



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Killing, torture and use of human shields and navigators by the SAC and BGF in Bilin Township, May to June 2022

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District during the period between May and the first week of June 2022. It covers activities of the State Administration Council (SAC) Infantry Battalion (IB) #403 under Military Operation Command (MOC) #8 and Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1011 in the area between Meh Pree and Na Kyee army camps. The SAC and BGF troops committed human rights violations including the arrest of local villagers for use as human shields, torture and killing. SAC and BGF troop movement caused fighting and the local Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) planted landmines to defend their territory. Two of the landmines exploded, killing a villager's goats. The villager relies on these goats for the family's livelihood.¹

Since the coup, State Administration Council (SAC)² troops under Military Operations Command (MOC)³ #8⁴ and Border Guard Force (BGF)⁵ Battalion #1011 [formerly Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)⁶ Battalion #333] in Na Kyee and Meh Pree army camps, Bilin Township,

¹ The present document is based on information received in June 2022. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha Htoo 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 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 Burma/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.

³ Military Operations Command (MOC) is comprised of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs) made up of three battalions each.

⁴ This information was taken from the [KNU Doo Tha Htoo News Facebook page](#), from a post dated May 5th 2022.

⁵ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw.

⁶ The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was originally formed in 1994 as a breakaway group from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Since its separation from the KNLA in 1994, it was known to frequently cooperate with and support the Tatmadaw in its conflict with the KNLA. The original group underwent major change in 2010 as the majority of the original DKBA was transformed into the Border Guard Force (BGF), under the control of the Burma/Myanmar government.

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District, have increased military activity and movement between their army camps. During patrols, these SAC and BGF troops passed villages including Aee Soo Hkee, Kloo Htaw Law (Kwee Htaw Law) and Wah K'Teh villages in Aee Soo Hkee village tract⁷, and Wah Hkaw Pwa, K'Hser Hpoe and Meh Pree Hkee villages in Meh Pree Hkee village tract, in Bilin Township. Moreover, fighting sometimes broke out close to the villages when the SAC and BGF encountered local troops from the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO)⁸. Sometimes the local KNDO troop attacked them, while these SAC and BGF troops patrolled Karen National Union (KNU)⁹-controlled territory. During fighting, the SAC and BGF frequently conducted indiscriminate shelling close to villages. This shelling placed villagers' lives at high risk and destroyed livestock and property. [Details of the fighting and shelling cannot be confirmed.]

As a result of the fighting and the SAC and BGF activities during the period between the beginning of May and June 3rd 2022, villagers were in danger of being hit by bullets and shrapnel, arrested for portering, used as human shields, as well as tortured and killed.

Killing

On about May 10th 2022 [the specific date cannot be determined], SAC troops [unknown battalion number] under MOC #8 and BGF troops from Battalion #1011, led by Battalion Deputy Commander Hennerly, transported one of their injured soldiers from Meh Pree army camp to Na Kyee army camp for treatment. They stopped at Na Kyee army camp for about one week and then returned to Aee Soo Hkee army camp on May 18th 2022. When they arrived at W--- village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract [on their return to Aee Soo Hkee army camp on May 18th,] they shot at a villager [and a KNDO soldier] beside the village. Both died [immediately from the shooting].

The incident happened when the villager was going to buy food. The KNDO soldier had ordered him to buy food for the local KNDO troops. The villager and KNDO soldier had planned to meet along a path beside the village to exchange the food. The SAC and BGF shot them dead [as soon as they arrived at the meeting place]. Therefore, [villagers suspect that the] BGF and SAC were waiting [in secret] to shoot at them [the villager and KNDO soldier] beside the path since before they arrived. Then, the SAC and BGF troops headed back to Aee Soo Hkee army camp. During the night, other SAC and BGF troops [unknown battalions] passed through Kwee Htaw Law village from Aee Soo Hkee army camp back to Na Kyee army camp, which created a high security risk for civilians. The victims' family could only get the corpses for the funeral the following day on May 19th 2022, after the local KNDO troop had made sure that there were no landmines around the incident place.

