

**Situation Update**January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024 / KHRG # 23-41+78-S1**Mu Traw District Situation Update: SAC air strikes, arrest of villagers, and indiscriminate shelling causing casualties, and landmine explosion, March 2022 to February 2023**

*This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Dwe Lo Township, in Mu Traw (Hpapun) District, during the period from March 2022 to February 2023. From March 2022 to February 2023, the State Administration Council (SAC) has been conducting ground and air attacks in civilian areas. These attacks have caused at least 15 casualties, including five children. Whenever the SAC soldiers entered villages, they burned down villagers' properties and looted their belongings. At least three villagers were arbitrarily arrested and forcibly disappeared. A landmine planted by local ethnic armed groups also exploded injuring two villagers, and landmine contamination has made it difficult for the villagers, who cannot avoid travelling to secure their livelihood.<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction**

This Situation Update highlights incidents that happened in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District. The information was collected from March 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 to February 28<sup>th</sup> 2023 and describes the arrest of villagers, shelling into villages, air attacks, and destruction of villagers' properties by the State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>2</sup>. [These attacks killed 9 villagers and injured 6 more.] A landmine planted by local ethnic armed groups also exploded, and 2 villagers were injured.

**The State Administration Council (SAC) arresting villagers**

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022, at 1:30 pm, the SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)<sup>3</sup> #404 transported military equipment to their army camps located in Mu Traw District. The SAC soldiers arrested five villagers living in A--- village, Ma Htaw village tract<sup>4</sup>, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District:

<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in March 2023. 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. 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, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

<sup>4</sup> A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

two villagers were arrested as they were on the road during the SAC patrolling, and three other villagers were arrested as they were eating on a rubber plantation. Two villagers were able to escape, but there is no information on the fate of the other three villagers as of November 2023.<sup>5</sup>

### **Indiscriminate shelling into villages**

On March 6<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 12 am, SAC soldiers from Military Operation Command (MOC)<sup>6</sup> #8 and LIB #408, based in Ma Htaw village tract (in Khaw Thoo Pwah Poo forest), under the commandment of Zaw Min Htet, fired 81 mm mortar rounds into T--- village, Ma Htaw village tract. The mortar shells fell next to the house of Saw<sup>7</sup> W---, a 37-year-old villager, while he was hiding in the bunker under his house. He was injured on his head and shoulder due to the explosion of the mortar shell. As soon as he was injured by the mortar explosion, he was sent to O--- Hospital, in Pay Kay village tract, Lu Thaw Township, Mu Traw District. He died on the way to O--- Hospital. Saw W--- is survived by four family members. His children are young [between one and ten years old], so [his wife] is facing hardships as she tries to secure the family's livelihood. Saw W---'s wife [now] has to live with her mother, as she faces difficulties and struggles to secure the livelihood of her family. She explained that she is in need of financial support. Although she lives with her parents, her parents are getting old and are in poor health. This situation makes it difficult for the family's future. [Contrary to what] she was expecting, the family has not yet received support from any organisation.

On May 7<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 12:20 pm, SAC soldiers from LIB #406, under MOC #8 command, based in Koo Seik army camp located in Ma Htaw village, fired four mortar rounds into H--- village, Ma Htaw village tract. Naw<sup>8</sup> Ax--- and Naw U---, who are 12 and 15 years old respectively, were playing in front of their house during the SAC shelling. Naw Ax--- was [struck by shrapnel and] died on the spot due to the seriousness of her injuries. The local leaders immediately sent Naw U--- to the clinic located in Ma Htaw village tract. She was hospitalised for two weeks while receiving the medical treatment necessary to cure her injuries. She has recovered from the injuries from the shelling and is now back home.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 10:30 am, SAC soldiers from LIB #406, under MOC #8 command, fired 81 mm mortar rounds into B--- village, Ma Htaw village tract. During the shelling, Saw S---, a 12-year-old child, was injured on his right shoulder blade. He was sent to a clinic located in Ma Htaw village tract on the day of the incident. There, he received medical treatment for two weeks to cure his injuries. The clinic had adequate medical supplies to treat the victim, so he recovered from the injuries. However, [shortly after,] he had to flee to the forest along with other villagers from the same village due to the SAC's [further] fighting and shelling in the area.

