



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: House burning and indiscriminate shelling in Kyeh Htoh Township (January 2023)

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Kyeh Htoh (Kyaikto) Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District in January 2023. On January 16th 2023, State Administration Council (SAC) Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #598 indiscriminately fired mortar shells into A--- village, Win Kan village tract, Kyeh Htoh Township, causing displacement and damaging three houses. It also impacted villagers' livelihood and security. On January 21st 2023, SAC soldiers burned down one house and two other buildings in B--- village, Zee Pyaung village tract, Kyeh Htoh Township, after having attacked a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) checkpoint.¹

SAC indiscriminate shelling and impacts on communities

According to local villagers, on the morning of January 16th 2023, soldiers from the State Administration Council (SAC)² Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³ #598 were patrolling in A--- village, Win Kan village tract⁴, Kyeh Htoh (Kyaikto) Township, Doo Tha Doo (Thaton) District. The LIB #598 is based in Shwegyi [Town], Hsaw Htee (Shwegyi) Township, Kler Lwee Htoo (Nyaunglebin) District. A--- village is located in a Karen National Union (KNU)⁵ controlled area. There are two Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁶ checkpoints near the village. The SAC also operates in the village and there are many SAC army camps surrounding the village.

¹ The present document is based on information received in March 2023. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha 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 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 Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

⁶ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

On January 16th 2023, at around 8:00 am, SAC LIB #598 attacked a KNLA security checkpoint near A--- village. Then, the fighting happened [and lasted for approximately an hour]. Five minutes after the fighting, at around 9:00 am, SAC LIB #598 indiscriminately fired five or six rounds of 40 mm mortar shells into A--- village. Three mortars landed in the village and exploded. As a result, three houses were damaged. These three houses were owned by local villagers named Ma⁷ C---, U⁸ D--- and U E---. However, no villager was hit and injured by the shelling because they already fled from their village when they first heard the sound of gunfire during the fighting.

The displaced villagers fled to neighbouring villages such as F--- village, G--- village, H--- village and I--- village in Kyeh Htoh Township. Some villagers fled to their hill plantations. There are more than 1,350 villagers in A--- village. About 1,300 villagers fled from their village. Only a few elder villagers stayed in the village. The displaced villagers faced food shortages during displacement. They also faced difficulty in accessing healthcare services. Daw⁹ J---, a displaced female villager from A--- village, reported: *“There are clinics and hospitals in Thein Za Yet Town [Kyeh Htoh Township] but it is far from our place. We cannot travel easily to the town at night [to access healthcare services] because it is not safe to travel. We cannot do anything [treat illnesses] as we do not have medicine. We just have to suffer [from sickness].”*

The shelling also impacted villagers’ livelihoods. Daw J--- added: *“It is very dangerous for villagers because SAC [soldiers] fired mortar shells in the area. As the SAC fires mortar shells, villagers are afraid to go to their workplace. As we have to flee, we don’t have time to work for our livelihood. Villagers are very afraid that mortars will land in their villages.”* Daw K---, another female villager from A--- village, reported: *“We cannot work freely for our livelihood. We always worry about when the fighting will happen and when the shelling will happen. We are afraid to go out. We worry and we are afraid. We cannot sleep well. We worry about having to flee again.”*

Some villagers [of A--- village] fled to F--- village, Kyeh Htoh Township. [After they arrived,] SAC soldiers from Waw Township, Bago Division, indiscriminately fired mortar shells near F--- village. Therefore, villagers [from A--- village] who were displaced to F--- village had to flee again [alongside F--- villagers]. Villagers said that no humanitarian organisation came to provide aid to those displaced villagers. During the reporting period, most of the displaced villagers did not return to their villages due to the unstable situation and indiscriminate shelling.

SAC burned down one house and two buildings owned by local villagers

On the evening of January 21st 2023, SAC soldiers burned down one house and two buildings in B--- village, Zee Pyaung village tract, Kyeh Htoh Township, Doo Tha Htoo District.

According to local villagers, on January 21st 2023, around 50 SAC soldiers from LIB #207 conducted their military activities in Wah Dat Kwin place, near LIB #207 army camp [located about thirty minutes away from B--- village on foot]. On that day, they [SAC] blocked the road that goes to the KNU-controlled area, stopped cars and motorbikes on that road and did not let anyone travel around. They [SAC soldiers] stopped car and motorbike drivers who travelled between Win Kan village tract and Zee Pyaung village tract, and confiscated villagers’ phones.

On the same day, at around 3:00 pm, about 60 SAC soldiers travelled from Wat Dat Kwin place to B--- village and they started to conduct their military operations in that area. When they [SAC] launched their military operations, some soldiers from LIB #207 [stayed behind, in Wat Dat Kwin place and] fired mortar shells in the area in order to help their soldiers [who were travelling to B-

⁷ Ma is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person’s name.

⁸ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

⁹ Daw is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person’s name.

-- village]. The mortar shells landed near B--- village and exploded. There is a KNLA checkpoint in B--- village. People's Defence Force (PDF)¹⁰ members also stayed together with KNLA soldiers at the checkpoint. The SAC launched its military operation in that area in order to destroy the [KNLA] checkpoint.

When the SAC soldiers arrived at B--- village, LIB #207 [soldiers who stayed behind] stopped firing mortar shells and sent their troops to B--- village in order to help the SAC soldiers as reinforcement. At 4:30 pm, [a total of] around 100 SAC soldiers burned down a house nearby the KNLA checkpoint. They recorded what they did to the house by taking pictures. The house is owned by U L---, a villager from M--- village, Zee Pyaung village tract. They also burned down a firewood storage hut [a shed to store firewood] and a goat farm [a building where local villagers keep their goats] near U L---'s house. The value of U L---'s house was about 20,000,000 kyats [USD 9,523.80]¹¹. The SAC left the village after they burned down the house and the other two buildings. Local villagers believed that the SAC burned the villager's house because they thought that it was a house belonging to PDF members.

The SAC burned down villagers' houses two times in Kyeh Htoh Township before this incident. This was the third time that they burned down houses and buildings owned by villagers. In October 2022, the SAC burned down houses in N--- village and O--- village, Pyi K'Doe village tract, Kyeh Htoh Township. In total, 17 houses from these two villages were burned down to ashes [in the previous two incidents].

Further background reading on the security and human rights situation in Doo Tha Htoo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forcible collection of logs in Hpa-an Township, July 2022"](#), May 2023.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: Two villagers were injured as a result of SAC mortar shelling in Bilin Township, June 2022"](#), March 2023.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: Villagers killed as a result of SAC mortar shelling in Bilin Township, June 2022"](#), February 2023.
- ["Dooplaya District Incident Report: Rape and killing of two adolescent sisters in Waw Ray Township, April 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.khr.org.

¹⁰ 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 formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

¹¹ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the June 1st 2023 mid-market rate of 1000 kyats to USD 0.48 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

