



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Arbitrary Arrest by SAC, August 2021

This Short Update describes events occurring in Paw (Paung) [also known as Maw S'Ko] Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District during August 2021. The State Administration Council (SAC) military attacked the local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Aee Weh army camp, after which they arbitrarily arrested villagers who lived near the KNLA army camp. The victims' family members have little hope they will be released. This short update also describes the SAC's attempts to coerce local villagers to send their children to school.¹

Arbitrary Arrest

In August 2021, two leaders of the local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)²—Bo³ Play in Bilin Township and Poo⁴ Gaw Hkoh base in Aee Weh Army camp, Paw (Paung) [also known as Maw S'Ko] Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District—passed away due to illness [Hpu Gaw Hkoh is known to have died of COVID-19 while the exact cause of Bo Play's death is unknown]. Their deaths were a major blow to the local KNLA and its area administrative structure. Because the local KNLA leadership was disrupted by the deaths, the State Administration Council (SAC)⁵ military took the situation as an opportunity to attack the KNLA army camp.

On August 24th 2021, multiple SAC battalions [battalion numbers unknown] attacked and occupied the Aee Weh KNLA camp in Maw S'Ko Township. They arrested about 20 people after the fighting. Among those arrested were two Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) members [the exact number of CDM members arrested has not been confirmed] and some KNLA soldiers, but the majority of those arrested were villagers who were working on their farms and living in farm huts near the Aee Weh army camp during the incident. Four of the villagers arrested by the SAC were known to local villagers: Poo N--- and another villager with his two children. [Interviewees did not know the other villagers who were arrested by the SAC because most of the villagers who

¹ The present document is based on information received in August 13th 2021. 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 Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

³ Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer.'

⁴ Poo is a Karen prefix meaning 'grandfather;' and is used for elderly men.

⁵ 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.

were arrested were from other places and travelled to the area to work on the rubber plantations as day labourers]. One local civilian, Naw⁶ I---, said, *“The general [Poo Gaw Hkoh] of that [Aee Weh] army camp died due to COVID-19. When they [SAC] heard that news they came to attack that army camp. They arrested more than 10 people [including KNLA soldiers and some villagers]. [...] Those [villagers] who were arrested had nothing to do with the army camp. [...] Their wives and children who are left behind cried a lot. I pitied them when I saw it.”* [In a follow-up interview in December 2021, the interviewee stated that she believed around 20 people, not 10, had been arrested.]

The SAC sent the KNLA soldiers and villagers they arrested to the new Zin Ma Thweh prison which is about a three-hour drive from the village. Only one villager, a rubber plantation owner, was permitted by the SAC authorities to go to the prison to bring food to her workers, who were among the villagers detained by the SAC. The families of the villagers who were arrested by the SAC could not do anything to secure the release of their family members, so they are now deeply sad and feel hopeless. According to Naw M---, *“They arbitrarily arrested the civilians. These civilians did not revolt against them in any way. They arrested anyone on the road in sight. What they did is not in accordance with the law. This is just bullying. You think about that. How much will a person worry when his or her family members have been arrested? They might not be able to sleep well when they think about their family members who were arrested. They might not get strength when they eat because they always think about their family members who were arrested, wondering when they are going to be released. They might pray really hard at night. We feel sad since that happened. The KNU [Karen National Union]⁷ should request the release of arrested civilians. Those civilians are innocent, so I would like them to be released. The family members of those who were arrested are crying every day. I feel sad when I see that.”*

According to an update that KHRG received on November 25th 2021, the villagers who were arrested by the SAC following the SAC’s occupation of Aee Weh army camp were still detained in Zin Ma Thweh prison and the SAC were still operating in the village.

Education

KHRG also received information about the education situation in H--- village. H--- High School is a Myanmar government school. Since 2020, students in H--- village have not been able to go to school due to the COVID-19 pandemic; the situation worsened following the February 2021 coup. After the coup, the H--- teachers started joining the CDM to stand against the junta. The SAC tried to open the school and threatened parents in an attempt to coerce them to send their children to school. SAC soldiers were present in the classroom as security guards and new teachers were sent from an unknown village to work at the H--- school. H--- villagers assume those new teachers were sent by the SAC military.

However, there were only about 50 students who went to school in June 2021, and the majority of these students were older. Most of the parents did not send their children to school due to their concerns for their children’s safety. Some of the parents did, however, take their children to school because of the SAC’s order to do so. One month later [in July], the school had to close due to the increase in COVID-19 cases. Naw I---, a villager who refused to send her children to school, said, *“Only one or two students from primary classes attend the school. I don’t know [where those new teachers are from]. I have never seen them. We don’t let our children go to school. [...] They coerced the villagers to send the kids to the school. Some parents are scared, so they sent their*

⁶ Naw is a S’gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person’s name.

⁷ 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.

kids to school. In fact, no one wants to go to school. The soldiers intimidated them. The soldiers are guarding the school.”

Further background reading on the security situation in Doo Tha Htoo District in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: SAC shot on sight a pregnant woman and her husband in Paw Township, September 2021,”](#) December 2021.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021,”](#) December 2021.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\),”](#) November 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.

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

