



Situation Update

December 21st, 2023 / KHRG #23-6-S1

Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: SAC air strike, indiscriminate shelling, and military operations, and education and healthcare challenges in Hsaw Htee Township, from October to December 25th 2022

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Hsaw Htee (Shwegyin) Township and Ler Doh Kyaukkyi) Township in Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District, during the period between October 1st to December 25th 2022. After State Administration Council (SAC) soldiers were attacked by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) on November 12th 2022, the SAC increased military activities in Hsaw Htee Township and fired mortar shells indiscriminately toward villages. The SAC also conducted air strikes into villages. During this period, villagers have also encountered difficulties in accessing education and healthcare services¹

SAC increased military operations

Before November 2022, the State Administration Council (SAC)² conducted some military operations in Hsaw Htee (Shwegyin) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District. On November 12th 2022, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)³ Battalions #9 and #7 attacked three SAC army camps: Tone T’Kaw army camp based in Tone T’Kaw village, P’Deh Kaw village tract⁴, Ler Doh Township; Baw K’Hta army camp, based near to Baw K’Hta village, Baw K’Hta village tract; and Than Seik army camp, based near Than Seik village, Than Seik village tract, Hsaw Htee Township. SAC Infantry Battalions (IB)⁵ #57, #350, #349, and Light Infantry Battalions

¹ The present document is based on information received in December 2022. It was provided by a community member in Kler Lwee 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 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 The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

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 An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions in the Tatmadaw are understrength 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. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

(LIB)⁶ #20 were stationed in all three army camps. Following the attack, the SAC increased their military operations and manpower in Hsaw Htee Township. For instance, they stored weapons for LIB #20, [reinforced the troops with soldiers from] Light Infantry Division (LID)⁷ #77, not usually based in Hsaw Htee Township, and increased military tanks and artillery weapons.

SAC air strikes in civilian areas

Following the fighting [mentioned above], the SAC also conducted air strikes into Than Seik village and Meh Zaw village, in Than Seik village tract, Hsaw Htee Township. The air strikes destroyed four houses in Meh Zaw village. In Than Seik village, the monastery building and hall were destroyed, but villagers' houses were not damaged.

Following the air strikes, villagers did not dare to stay in the village. Thus, they fled and sheltered in forests until today [as of June 2023]. Villagers from Naw Ra Per Koh village, Yo Ler Per village, La Hta village, Tha Say Der village, and Khaw Hta village, in Saw They Hkee village tract, and villagers from Ta Ho Aw village, Loh Hkee village tract, and Ler Wah village, Ler Wah village tract, were sheltering in the forests. [As of October 2023, all villagers had returned to the village].

In addition, on December 2nd 2022, at 5:20 pm, [the SAC] conducted air strikes four times into the surrounding area of Baw Law Teh village, Saw They Hkee village tract, an operation area of KNLA Battalion #7. Two shells exploded resulting in no injuries, nor damages in villages.

SAC indiscriminate shelling in Hsaw Htee Township

Following the armed clashes, on November 13th 2022, at around 6 pm, SAC soldiers from Hsaw Htee (Shwegyin Bhyu Ha) Township [also] shelled nine mortars into Kyaw Tan village, Ain Ga Ni village tract, and into the surroundings of Ain Ga Ni village, Ain Ga Ni village tract, Hsaw Htee Township. On the same day, at 9:30 pm, [SAC soldiers in] Ain Ga Ni Let Net Gyi Kone, Ain Ga Ni village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, shelled twenty-five mortars into Than Seik and Pa Aye villages, Than Seik village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, and respectively into To Thay Pu village, P'Deh Kaw village tract, Ler Doh Township. At 11:12 pm, the SAC soldiers from Ain Ga Ni Let Net Gyi Kone once again shelled eleven mortars into Than Seik village, Pa Aye village, and To Thay Pu villages. Though the shelling did not injure villagers, it destroyed villagers' plantations and areas surrounding the village. Villagers did not dare to live in their villages [and fled to the forest]. Some villagers returned to their village [from time to time] to check their belongings. Some villagers interacted with SAC soldiers, so they [were able to] settle down [without trouble] back in the village. The SAC purposely threatened villagers so that villagers would not report information to KNLA soldiers.

On December 4th 2022, at 8:30 pm, SAC IB #596 [from] Ler Htaw Tho army camp, led by Captain Tiet Naing Lin, launched two 60mm [mortar shells] near Klaw Thoo Hkee village, Klaw Thoo Hkee village tract, Hsaw Htee Township. On the same date, at 9 pm, SAC IB #598 [from an] army camp based in Za Lot Kyi village, Za Lot Kyi village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, led by Major Thein Lu, shelled two 60mm mortar shells into Ler K'Hsaw (Kyawk Seik) village, Hsaw Htee Township. The

⁶ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Light Infantry Battalions in the Burma military 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 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁷ A Light Infantry Division (LID) of the Tatmadaw 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)

shells did not injure any villagers. SAC soldiers intentionally launched shelling into the area surrounding villages and villagers' plantations to threaten villagers. Thus, villagers dwelling close to SAC IB #598 army camp have been living in fear and they worried that fighting might break out [between SAC and KNLA soldiers]. [In addition] some [SAC soldiers] have stopped villagers while the villagers were travelling [to check and question villagers]. [Hence,] villagers from Baw K'Hta, Than Seik and Doh Thay Pyu villages, in Kaw Ta Say village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, [who fled to their plantation fields], faced difficulties [in terms of healthcare]. They caught colds and were bitten by mosquitoes while sleeping in their plantations. So, there was an increase in sickness, making it difficult for them to work in their plantation fields.

