SAC [State Administration Council²]'s LIBs [Light Infantry Battalions]³ #559 and #560, based in Lay Nya village, patrolled to L--- village, Sa Tein village tract⁴, Ler K'Saw Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. Before the SAC soldiers reached L--- village, they entered J--- village, Sa Tein village tract, and arrested seven J--- villagers then forced them to carry ammunition for them [SAC] to L--- village.

Before the SAC reached near L--- village, they entered V--- Place [villagers' plantation area], into the plantation of a villager named Ko⁵ K---. The time that the SAC arrived at Ko K---'s plantation was 9:30 am. One of the SAC soldiers pointed a gun at Ko K--- as soon as they reached the plantation and forced him to kneel down. SAC soldiers arrested five labour workers and one plantation owner [Ko K---]. According to the L--- villager, Ko K---: *"After the SAC arrested us [Ko K--- and the five labour workers], they gathered us together then ordered us to*

¹ The present document is based on information received in December 2023. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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 'Ko' is a Burmese title meaning older brother. It can be used for relatives as well as non-relatives.

carry the stuff that they brought with them. Then they released the seven J--- villagers [that they arrested earlier]. They [SAC] also forced us to continue carrying the packages that the J--- villagers had carried for them. They didn't walk in front of us, they demanded us to walk in front of them instead [as navigators and human shields]. There is no path on the road, so we had to walk in fear [of stepping on a landmine]. The packages were heavy so one of the SAC soldiers said to take a rest. But another one said 'Hey... aren't you guys men? Do not take a rest. Go quickly!'; and they also kicked our bottoms. At that time, we needed to continue our journey without taking a rest."

While they continued their journey for a while, an SAC General [name unknown] ordered them [the arrested villagers] to navigate the way to a nearby cell phone tower. Then the SAC General said he would release them [the six L--- villagers] when they reached the cell phone tower. After they arrived at the cell phone tower, the SAC General said no one should know they were there. He said that if they [SAC] were shot [by armed resistance forces], he would kill them [villagers] all. After, he released the six L--- villagers at 11:30 am.

After the six villagers arrived back to their village [L--- village], villagers in the village asked where they came back from. After hearing the response, the villagers stayed in the village full of fear. Since this incident, villagers run [flee] far away as soon as they hear Burma Army soldiers entering [or near] the village.

[KHRG has received previous information about these same SAC LIBs #559 and #560 committing arbitrary arrests and torture of villagers in Sa Tein village tract in November 2023.⁶]

Further background reading on the situation on arbitrary arrest and human shields in Southeast Burma/Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [*Shadow of Death: Use of civilians as human shields by the State Administration Council \(SAC\) in Southeast Burma since the coup*](#), July 2023.
- [*"Taw Oo District Incident Report: SAC soldiers arbitrarily arrested and forcibly disappeared three villagers in Htaw Ta Htoo Township \(April and August 2023\)"*](#), November 2024.
- [*"Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC soldiers arbitrarily arrested and detained two villagers, including a 16-year-old, in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township \(July 2024\)"*](#), August 2024.
- [*"Dooplaya District Incident Report: SAC forcing villagers to act as human shields in Noh T'Kaw Township, October 2023."*](#), January 2024.

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.

⁶ KHRG, [*"Mergui-Tavoy District Short Update: SAC soldiers arbitrarily detained and tortured a villager at a checkpoint in Ler K'Saw Township \(November 2023\)"*](#), January 2025.