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<sup>5</sup> KHRG, “[In the Dark - The crime of enforced disappearance and its impacts on the rural communities of Southeast Burma since the 2021 coup](#)”, November 2023.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>8</sup> Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.



This photo was taken on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 in B--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. This photo shows Saw S---, a 12-year-old boy who was injured on his shoulder blade while he was playing next to his house, as a result of shelling conducted by SAC MOC #8, LIB #406, based at Koo Seik army camp, on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2022. [Photo: KHRG]

On December 15<sup>th</sup> 2022, SAC soldiers from LIB #406 based at K'Ser Theh Pleh (Taung Thone Lone) army camp fired two rounds of 120 mm mortars into E--- village, Htee Th'Bluh Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township. One round fell into the sesame plantation of Naw K---'s grandmother, and another fell into the farmland of an E--- villager named Saw Q--- and killed a cow.

On the morning of December 21<sup>st</sup> 2022, [at 9:40 am], before an SAC helicopter transporting rations and ammunition arrived, SAC soldiers from the LIBs #340, #341, #434, and Phyu Ha army camp indiscriminately conducted shelling into F--- village, Kleh Hkoh village, Kyaw Klee Law village's vicinity, and in the hills [located in Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township]. [The SAC fired] over 20 rounds of mortar. An F--- villager, named Naw J---, was killed and [her sister], Naw M---, was injured after the explosion of an 81mm mortar shell, fired by the SAC soldiers, that fell next to F--- village. After she was injured, Naw M--- was sent to the [SAC-managed military] Phyu Ha Hospital. The incident happened while these two sisters were finding firewood in the forest.



This photo was received on January 6<sup>th</sup> 2023. This photo, taken in F--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mutraw District on the day of the incident, shows Naw J--- who was killed by the explosion of an 81 mm mortar shell fired by LIB #340, led by company commander Myo Win, on December 21<sup>st</sup> 2022. [Photo: Local villager]

On January 9<sup>th</sup> 2023, SAC soldiers from LIB #404, based in Ma Htaw village, Ma Htaw village tract, fired mortars into the area surrounding Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township. A villager named Saw N---, from D--- village, Meh Way village tract, was injured during the explosion. The SAC soldiers fired a round of 120mm mortars that fell next to his house and [hence] Saw N--- was injured in the explosion. He was injured while he was returning home from the displacement site to collect food and see the situation of his new home. [His old house had been destroyed and he had recently built a new house]. The incident occurred in the afternoon, at 1:30 pm. He was injured on his left elbow, right hip and the sole of his right foot.



These photos were taken on January 9<sup>th</sup> 2023, at Wa Hka Der Hospital, in Dwe Lo Township. These three photos show Saw N--- who was injured as a result of the 120mm mortar shelling conducted by the SAC LIB #404, based in Ma Htaw village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. During the shelling, Saw N--- returned from a displacement site to D--- village, Meh Way village tract, to collect food. He was injured by mortar shrapnel on his right foot, left elbow and right hip. [Photos: KHRG]

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023, at 8 pm, SAC soldiers based at K'Hser Theh Pleh army camp fired 120mm mortar rounds into Az--- village's vicinity, Htee Th'Blut Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township. Paddy fields and a betel nut plantation owned by a villager named Saw I--- were damaged. Two to three betel nut plants were destroyed. When the SAC launched the shelling, villagers were in the village. As for the villagers, they slept in makeshift bunkers [under their houses] during the night and went to work on their farmland during the daytime, in fear. Villagers are afraid to work on their farmlands due to the SAC shelling.