Education challenges in Hsaw Htee Township

On November 21st 2022, a Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)⁸ primary school located in Klaw Tho Hkee village, Klaw Tho Hkee village tract, Hsaw Htee Township, had to close. This was because SAC soldiers visited the school, making teachers and students feel unsafe. The school was located near the SAC IB #598 Ler Hta Tho army camp. Moreover, other schools such as Htoo Lu high school, located in Naw Ra Per Hkoh village, Saw Theh Hkee village tract, Hsaw Htee Township; Baw Law Teh Hta middle school, in Kaw Theh Hkee village tract, Hsaw Htee Township; Meh K'Teh middle school, in Meh K'Teh village tract; and Tha Say Der primary school, in Saw Theh Hkee village tract, were also [forced to] close since November 21st 2022 due to the SAC increasing their [air] reconnaissance operations. It created an unsafe environment for students and teachers.

In addition, due to the abovementioned air strike on December 2nd 2022, in the area surrounding Baw Law Teh village, schools had to close, and could not organise the half-year exam. Students and their parents were displaced by [SAC] aircraft reconnaissance and the dangers they brought. Similarly, teachers were also sheltering in the forest. [Though it was] time for the half-year exam, students had to flee [to different places]. Some students did not want to continue to study because the [SAC] operations have increased [and they were afraid], and villagers were [frequently] faced with the danger of air reconnaissance. There were many cases of young students who faced [seasonal] illnesses. Schools were closed. [As of October 16th 2023, all villagers returned back to their villages.]

Healthcare challenges in Hsaw Htee Township

Civilians have faced various severe difficulties, including in obtaining healthcare. In Saw Htee Township area, Karen National Union (KNU)⁹ has arranged [clinics] to take care of patients at Htoo Lu Hospital, in Saw They Hkee village tract; at Meh K'Ti clinic, in Meh K'Ti village tract; and at three Meh Pi Hta clinics, all in Blaw Koh village tract —the medical procedures run under the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW)¹⁰.

⁸ The Karen Education and Culture Department is the education department of the Karen National Union. Its main goals are to provide mother tongue education services to rural Karen populations in Southeast Burma, as well as to preserve the Karen language, culture and history. Despite being an important education provider in the region, it is not officially recognised by the Burma government.

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 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.

Local support distribution for villagers

On October 15th 2022, the Karen Women Organization (KWO) distributed dried food [such as] oil, instant noodles, and beans to villagers from Loh Hkee village tract and Ler Wah village tract, Hsaw Htee Township. In total, 2,346 litres of oil, 558 packs of instant noodles, and more than 37 sacks of beans were distributed. There are 179 households, amounting to 1,225 people in Loh Hkee village tract, and there are 93 households, amounting to 617 people in Ler Wah village tract. The total population of the two village tracts is of 1,842. The distribution happened after [villages located in] Ler Wah and Loh Hkee village tracts were destroyed by the fighting that occurred [between SAC and KNLA] on September 14th 2022. Civilians [from the two village tracts] have fled and sought shelter in the forest [for their safety and survival], becoming internally displaced people (IDPs). Some villagers have returned to their village but some remained in the forest as they thought it was wiser to stay away from the village. Some villagers farm on their plantations for their occupation, so they have stayed in their plantation fields.

Conclusion

In Hsaw Htee Township area, civilians have faced various difficulties caused by SAC soldiers increasing their military operation activities. [SAC] shelled indiscriminately and conducted an increasing amount of air strikes. All nine village tracts from Hsaw Htee Township have faced similar difficulties. It was winter season [during the reporting period], so children and mothers [in particular] have faced difficulties while fleeing. SAC soldiers increased military operation activities, fired arms, and frequently conducted air reconnaissance. Civilians worried there due to intense fighting.

Further background reading on the situation in Kler Lwee Htoo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Kler Lwee Htoo District Incident Report: Villagers arrested as human shields, and shelling and looting by the SAC in Moo Township, March 2023.”](#), October 2023
- [“Kler Lwee Htoo District Situation Update: Killings, arbitrary arrests, SAC operations, and livelihood, healthcare and education challenges in Moo Township, from July 25th to October 31st 2022.”](#), October 2023.
- [“In the Dark - The crime of enforced disappearance and its impacts on the rural communities of Southeast Burma since the 2021 coup”](#), November 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.

Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District

