



## Situation Update

October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023 / KHRG # 23-4-S1

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## Taw Oo District Situation Update: SAC military activities and livelihood, education, and healthcare challenges, September to December 2022

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*This Situation Update describes events occurring in Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District during the period between September and December 2022. This report outlines the struggles of villagers from five areas: Kaw Thay Der, Khoh Hkee, Maw Nay Pwa, Per Htee and Day Loh. The State Administration Council (SAC) arrested travellers, extorted their family members, and increased military movements causing major obstacles for children and teenagers to attend school. Villagers struggled due to a lack of enough income to cover their daily expenses. Many villagers also developed seasonal sicknesses that remained untreated.<sup>1</sup>*

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### Introduction

This report describes the situation in five areas in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, between September and December 2022, namely Kaw Thay Der, Khoh Hkee, Maw Nay Pwa, Per Htee, and Day Loh areas. Villagers reported State Administration Council's (SAC)<sup>2</sup> increased military activities and livelihood, education, and healthcare challenges.

### SAC military activities

After the SAC seized power in Burma, various human rights violations occurred [again], such as fighting, threats, killing, looting, daily indiscriminate shelling, and arbitrary arrests at checkpoints. Additionally, the SAC arrested local villagers travelling and extorted their family members. This caused a great problem for villagers. The SAC indiscriminately fired artillery weapons and conducted air strikes into villages. [Moreover,] landmines were planted on public roads [leading to villagers' plantations]. These placed villagers' lives at high risk.

An incident happened on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2022, in A--- village, Maw Nay Pwa area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. At 1:00 pm, an air strike was conducted [by the SAC] unexpectedly while some villagers were gathering to greet and bless each other [for Christmas]. Children and

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in January 2023. 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 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.

elderly villagers had to [flee and] hide near the village. A--- village has 63 houses and a population of 439 [villagers]. Many villagers were displaced after the incident and were living far from their plantations. [During December 2022,] they had to travel long distances to purchase and trade food and to bring patients to the hospital.

Due to SAC military operations, some villagers [displaced persons coming from other areas in Southeast Burma], who were also sheltering in villages [located in Maw Nay Pwa area], did not dare to return to their hometowns. In addition, securing livelihoods got much harder for villagers as they were not able to find jobs. Villagers [sheltering in the area] were able to eat only when someone [local villagers] provided them [with food]. Every month, local [Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>3</sup>] authorities arranged [to distribute] essential food supplies.

### **Armed conflict and livelihood challenges**

Between September and December 2022, villagers from the [abovementioned] five areas in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, were struggling to secure their livelihoods. Some villagers live in hill areas, while others live in plain areas. Per Htee area is a plain area, while Khoh Hkee, Kaw Thay Der, Maw Nay Pwa and Day Loh areas are situated on the hills. [Villagers from hill areas] grow durian, betel nut, cardamon, and Kaffir lime [for their survival].

From September to December 2022, villagers worked [on their plantations] under danger [at risk to their lives, due to the SAC attacks]. [Due to the climate,] villagers did not harvest good [quality] fruit. Some villagers struggled [to have enough] rice, which is the main food [basis of their diet]. The price of rice also increased. [In addition, villagers had] difficulties in carrying rice [home from shops because the SAC set up check points] on the road.

Following fighting [between the SAC and a resistance armed group] in [these] areas, some civilians were afraid [to stay in their villages], so they moved [fled to a new place]. Villagers had to work despite having unsafe [working] conditions. Villagers [felt] worried and burdened due to fighting, air strikes, and shelling. Some villagers encountered difficulties in carrying food as they lived far away from [food markets]. [Villagers had trouble with] purchasing and trading food. Dry food prices were rising, while fruit [that villagers harvested from their farms] could only be sold at low prices [in the market]. Villagers' income and expenses were not a match. [Villagers had low-income streams and their expenses outweighed their income streams]. Various difficulties followed villagers in their [daily] livelihood activities. Villagers also worried about military operation activities.

