



## Short Update

January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 / KHRG # 23-423-D1

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## Mergui-Tavoy District Short Update: Landmine explosions injured three villagers and affected villagers' livelihoods, and KTLA shot and injured one villager, in K'Ser Doh Township (October to December 2023)

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*This Short Update describes events occurring in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, in the period of October to December 2023. On October 24<sup>th</sup> 2023, a landmine explosion injured a villager from Y--- village, Paw Hkloh area, while he was heading back home from working at his plantation. Another landmine exploded while villagers were rescuing him from the incident place, but no other people were injured by that explosion. However, on their way back from taking the injured villager to the hospital, villagers were targeted by gunfire by the Kaw Thoo Lei Army (KTLA) who were at L--- village in Paw Hkloh area. Consequently, a villager was injured on the waist by a gunshot. The second landmine incident occurred on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2023, when a G--- villager stepped on a landmine planted on a pathway while he was going to work. He was minorly injured and received treatment in Y--- village. The next day, a landmine explosion caused an injury to the cow of a villager in the same location. On December 15<sup>th</sup> 2023, a villager from C--- village, Paw Hkloh area, stepped on a landmine planted beside the road on her way back home from her hill farm. Due to this incident, she lost her left leg. The pervasive threat of landmines poses a significant obstacle for villagers in Paw Hkloh area, K'Ser Doh Township, who are seeking to carry out their daily work. Villagers do not know which armed group planted the landmines.<sup>1</sup>*

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### October 2023: Four landmine explosions in Y--- village, Paw Hkloh area

#### **October 24<sup>th</sup> 2023: Two landmines exploded**

On October 24<sup>th</sup> 2023, a villager from Y--- village, Paw Hkloh area, K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, named U<sup>2</sup> B--- [unknown age] stepped on a landmine planted by an unknown armed group while heading back home from his plantation. [The landmine was planted on a pathway at the plantation.] This villager [U B---] is a daily worker residing with his wife. He suffered the loss of his leg due to the [landmine] explosion. Upon his injury, he screamed for his wife [who was in their hut nearby], who then called for help. Other villagers came to his aid and carried him back [to Y--- village]. Another landmine exploded behind them during this rescue effort, but no additional injuries were reported. Villagers think it could have been a dog or a branch that set off the landmine because it exploded after they had already passed. The landmines were planted by an armed group but the villagers are unsure which one because there are different ones active in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 'U' is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

The victim [U B---] was initially taken to R--- Hospital [administered by the State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>3</sup>], located [in Way Tah Eh (Myitta) Town] between K'Ser Doh Township and Ler Doh Soe Township, and was later transferred by local villagers to a hospital [administered by the SAC] in Dawei Town for further treatment [due to equipment issues in R--- Hospital].

Upon the return [of villagers who took U B--- to the hospital] to Y--- [village] after transporting the injured villager, they were targeted by the Kaw Thoo Lei Army (KTLA)<sup>4</sup> when they reached L--- village, in Paw Hkloh area, as they were driving a Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>5</sup> car. [Villagers believe that the KTLA soldiers knew it was a KNU car because they recognised the car's license plate. All passengers in the car were civilians.] This attack resulted in an unidentified villager sustaining a gunshot wound to the waist.

Villagers no longer dared to drive the KNU car so they left the car at K--- village, Paw Hkloh area, which is two miles [3.2 kilometres] away from where they were shot by KTLA soldiers, due to the security issue of KTLA soldiers nearby. After leaving the car at K--- village, the villagers returned to Y--- village using a 'line car' [pick-up truck, used as a shared taxi] and later retrieved the car.

### **October 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 2023:**

On October 25<sup>th</sup> 2023, a villager named Saw<sup>6</sup> E--- (40 years old) from Y--- village accidentally stepped on a landmine planted on the road [located slightly outside of Y--- village, used to access plantations] while on his way to work. He did not sustain any serious injuries, but [he] experienced swelling in his legs. Saw E--- received treatment and recovered in the [Y---] village's clinic [administered by the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW)<sup>7</sup>]. [Villagers do not know which armed group planted the landmine.]

