
Incident Report
January 24th, 2025 / KHRG # 24-198-11

Mu Traw District Incident Report: SAC arbitrary arrest, use of villagers as forced navigators and human shields, mistreatment, and looting in Bu Tho Township (April 2024)

This Incident Report describes events occurring in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District, in April 2024. On April 2nd 2024, over 200 State Administration Council (SAC) soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #434, stationed at Koo Seik army camp, arrested 11 villagers from Z--- village in Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township. The soldiers released seven villagers and forced four of the arrested villagers to navigate the way for them and to act as human shields while marching to LIB #434's army camp. After the SAC soldiers were confronted by KNLA soldiers on the way, SAC soldiers physically abused and threatened to kill one of the arrested villagers. The four villagers were compelled to guide SAC soldiers for a day without being given food or a chance to eat. Although the villagers managed to escape, the incident was distressing for the victims and their family members. The SAC soldiers also looted four pairs of earrings, a ring, and cash from the 11 arrested individuals in the forest near Z--- village. They also broke into a villager's house in Z--- village, destroyed a box containing belongings, and stole three shirts and a lucky string.¹

Part 1 – Incident Details

Type of Incident	Arbitrary arrest, use of forced navigators and human shields, and physical abuse, by the State Administration Council (SAC) ²
Date of Incident(s)	April 2 nd 2024
Incident Location (Village, Township and District)	Z--- village, Meh Klaw village tract ³ , Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District

Victims Information

¹ The present document is based on information received in May 2024. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw 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 village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

Name	Saw ⁴ H---	[Saw H---'s] youngest brother [Unknown name]	[Saw H---'s] nephew [Unknown name]	O---
Age	42 years old	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Gender	Man	Man	Man	Man
Ethnicity	Karen	Karen	Karen	Karen
Marital Status	Married	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Occupation	Farming (hill field)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Religion	Animist	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Position	Village head	Villager	Villager	Villager
Village	Z--- village, Meh Klaw village tract	Z--- village, Meh Klaw village tract	Z--- village, Meh Klaw village tract	Z--- village, Meh Klaw village tract

Perpetrator Information (Armed Actors)				
Name(s)	Rank	Unit	Base	Commander's Name
Ba Lay	Captain	SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) ⁵ #434	Koo Seik army camp, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District	Unknown

Part 2 - Information Quality

1. Explain in detail how this information was collected.

A staff member from the Karen National Union (KNU)⁶ township office [in Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District] informed a KHRG researcher about this incident via radio message. Following the incident on April 2nd 2024, the KHRG researcher went to the area to interview a local leader [specific position censored for security] and one of the victims [who is also the village head of Z--- village].

2. Explain how the source verified this information.

Saw H--- [one of the victims, and the village head of Z--- village] provided information about his experience.

Part 3 – Complete Description of the Incident

⁴ 'Saw' is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

Describe the Incident(s) in complete detail.

On April 2nd 2024, more than 200 soldiers from the State Administration Council (SAC)'s Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) #434, based at Koo Seik army camp (Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township), marched to Na Koo Nah village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, and to Way Sa village, Meh Klaw village tract. [As they continued their journey, and] upon reaching Z-- village, Meh Klaw village tract, the soldiers arrested 11 villagers who they encountered on the way near Z--- village, including the village head, Saw H---, from Z--- village. The arrested villagers included Saw H---, his three children [exact ages unknown, but underage], his uncle and aunt, his father-in-law and mother-in-law, his nephew, his youngest brother, and O--- [another villager from the same village]. [Due to SAC militarisation in the area, including shelling and air strikes, these villagers had been living in the forest for about a year. They would travel back and forth from the forest to their homes in the village to check on their properties. SAC soldiers arrested them while they were traveling.] None of the villagers were informed of any reasons for their arrest.