The name of the [civilian] victim is Saw¹⁰ H---. He was 34 years old and leaves behind his five young children and his wife. Saw H--- had three sons and two daughters, and his youngest child is only around one year old. As he [Saw H---] was the only breadwinner for his family, it is a big loss for their family's wellbeing and livelihood. His widow is now deeply concerned about the future education, wellbeing and livelihood of her five children. Even though her four older children could go to school last year, it is uncertain if they will be able to go to school this year or in the future. A

⁷ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

⁸ The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) was formed in 1947 by the Karen National Union and is the precursor to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Today the KNDO refers to a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

⁹ 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 Burma 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.

¹⁰ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

family member expressed that, *“Everything is a challenge for her [the victim’s wife] because she lost the breadwinner of the family. How can she raise the group of children without her husband? [...] Now his children and wife are crying a lot and we cannot do anything now.”* Villagers and village leaders from Aee Soo Hkee village tract provided 100,000 kyats [USD 54.01]¹¹ to the victim’s family, but they have not received any compensation or support from any authorities or armed groups.

Use of human shields

Whenever the SAC and BGF who are based in Na Kyee and Meh Pree army camps patrolled the area between their army camps, they arrested any villagers they saw on their way to use as navigators and human shields. On May 3rd 2022, the SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)¹² #403¹³ and BGF Battalion #1011 arrested a number of villagers [the total number cannot be confirmed] as human shields, including four villagers from Aee Soo Hkee village and four villagers from Wah K’Teh village, and released those villagers when they arrived at the next place [the exact location cannot be confirmed].

Physical assault

Moreover, one villager named Saw L--- from B--- village, was also physically assaulted by being slapped across the face while standing beside his house, without being given a reason. Saw L---’s face became swollen and it was painful. The incident happened in the afternoon of May 3rd 2022, and was perpetrated by a soldier from SAC Infantry Battalion (IB) #403 under MOC #8 and BGF Battalion #1011 under Bo¹⁴ Henry, when the troops arrived at B--- village while patrolling between Meh Pree army camp and Na Kyee army camp.

Landmine incident

In May 2022 [specific dates are unknown], two landmine incidents happened near Kwee Htaw Law village, Aee Soo Hkee village tract, Bilin Township. The exploded landmines were planted by a local KNDO battalion, to defend their territory following fighting with the SAC and BGF. One of the incidents happened in a place just outside of Kwee Htaw Law village and the explosion killed three goats. The other landmine exploded in Chaw K’Lee Hta area, beside the Bu Law Kloe River and the explosion killed seven goats. The 10 goats were all owned by one villager from Kwee Htaw Law village. Moreover, the presence of landmines near the community farms [located outside of the villages] also created a high security risk for the nearby villagers [who had to travel to and work on their farms].

From early June 2022, the SAC and BGF stopped patrolling the area between their army camps, so the situation in Aee Soo Hkee village went back to normal and villagers did not have to face armed conflict, arrest, torture and the fear of human rights violations by armed actors. Therefore, villagers are now preparing their farms to start planting paddy for their livelihoods. However, fighting can happen when the SAC and BGF resume their troop movements. Just recently,

¹¹ All conversion estimates for the kyat are based on the July 5th 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1,000 kyats to USD 0.54 (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

¹² An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most 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, particularly following the signing of the NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

¹³ This information (battalion information) was taken from the [KNU Doo Tha Htoo News Facebook page](#), from a post dated May 5th 2022.

¹⁴ Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer'.

villagers received information about the SAC and BGF resuming their military activities. So once again they fear conflict and other abuses so need to be cautious.

Further background reading on human rights violations in Doo Tha Htoo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: SAC troops arbitrarily detain seven villagers, March 2022"](#), June 2022.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Deliberate SAC shelling at religious event results in civilian deaths, injuries and property damage in Tha Htoo Township, March 2022"](#), April 2022.
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Ongoing fighting in Bilin Township leads to more than 2,000 IDPs, as well as injury and property damage, December 21st 2021 to January 11th 2022"](#), March 2022.

About KHRG

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

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