Upon returning home after the incident, he discovered two other landmines planted in the area and promptly alerted other villagers [verbally]. However, on October 26<sup>th</sup> 2023, another villager ventured down the same path to herd his cows. One of his cows stepped on a landmine while he was herding them, resulting in the loss of the cow's leg. The villager was unharmed.

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<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 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.

<sup>4</sup> The Kaw Thoo Lei Army (KTLA) was founded on July 17th 2022 by Brigadier-General Nerdah Bo Mya. Nerdah Bo Mya, former Commander-In-Chief of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), was dismissed by the KNU in 2022. KTLA operates in two districts in Southeast Burma, in KNU-controlled areas, namely Mergui-Tavoy and Dooplaya districts. In Dooplaya District, they operate in alliance with resistance armed groups. KTLA battalions in Mergui-Tavoy District are in conflict with both SAC and KNLA troops.

<sup>5</sup> The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the 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 (NCA) in 2015, following the 2021 coup staged by Burma Army leaders, the KNU officially stated that the NCA has become void.

<sup>6</sup> 'Saw' is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>7</sup> The Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) is the health department of the Karen National Union. It was established in 1956 to address the lack of public healthcare resources in rural Southeast Myanmar. It currently operates a network of community-based clinics in the region, but its capabilities remain limited due to funding constraints.



These four photos were taken in December 2023 in Y--- village area, Paw Hkloh area, K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. On October 25<sup>th</sup> 2023, a villager named Saw E--- (40 years old), from Y--- village, stepped on a landmine on his way to his plantation. He was not severely injured, but his leg was swollen, so, he received treatment in a clinic at Y--- village. The photo on the top left shows the injury sustained by Saw E--- on his right leg due to the landmine explosion. The photo on the top right shows a hole in the ground from where the landmine was planted and exploded. The photo on the bottom left shows fragments from the exploded landmine. The photo on the bottom right shows an unexploded landmine that was planted near the other landmine. [Photos: KHRG]

### **December 15<sup>th</sup> 2023: Landmine explosion in C--- village, Paw Hkloh area**

On December 15<sup>th</sup> 2023, a villager [unknown name and age] from C--- village, Paw Hkloh area, K'Ser Doh Township, stepped on a landmine planted [by an unknown armed group] beside the

road [near C--- village,] while on her way back home from her hill farm after collecting vegetables. The explosion resulted in the loss of her left leg. Following the incident, fellow villagers assisted in transporting her to a hospital [administered by the SAC] in Dawei Town for further medical attention.

### **Conclusion:**

The villagers within Paw Hkloh area, such as those from D---, C---, H---, Y---, T---, Z--- and J--- villages, are facing ongoing security concerns related to the presence of landmines. It has been advised by fellow villagers that villagers avoid specific areas known to contain landmines, and if travel to these areas is necessary, they should only utilise routes designated as safe [through common knowledge among villagers as they share the information with one another via word of mouth. Safe routes are not physically signalled.].

The pervasive threat of landmines poses a significant obstacle for villagers seeking to carry out their daily work, further complicating their livelihoods. Additionally, increased militarisation by the Kaw Thoo Lei Army (KTLA) and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>8</sup> in Paw Hkloh area also poses an obstacle for villagers' livelihoods.

Further background reading on the situation on landmines in Southeast Burma/Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [\*Danger Beneath Our Feet - Landmine contamination in Southeast Burma and its impacts on villagers since the 2021 coup\*](#), December 2023.
- [\*“Mergui-Tavoy District Incident Report: A 19-year-old villager was injured by a landmine explosion in K’Ser Doh Township, October 2023”\*](#), May 2024.
- [\*“Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: SAC looting and shelling causing casualties, destruction, and displacement, and landmine contamination in Tha Htoo Township \(February to November 2023\)”\*](#), July 2024.
- [\*“Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: A landmine explosion severely injured a 14-year-old girl in Moo Township, May 2024”\*](#), September 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](http://www.khrq.org).

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<sup>8</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