On that day, during the same incident, the village head, Saw H---, his youngest brother, his nephew, and another villager named O--- were [separated from the other villagers and] forced [by the SAC soldiers] to navigate the way to the LIB #434 army camp. [The other seven villagers were released at this time.] The purpose [of the forced navigation] was to avoid encountering Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁷ combined troops along the route [and to use the villagers as human shields]. The SAC soldiers did not take his [Saw H---'s] three children, his uncle and aunt, or his mother-in-law and father-in-law with them [as human shields]. Saw H--- explained: *"They [SAC soldiers] forced me to navigate a way where there would be no people [local armed resistance groups] present. The SAC soldiers said, 'We can go [to the Koo Seik army camp] through the jungle road that you will lead. It will only be enough if we are able to reach our destination [without encountering any armed resistance groups].' Then, I navigated the way for them."*

When they [SAC soldiers and the four villagers being used as human shields and forced navigators] reached a water channel next to a farmland [precise location unknown], sporadic fighting occurred between the SAC and KNLA soldiers. After the fighting ceased, the SAC captain, named Ba Lay, from LIB #434 threatened him [Saw H---] that if fighting happened again on their journey, he would not be able to escape and he would be killed immediately. Then, the captain kicked Saw H--- once and punched him in the face once. With that kick and punch, Saw H--- fell to the ground and cut his knee.

Saw H--- and the three other villagers were forced to accompany [and navigate for] the SAC soldiers on a journey that lasted for one day. While navigating for the soldiers along their route, they were not provided with any food or opportunity to eat. Saw H--- recalled: *"I had a meal in the morning before the arrest. After I was arrested, I did not get to eat for the rest of the day. I did not get to eat the whole night and the whole morning [of the next day]."*

On April 3rd 2024, when they [the four villagers being used as human shields/forced navigators] were taken to a logging place nearby the LIB #434 army camp, Saw H---, his youngest brother and nephew managed to escape. Although they managed to escape, [the other villager] O--- [who had not managed to escape], was taken [as a navigator for the SAC soldiers] to the SAC army camp where LIB #434 was based. When the SAC soldiers arrived at their army camp, they released O---, and did not torture him.

When he [Saw H---] arrived home, his wife informed him that [after they were separated], SAC

⁷ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

soldiers [from the same LIB #434] had looted four pairs of earrings, a ring, and 10,000 baht [288.96 USD⁸] and 50,000 kyats [23.82 USD⁹] from them [Saw H---’s wife and children] in the forest near Z--- village. [Some] SAC soldiers from the same battalion [entered Z--- village and] had also broken into Saw H---’s [family] house located in Z--- village. [The SAC soldiers] had destroyed a box where they [Saw H--- and his family] kept their belongings inside and had stolen three shirts and a lucky string [which is believed to offer protection and bring good luck]. Saw H--- explained that, when he escaped and arrived back to his family, *“my wife told me ‘you have three children, and I bought them two earrings [which were taken], two earrings and a ring which were given to me by their grandmother [which were also taken]. They [SAC soldiers] also confiscated 10,000 baht that we had saved. With that money, I thought I was going to send one of the children to school who has to attend grade-8 and has to stay at the dormitory.’”* Saw H--- added, *“my wife asked ‘how can we afford to send our children to school?’”*

Saw H--- and his family felt profound sadness about what had happened to him and [worry about] the effect [this will have] on his children and their future education. He also felt like it had violated his human rights. He reported that he would like the SAC soldiers to be removed from their area, recognising that their actions are unjust. He added: *“I hope to see peace in the future.”*



These two photos were taken in April 2024 at a farmland located near Z--- village, Meh Klaw village tract, Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District. These photos show Saw H--- who was injured when physically abused by the SAC captain, named Ba Lay, from LIB #434. On April 2nd 2024, he was arrested by SAC soldiers and forced to navigate for them, alongside three other villagers, two of whom are Saw H---’s relatives. The villagers escaped on April 3rd 2024. [Photos: KHRG]

Part 4 - Permission for Using the Details

Did the victim(s) provide permission to use this information? Explain how that permission was provided.

Saw H--- allowed KHRG to use this information. He said international stakeholders should know this kind of incident are occurring.

⁸ All conversion estimates for Baht are based on the official market rate as of January 6th 2025 at 1 USD = 34.61 THB, conversion rate available at <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>

⁹ All conversion estimates for Kyat are based on the official market rate as of January 6th 2025 at 1 USD = 2,099.04 MMK, conversion rate available at <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>

Further background reading on the situation on arbitrary arrest, forced navigators, 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 arbitrary arrest, torture, conflict-related sexual violence, house burning and forced labour of villagers in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township \(November 2023\)"](#), October 2024.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: villagers used as human shields, forced labour and navigators; SAC shelling and looting; and forced displacement in Bilin Township \(July 2021 to September 2022\)"](#), 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.

