



## Situation Update

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 / KHRG # 21-89-S1

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## Mu Traw District Situation Update: Villagers protest against the military coup in Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns, Lu Thaw Township, February to March 2021

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*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District in February and March 2021. The update highlights the protests held in Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns in the weeks following the military coup. The villagers held protests to show their disapproval of the military takeover. Even though they were stopped at one point by Tatmadaw soldiers, negotiations between the protest organisers and Tatmadaw officials made it possible for the protests to continue. The civilians were able to hold the protest successfully.<sup>1</sup>*

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The beginning of 2021 has been a devastating moment for civilians living in Myanmar. The military (led by Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Min Aung Hlaing) forcibly seized power from the National League for Democracy (NLD) vice-president U Myint Swe on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.<sup>2</sup> Since the coup,<sup>3</sup> NLD government officials and [anti-coup] protestors have been detained [by security forces].

Since the military coup, civilians living in Myanmar who do not want the dictatorship have protested against the military coup. People living all throughout Myanmar have participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)<sup>4</sup> by banging metal boxes and metal barrels to express their disapproval. The [CDM] protests were started by healthcare workers and have gradually been growing with protests occurring in both Hpapun and K'Ma Maung towns. On February 5<sup>th</sup> 2021, healthcare workers from the public hospital in K'Ma Maung Town participated [began

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in March 2021. It was drafted 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.

<sup>2</sup> U Myint Swe was actually declared Acting President by the Tatmadaw at the time of the coup, on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, whereupon he transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing.

<sup>3</sup> On February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, the Burma Army deposed the democratically elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military proclaimed a year-long state of emergency and transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces. Based on unproven fraud allegations, the Tatmadaw invalidated the landslide victory of the NLD in the November 2020 General Election and stated it would hold new elections at the end of the state of emergency. The coup d'état occurred the day before the Parliament of Myanmar was due to swear in the members elected during the 2020 election. Elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

<sup>4</sup> On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging.

participating] in the CDM. On February 6<sup>th</sup> 2021, healthcare workers from the hospital in Hpapun Town (a 100-bed-hospital) also participated [began participating] in the CDM.

On February 8<sup>th</sup> 2021, local people who live in Hpapun Town and K'Ma Maung Town protested against the military coup because they do not accept the dictatorship. On February 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, they held another protest which included around 200 people, starting from [the area between] the Hpapun Basic Education High School and the (100-bed) hospital in Hpapun Town. From there, they marched to Section (1) of Hpapun Town. People who took part in the protest in Hpapun Town circled twice around Hpapun Town, before returning to the Hpapun Government Basic Education High School at 10:30 am. The protest was successfully finished [ended without incident].

Likewise, on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, there were around 600 people from K'Ma Maung Town who held a protest starting from the government kindergarten school and marching to the public hospital. The protest finished at 11:30 am. The slogans used in the protest were: 1. Release the detained NLD government officials and protesters; 2. May Aung San Suu Kyi be healthy. The protests were held by different ethnic groups and staff from different [government] departments.

On February 13<sup>th</sup> 2021, another protest was held in K'Ma Maung Town. The protest started at 9:00 am and ended at 11:00 am. Around 200 people, of different ethnic groups, participated in the protest. The protesters started marching from the football [soccer] field at K'Ma Maung Basic Education High School and circled once around the town. Then they returned and gathered at the school. No protests were held in K'Ma Maung on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2021.

Similarly, on February 13<sup>th</sup> and February 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, there were no protests in Hpapun Town.

Civilians protested in Hpapun Town on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2021. The protest was held in the western part of Hpapun Town located in K'law Hta village tract,<sup>5</sup> Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. The protest was held with the people from the eastern and western parts of town, who gathered to protest against the military coup.

Village heads and elders took part as organisers and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>6</sup> soldiers stood guard as security during the protest. Villages such as Nah Khoh Hkee, Nah Khoh Hta, Maw Taw Hta, Ta Ghaw Kyoh, Day Baw Khaw, Dwe Lo, Baw Thay Hkee, Ta Hkoo Doe and K'Law Day, Htee Boh Kah Hta, Day Law, Baw Hta, Hpa Hee Kaung, Pyin Ma, Nga Ein Su, Ma Htaw and many more took part. There were villagers from 100 villages in total that took part in the protest.

As for the village tracts: Meh K'Law, Meh Nyoo, Meh Hkoo, Meh Mawe, Meh P'Lee, Day Wah, Htee Th'Daw Hta, Ma Htaw, Htee Th'Blut Hta, Lay Boe Hta, and K'Taing Tee village tracts were included. [With such large numbers] the protesters split into two groups to hold the protest. One group held a protest in Hpapun Town and the other group held a protest in Way Mone village.

In Hpapun, the villagers held the protest in front of the army camp of Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>7</sup> #642 and then they circled twice around Hpapun. The protest, which was held on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2021, [started] at 8:00 am and finished at 12:00 pm. The protesters gathered at the football [soccer] field at Hpapun High School [prior to going to the army camp]; they chanted slogans and sang their national hymn. The protest ended without incident.

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<sup>5</sup> A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

<sup>6</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>7</sup> A Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, 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. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

The slogans used in the protest were: 1. Release the detained NLD government officials and protestors; 2. The Burma Army must withdraw their army camps from our territory; 3. Burmanisation and military dictatorship must end; 4. Abolish the 2008 Constitution; 5. Establish a federal democratic state; 6. Give us equality and self-determination; 7. The United Nations and the international community must not work with the Burma Army. Local people living in Hpapun Town provided food, water and juice for the protesters.

Even though there were no blockades to stop the villagers from protesting in Hpapun Town, villagers who participated in the protest in Way Mone were stopped for about one hour by Tatmadaw<sup>8</sup> LIB #434 at their gate near the southern part of their army camp. The protest organisers and officials from LIB #434 negotiated and the gate was later opened, so villagers were able to continue their protest in Hpapun Town.

Even though the protesters were confronted with obstacles, there were no casualties as a result of the protest. They were able to finish the protest at 12:00 pm without incident. No one was apprehended [by security forces] after the protest.

Further background reading on protests against the 2021 military coup in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021"](#), May 2021.
- ["An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)"](#), May 2021.
- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Interview: Security forces kill peaceful anti-coup protesters in Dawei Town, February 2021"](#), March 2021.

## 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.khrq.org](http://www.khrq.org).

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<sup>8</sup> Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

# Mutraw (Hpapun) District

