



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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SPDC troops burn villages and step up operations against civilians in southern Toungoo District

Following the deployment of new SPDC Army units in southern Toungoo District at the end of November, SPDC troops have been sweeping through the forests on search and destroy missions targeting displaced communities in hiding. Already in December, these patrols have burnt down at least two villages and killed at least one displaced villager as well as having destroyed numerous hidden food stores which they have encountered during patrols of the area. The local displaced communities are now facing heightened food insecurity and an ongoing risk of military attack.

Continuing with its two-year-long offensive against civilian communities in Northern Karen State the SPDC Army deployed Military Operations Commands (MOCs) #4 and 10 to Toungoo District at the end of November 2007. These two newly deployed MOCs are now operating in the area concurrently with previously deployed MOCs #9 and 5 and Light Infantry Division (LID) #88. While MOCs are supposed to comprise 10 battalions for offensive operations with a current average of about 120-150 troops per battalion, only eight of these are operational under MOC #4. These are Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) #701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707 and 710. In southeastern Tantabin township (Taw Ta Too in Karen) patrols from LIBs #703, 707 and 710 began operations on November 29th; searching out displaced communities in hiding.

On December 1st 2007, SPDC soldiers arrived at the Th'Ay Kee area. Due to previous SPDC military operations in the area the community of Th'Ay Kee no longer resides in the village itself, but rather at hiding sites in the surrounding forests. Upon detecting the hidden rice stores and huts of displaced villagers, the soldiers burnt these to the ground. For some Th'Ay Kee villagers, these rice stores were the last of their provisions. Having run out of food, some villagers have tried to sneak back to their agricultural fields in order to harvest their paddy crop. This tactic may remain possible so long as they can avoid detection from the ongoing SPDC patrols in the area.

On December 2nd, 32-year-old Saw Kler Poh, a displaced villager from Kheh Der village, Tantabin township travelled to his agricultural field in the hopes of harvesting some of his paddy crop. However, SPDC soldiers active in the areas spotted him and shot him on sight, killing him instantly. On December 5th, a patrol of SPDC soldiers reached Buh Kee village as well as the homes of displaced Buh Hsa Kee villagers, located in southeastern Tantabin township. The troops burnt both villages to the ground the same day.

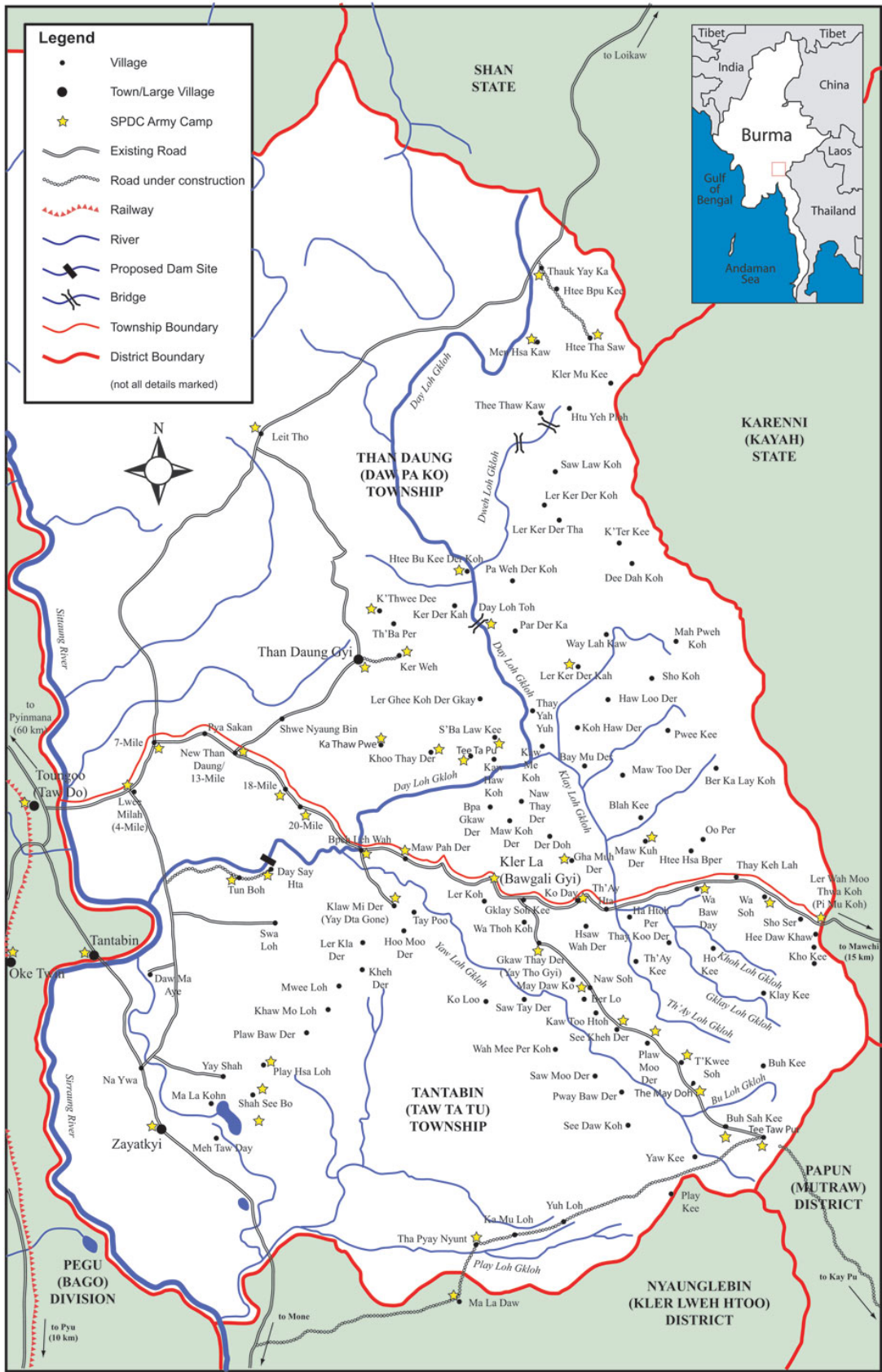
Due to the intensification of military operations against civilians in southern Toungoo District displaced communities in hiding from villages such as Saw Wah Der, Hah Htoh Bper, Gker Lay Hta, Thay Koo Der, Th'Ay Kee, Buh Kee, Buh Hsa Kee, Bplay Kee, Khoh Kee, Hee Daw Khaw, Soh Ser and Wa Soh located in Tantabin township are now facing even more serious

food insecurity. According to one KHRG field researcher working in southeastern Tantabin township - who estimates that there are now more than 2,000 displaced villagers in the area:

"Some villagers are facing food problems. For example, for villages such as Th'Ay Kee and Saw Wah Der, SPDC soldiers burnt down their rice stores and the food which they'd hid at hiding sites so it will be hard for them to access food in the future."

Despite the increasing threats of military attack and the rising food insecurity the displaced villagers in the area have said they are not yet sure whether or not they will head out to refugee camps in Thailand.

Toungoo (Taw Oo) District



A map of Burma and its surrounding regions. Burma is shown in white, with a yellow rectangular area in the south. Neighboring countries are labeled: Tibet, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. Bodies of water are labeled: Gulf of Bengal, Andaman Sea, and Gulf of Thailand.

