



Short Update

April 30th, 2019 / KHRG # 19-24-D1

Nyaunglebin District: Tatmadaw road construction activities lead to confrontations with the KNLA, displacement and property damage in Kyaukkyi Township

From February until early April 2019, intermittent confrontations between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA resulted in the displacement of at least 108 people in Kheh Der village tract. The fighting broke out because the Tatmadaw is undertaking controversial road construction works despite the objection of local communities and the KNU.¹

Sporadic armed clashes leading to displacement

In early February 2019, a Tatmadaw soldier was shot and injured in Muh Theh while he was building a road between the villages of Muh Theh and Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee). This incident occurred in a KNU-controlled area in Kheh Der village tract, Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District. KHRG has not been able to confirm who fired at the soldier. Local people believe that he was shot because the Tatmadaw was engaged in road construction activities despite repeated objections from the local community and KNU leaders.

On February 23rd 2019 around noon, a second Tatmadaw soldier was shot while he was operating a backhoe to build a road in Aee Thar Plaw [area], Kyaukkyi Township. In retaliation, the Tatmadaw fired two artillery shells and other weapons toward the area where they thought the shot came from. According to local people, no further fighting occurred that day. The shelling did not result in civilian casualties or property damage. Following this incident, the Tatmadaw sent reinforcements to provide security for the road construction.

On March 27th 2019 at 7:00 AM, fighting broke out between the KNLA and Tatmadaw soldiers between Muh Theh and Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee), reportedly because the Tatmadaw trespassed into KNU territory in violation of an oral agreement with the KNLA. No casualties were reported. These clashes are a clear violation of section 5 (a) of the NCA, which states that the Tatmadaw and Ethnic Armed Organisations shall not engage in armed attacks in ceasefire areas. In addition, both the Tatmadaw and the KNLA failed to act with the necessary diligence to avoid this confrontation, as they should have under section 7 (a).

On April 2nd, 2019, a first group of local people fled Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee). Because of the fighting that broke out, they did not feel safe staying in their village. They cleared new lands, preparing a space where the rest of the village could settle. On April 4th, 2019, more dismantled their houses to move to this new place, which is located a 30-minute walk from the village. In total, 108

¹ This Short Update is based on information received in March 2019. It was provided by a community member in Nyaunglebin 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.

people from 34 households have already moved there, and they now face livelihood difficulties and difficulties accessing water. They told KHRG that they fled to protect themselves from renewed fighting between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw. They did not feel safe staying in Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee) because their village was close to the road. Other community members from Kheh Der village tract are now worried that fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA might recur, and have started preparing to flee their villages should the situation worsen.



Villagers from Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee) cleared a new place to live on April 2nd, 2019. [Photos: KHRG]



Villagers from Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee) dismantling their houses to relocate to another area on April 4th, 2019. [Photos: KHRG]

A contentious construction project opposed by the local community

The Tatmadaw road construction project is aiming to reach Than Bo, Muh Theh, Baw Hser Khoh and the Yuzalin River. The road is intended to be three lanes wide. The Tatmadaw is also building bridges on Thay Nweh Loh Kloh, Thay Ghey Loh Kloh and Ta Hoh Loh Kloh rivers. Tatmadaw soldiers from Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) #264 and #124 stand guard along the way from Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee) to Muh Theh to protect the construction sites. Because of that, community members who reside in Kheh Der village tract are afraid to travel.

Prior to the February incidents, community members submitted an objection letter to the Tatmadaw to stop the road construction project. The KNU/KNLA authorities of Nyaunglebin District also wrote objection letters and a statement intended to stop the project. On February 22nd 2019, the Tatmadaw's Southern Operation Command (SOC) Commander Myo Win went to meet the local population in Muh Theh and Pa Kaw Hta (Hkee). He was accompanied by his soldiers and two KNU liaison officers. According to people who attended the meetings, he tried to persuade them that the Tatmadaw development activities would benefit the local community.

However, locals had concerns that the road construction is for military purposes. They also objected to it because no compensation was provided to them even though the road construction had damaged many of their lands and plantations. In total, 84 plantations and irrigation ditches have been destroyed so far. These actions endanger the livelihoods of local communities, who rely on small-scale farming to secure their livelihoods. In addition, they violate section 5 (a) of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, which states that the Tatmadaw shall cease to engage in destruction of property in ceasefire areas. The local community told the commander that the situation in the area was not stable yet, and that peace had to come before development projects could be implemented. Despite these objections, the Tatmadaw continued the road construction.

On March 21st, 2019, a group of around 70 people from Kheh Der village tract demonstrated against the road construction project. They also wanted a halt to military activities that provoke skirmishes and endanger the civilian population. On March 23rd, 2019, the Chief Minister of Bago Region, U Win Thein, and civilian representatives of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) met with people from Kheh Der village tract in Muh Theh. They highlighted the positive effects of this construction for local communities and encouraged civilians and armed groups to collaborate in this process.



Villagers from Kheh Der village tract demonstrating against the Tatmadaw road construction project on March 21st, 2019. [Photos: KHRG]

The local community continues to oppose this construction project, as one local confirmed to KHRG: *“Prioritising development projects would never bring genuine peace in the country. This makes the NCA useless.”* Another community member even questioned the legitimacy of the Tatmadaw to undertake this work: *“We can construct the road on our own, if we achieve peace. Why it is built by the Tatmadaw? Road construction is the government’s responsibility.”*

On April 4th, 2019 at 10:00 am, the Bago Region Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee – JMC-S (Bago) held a meeting with the Kheh Der village tract administrator to try and solve the problem. Currently, the Tatmadaw has paused the road construction but continues working on the bridges. As of April 13th, soldiers from Infantry Battalions #124 and #264 remained standing guard around the construction areas. However, the situation could worsen if no permanent solution is found to settle this contentious issue.

Further background reading on tensions arising from Tatmadaw road construction activities can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Hpapun Situation Update: Tatmadaw road construction activities results in skirmishes with the KNLA and displacement in Lu Thaw Township”](#), (January 2019)
- [“Hpapun Situation Update: Fighting breaks out between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA in Lu Thaw Township”](#), (January 2019)
- [“Hpapun Incident Report: Tatmadaw road construction results in the indiscriminate firing of mortars and displacement in Lu Thaw Township, March 2018”](#), (June 2018)
- [“Nyaunglebin Short Update: Mone Township, November 2016 to February 2018”](#), (June 2018)

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. 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.

Recent Tatmadaw road-building in Southeast Myanmar