Farmers from Per Htee area complained about the unstable weather to grow beans and to farm. Farmers had no other income other than from farming. So, some farmers started working abroad [to increase their income]. Villagers [in the area] encountered threats, arbitrary arrests, and physical abuse committed by SAC soldiers while they travelled. Day labourers had to work under dangerous circumstances. Stealing also increased in the [local] area.

The five areas all had different [high] prices [in markets]. Villagers had to pay [tax] in various ways [at SAC checkpoints].

### **Education challenges in Taw Oo District**

From September to December, the KECD schools that operate in Htaw T'Htoo Township, Taw Oo District are Bu Hsa Hee School which located in Kho Hkee area, Ler Htaw Doh School, located

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<sup>3</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 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.

in Maw Nay Pwa area and Htoh Lwee Wah School, located in Htee K'Waw. SAC military activities [in the Township] increased, becoming an obstacle for children and teenagers [to attend school]. Parents worried for children who lived far from the school because SAC soldiers fired [guns] indiscriminately [while the students travelled to schools], resulting in decreasing enrolment during this period.

Students who lived in dormitories [at boarding schools], like Ler Htaw Doh school from Maw Nay Pwa area, had difficulties purchasing [a sufficient amount of] food because the price of food was high. As a consequence, some students stopped enrolling in school [,unable to afford the school fee]. Some locally established [community self-funded] schools had connections with the three high schools, [therefore, students could easily attend the high schools after completing their schooling at the locally established schools]. Teachers were teaching [in the community-run schools] at risk to their lives, as SAC soldiers [often] came into schools to patrol. SAC patrolling also brought out worries for teachers to continue teaching and became an obstacle for children and young teenagers to access education. Danger will [continue to] occur to villagers due to the conflict that takes place in the area. Many graduated students went to other countries to seek out job opportunities.

### Healthcare challenges in Taw Oo District

As it was the winter season between September and December 2022, sickness increased, including flu, headaches, and [other] illnesses. When villagers from Khoh Hkee, Kaw Thay Der, and Maw Nay Pwa areas got sick, they were sent to a [nearby] hospital. SAC soldiers patrolling [on the roads] created difficulties for villagers to travel and posed a danger. Some [sick] children did not receive treatment. In addition, many [children] did not receive vaccinations [at all]. Pregnant women also did not receive proper healthcare.

Similarly, in Per Htee area, a day labourer who got sick was unable to go for a check-up [at the hospital due to travel restrictions]. Some sick villagers were [only] lying in bed [at home] due to this strict situation. Villagers faced rising travel costs and restrictions, as well as the inability to make extra income. Parents needed money [additional financial support] to look after and take care of disabled children. Communities from the area of Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District did not receive healthcare [treatment].

Villagers from the five areas in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, expressed their desire for [KNU] authorities to notice their needs [support services such as safety, health care, livelihood, and education in response to SAC abuses].



These pictures were taken on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2022 in A--- village, Maw Nay Pwa area, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District following an SAC air strike. The A--- village head collected the shrapnel shown in the left photo. [Photos: KHRG]

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

- [\*“Taw Oo District Short Update: Indiscriminate shelling, restrictions on movement and SAC military activity in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, February 2023”\*](#), March 2023.
- [\*“Taw Oo District Incident Report: A female villager died in a landmine explosion in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, January 2023”\*](#), March 2023.
- [\*“Taw Oo District Short Update: One villager was killed and three villagers injured in SAC air strikes in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, November 2022”\*](#), March 2023.
- [\*“Taw Oo District Situation Update: Deliberate shooting of two villagers, military activity, including live-fire exercises into villages, fighting, shelling and displacement in Daw Hpa Hkoh and Htaw Ta Htoo Townships, February to October 2022”\*](#), January 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.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

# Taw Oo (Toungoo) District

