



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

December 16th 2021 / KHRG # 21-237-D1

Mu Traw District Short Update: Torture, fighting, indiscriminate shelling, and threats by SAC soldiers have resulted in fear and displacement of villagers in Dwe Lo Township, August 2021

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District during the month of August 2021. It highlights the acts of torture committed by State Administration Council (SAC) Light Infantry Battalion #107 against three villagers after accusing them of detonating a bomb near the village monastery. The SAC soldiers even threatened villagers living in N--- village, stating they would conduct indiscriminate shelling into the village in retaliation for any attacks by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Due to the indiscriminate shelling by SAC troops, a monk was injured and two villagers' houses were burnt. Constant fighting between the SAC and KNLA has also resulted in the displacement of villagers living in N--- village. Aside from living in fear due to fighting and indiscriminate shelling by the SAC, the local villagers are facing challenges due to travel restrictions tied to COVID-19.¹

On August 15th 2021, at 8:30 am, a bomb exploded in front of the entrance to the village monastery located in N--- village, Ma Htaw village tract,² Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. The explosion killed a cow owned by Saw³ T---. The cow's back legs were also broken as a result of the explosion. According to Saw T---, the villagers butchered the cow [for meat] and he was able to sell 10 viss [a little over 16 kilograms] of the meat to the State Administration Council (SAC)⁴ soldiers.

¹ The present document is based on information received in August 2021. 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 A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

³ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁴ 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 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.

After the bomb exploded, the SAC soldiers⁵ from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁶ #407 called three villagers whose houses were located close to the place the bomb exploded [to question them about the explosion]. These villagers are: Saw Y--- (45 years old, with three children), Saw T--- (34 years old, with two children), and Saw O--- (25 years old).

According to Saw T---, the SAC battalion commander accused him [and only him] of being the one who triggered the bomb. Saw T--- added: *"It is fortunate that none of the soldiers were injured or died. If one of the soldiers had died, for sure they would have shot me to death."*

The battalion commander also kicked one of the other [detained] villagers, Saw Y---, in the head one time, and hit Saw O--- on the crown of his head with the barrel [of a rifle]. Saw O--- sustained injuries to the head, which was cracked and bleeding [from the blow of the rifle].

[Afterward, the SAC soldiers began firing indiscriminately.] During the indiscriminate firing, they forced the three villagers to sit in a squatted manner while they fired guns [toward the sky], with the bullet shells falling on the villagers' heads.

The SAC soldiers did not give any compensation for the physical abuse, and said they would only treat the wounds [that the villagers had sustained], so the villagers did not accept it [medical treatment from the SAC]. The SAC soldiers also recorded [the name, age, and other personal information] of the three victims' family members [the soldiers forced them to provide this information].

The SAC soldiers conducted more indiscriminate firing [during the month of August, dates not specified] into areas on both sides of the road running through the village. A piece of [shrapnel from the] grenade injured a village monk on his right forearm. They [SAC soldiers] fired into two houses, one belonging to Saw P--- and the other belonging to Saw W---. Because no one was inside the house, no one was injured.

Now the SAC soldiers are also threatening the villagers, telling them that if the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁷ comes and attacks them they will conduct shelling, and they will not care [what the impact may be]. They will burn houses where the attack has taken place and they will conduct indiscriminate shelling. The SAC soldiers also said they will not tell the villagers to leave or to stay, but they will do as they say [just retaliate by shelling] if [any] attack [by the KNLA] happens.

[Due to SAC indiscriminate shelling into and near villages, the KNLA launched multiple attacks against the SAC during the month of August.] According to Saw T---, *"The KNLA told SAC soldiers that they attacked the SAC soldiers because they engaged in indiscriminate shelling into the villages."* [As a result, the SAC threatened to retaliate through further shelling.] The SAC

⁵ Tatmadaw is the term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

⁶ A 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.

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

soldiers responded that they will engage in shelling, even if they do not see who the attackers are [whether they are KNLA or not].

On August 16th 2021, there were around 40 villagers from N--- village, including both men and women, who went to meet with village tract leaders to get more information about whether they can [or should] continue to stay in the village. There are 98 households in N--- village, and at the time of this report only around five households had fled since the fighting took place between KNLA and SAC soldiers in early April. They [those who fled] haven't come back yet. The rest are still in the village and now these villagers are facing a dilemma about whether to run or stay because of the threats from the SAC. At the same time, because of COVID-19 restrictions and fighting, it is really difficult to leave the village as well.

