



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Hpa-an District Situation Update: the Civil Disobedience Movement, COVID-19 and education, April to June 2021

This Situation Update describes events occurring in Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District from April to June 2021. This report highlights issues related to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the education situation. After the military coup, many government staff joined the CDM and have been seeking temporary shelter in areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU). COVID-19 cases have increased, resulting in travel restrictions and an increase in the price of goods. Some villagers cannot afford to buy goods because they do not have jobs. In June 2021, one of the Karen primary schools reopened for one month but was closed again when COVID-19 cases increased. The school will reopen when the situation improves.¹

Introduction

This situation report covers events that occurred in Ta Kreh [Paingkyon] Township, Hpa-an District, in the period from April to June 2021, following the military coup. This situation update will discuss the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)², COVID-19, and the education situation in Ta Kreh Township.

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and travel restrictions

In May 2021, CDM participants from different towns and districts came to H--- village, Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District. These CDM participants are of different ethnic and religious backgrounds and had different [professional] positions.

In April 2021, there were no travel restrictions [in Hpa-an District]. An organisation [villagers were not able to identify the name of the organisation] came and provided training on issues such as healthcare, water purification, food preparation, healthcare for pregnant women and

¹ The present document is based on information received in July. It was provided by a community member in Hpa-an 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 On February 2nd 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 1st 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.

infants, sexual violence, and COVID-19 prevention. Since May 2021, however, it has become more difficult to travel because the State Administration Council (SAC)³ has been searching for and arresting CDM participants. Therefore, it is not easy for this organisation to enter the area.

COVID-19 and its impacts

In June 2021, COVID-19 cases increased, resulting in travel restrictions and an increase in the price of goods. Some villagers struggled to get food because they did not have jobs and were unable to earn their livelihoods. Furthermore, some villagers were infected with COVID-19 at the shop where the villagers used to buy goods. The SAC military government ordered the shop to close temporarily.

Since the COVID-19 situation has grown worse, organisations, including the one noted above [that came to provide training], have been unable to come to Ta Kreh Township to organise activities.

Other Healthcare

There was a pregnant woman in the area [Ta Kreh Township] who needed to give birth via caesarean section (C-section), so she couldn't give birth [in the village] and needed to go to the hospital [to give birth]. She went to the public hospital, but they rejected her [because they did not have capacity to treat her]. She then had to go to the private hospital to deliver her baby. After she recovered from childbirth, she came back and stayed at her mother's house [in Ta Kreh Township].

Education

In June 2021, the Karen [Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)⁴] primary school in T'Koo Traw village, Noh Hkwee village tract,⁵ Ta Kreh Township, Hpa-an District, reopened because students from the other villages came to attend that school. There were four teachers and over 70 students attending the Karen [KECD] primary school. [At this time] Myanmar government schools were still closed. In July 2021, however, the majority of villagers were infected with COVID-19 and the school was closed for two weeks. If the situation improves, the school will reopen. The Karen National Union (KNU)⁶ also announced a temporary closure of Karen schools.

Conclusion

Though there might be many other events that occurred during this period in 2021, due to the COVID-19 situation, KHRG's researcher was unable to travel [to collect other information] and

³ 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.

⁴ The Karen Education and Culture Department is the education department of the Karen National Union. Its main goals are to provide mother tongue education services to rural Karen populations in Southeast Myanmar, as well as to preserve the Karen language, culture and history. Despite being an important education provider in the region, it is not officially recognised by the Myanmar government.

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

⁶ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar 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 in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

so was not able to provide KHRG with information on other events. In 2021, there have been many challenges for the [local] community because of the military coup and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the livelihood, education and travel situations are very different than they were before [the military coup and COVID-19].

Further background reading on the situation on human rights issues related to the CDM, COVID-19, general healthcare, and education in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Dooplaya District Interview: Looting, fighting, forced labour and COVID-19 infections, September 2021,”](#) January 2022.
- [“Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: SAC militia shoots teenage villager, CDM and protestor protection, SAC troop movement, arbitrary taxation and livelihood, healthcare and education challenges, March 2021,”](#) January 2022.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\),”](#) November 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.

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.

Hpa-an District (Central Kayin State)



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