



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

KHRG's Statement on Shelling in Luthaw Towhship, Mutraw District

21st February 2020

KHRG strongly condemns the targeting of civilians through the use of indiscriminate shelling. Civilians have the right to feel safe in their villages and should not have to continuously relocate due to fear of being attacked. For seventy years the Karen people have had to repeatedly relocate; KHRG is urging for this to come to an end.

In-between the 3rd to 8th February 2020, the Tatmadaw shelled around 600 shells into KNU's Mutraw District area displacing more than 300 villagers. In a recent interview, Brigadier General, Zaw Min Tun stated that the shelling was in retaliation for an attack carried out by the KNU. According to reports on January 30th, a battalion commander providing security for the road construction was killed in an alleged mine attack by the KNU. The tension between the KNU and the Tatmadaw has intensified since the Tatmadaw resumed their road construction activities in the area.

More than 300 villagers from Lu Thaw townships have been displaced and villagers from nearby villages are concerned for their security and that the situation may escalate. Carrying out activities that lead to the forced displacement or relocation of the local population is a clear violation of Section 9(c) of the National Ceasefire Agreement. This incident is only the most recent attack carried out by Tatmadaw whereby they targeted civilians. On December 30th 2019, the Tatmadaw fired at a group of villagers from Wa Tho Hkoh villager, Lay Poe Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mutraw District as they were going to a funeral. This incident resulted in two villagers being injured. According to Section 9(p) of the NCA, the Tatmadaw must, "[E]nsure the security and development of civilians living in ceasefire areas." KHRG calls for greater adherence to the NCA and accountability for those who continue to violate its provisions.

The villagers have continuously expressed their disapproval of the road construction. On January 15th 2020, villagers from Mutraw district protested across eleven different locations against the militarization and road construction in the area demanding for the road construction to be stopped, the removal of all Tatmadaw camps in their ancestral lands and for the Tatmadaw to follow the provision of the NCA.

KHRG urges the Tatmadaw to follow the provisions of the NCA, to avoid activities that endanger the lives of the civilians and respect the voices of the villagers. The Tatmadaw must stop indiscriminate shelling and fire in the ceasefire areas to show their genuine desire to achieve peace. Both KNU and the Tatmadaw must prioritize the security of the civilians, listen to their voices and respect the rights of the villagers.

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