Currently, SAC soldiers are staying at the entrance and exit of N--- village. On August 15th 2021, both groups [the soldiers at both the entrance and exit of the village] lined up between the two camps [that they had temporarily set up at each end of the village] and conducted indiscriminate firing [of guns and mortars]. The fighting and indiscriminate shelling by the SAC military have been happening almost every day between E--- village, K'Ter Tee village tract, Dwe Lo Township and Hpapun Town.

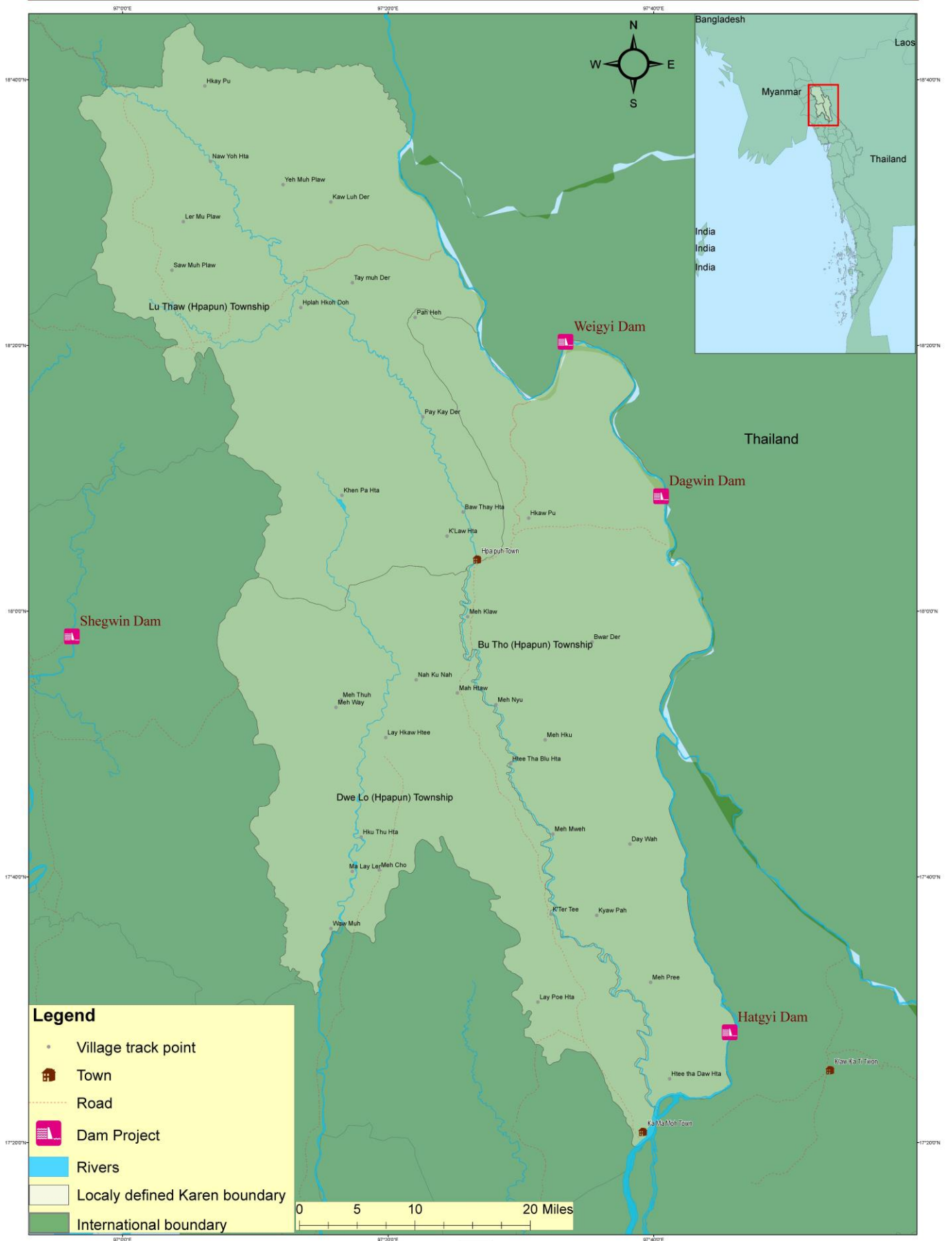
Further background reading on the security situation and military activity in Mu Traw District in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: Airstrikes, fighting, indiscriminate shelling and landmine contamination resulted in the displacement of villagers, one injury and one death in Bu Tho Township, Mu Traw District, March to May 2021"](#), December 2021.
- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: Landmine contamination, indiscriminate shelling, arbitrary taxation, movement of troops, and livelihood, education and healthcare situation, May to June 2021"](#), September 2021.
- ["Mu Traw District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw results in displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2020 to February 2021"](#), June 2021.
- ["Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021"](#), May 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.

Mutraw (Hpapun) District



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