### **SAC air strikes causing casualties and property destruction**

On May 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 5 pm, SAC soldiers from LIB #406, under the command of MOC #8, based in Koo Seik army camp, dropped bombs in B--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, using drones. During the drone attacks, a B--- villager named Saw Y--- (38 years old) was injured on his head and right calf. He was then sent to the clinic located in Ma Htaw village tract and received treatment for two weeks. He has already recovered from his injuries. The Free Burma Rangers (FBR)<sup>9</sup> and other [unknown] organisations supported him [financially] while he was receiving treatment. Saw Y--- has to work on his farmland to secure his family's livelihood [and he is facing difficulties after the injury].

<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1997 in response to Burma Army offenses, Free Burma Ranger (FBR) is a multi-ethnic humanitarian relief organisation that specialises in providing emergency health care, shelter, food and clothing to civilians in war zones and prioritises assisting IDPs. In addition to their relief activities the FBR also conducts capacity building trainings, documents human rights violations and advocates regularly on the situation in Burma/Myanmar.



These photos were taken on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2022, in B--- village, Ma Htaw village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District. Saw Y--- was injured by shrapnel from the bombs dropped on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2022 by the SAC Light Infantry Battalion #406, under the command of MOC #8, based at Koo Seik army camp. The SAC dropped the bombs with drones, on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 5 pm. [Photos: KHRG]

On December 7<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 4 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Meh Kaw Law village, Meh Thuh village tract, Dwe Lo Township. A villager named Saw Z--- (65 years old) was injured on his knee. Eight houses were damaged as a result of the air strike. Among these houses, Saw G---'s (30 years old) house was totally destroyed. Only a few posts remained after it was burned [when hit by the air strike], though villagers were able to kill the fire. A motorcycle and a wood machine cutter were burned.

On December 7<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 4 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Toh Meh Hkee village, Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township. Some houses in Toh Meh Hkee village were burned and damaged. Two houses owned by villagers were destroyed and five were damaged.

On December 12<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 3:50 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Meh Way A'Htet Suu village, Meh Way village tract. Two houses in Meh Way A'Htet Suu village were burned. A few other villagers' houses were damaged.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 5:30 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Hkloh Hkee village, Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township. Some houses in Hkloh Hkee village were burned and some were damaged. Five houses owned by villagers were burned. One villager's rice barn and rice milling machine were damaged. Twelve civilian houses were also damaged.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> 2022, at 5:30 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Wa Thoh Law village, Meh Way village tract. Some houses in Wa Thoh Law village were burned and damaged. Two villagers' houses and a rice barn were burned. Eight houses owned by villagers were damaged.

On January 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 10 am, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike in Ler Htoo Poe village, Meh Thu village tract, Dwe Lo Township. The clinic and healthcare workers' rooms were destroyed as a result of the air strike. The fighter jets dropped five rounds of bombs.

On January 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 11 am, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike in Yah Khee Hta village's vicinity, market and bridge, in Meh Thu village tract. During the air strike at the market, a shop owner, her five family members, and a driver were killed. [The victims' names are]: Daw<sup>10</sup> Nwe Nee Moe, the 53-year-old shop owner; Ma<sup>11</sup> Aye Aye Soe (32 years old); Ma Pa Pa

<sup>10</sup> Daw is a Burmese female honorific title used before a person's name.

Lin (24 years old); Myat Noe Ko Ko (20 years old), the nephew of the owner; Htet Myat Ko Ko (21 years old), her older son; and Ko<sup>12</sup> Peter, her driver (from Shwe Kyin Town).

On January 18<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 7 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Khaw Poe Hkee village, Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township. The air strike damaged three houses.

On January 21<sup>st</sup> 2023, at 11 am, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Boh Deh Koh village, Meh Way village tract. During the air strike, the house of a Boh Deh Koh villager burned down.

On January 21<sup>st</sup> 2023, at 2 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike in Toh Meh Hkee village, Meh Way village tract. Due to the air strike, one house burned down and two other houses were damaged.

On February 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 2 pm, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike into Meh Way Ah Htet Soo village, Meh Way village tract. During the air strike, there were a few houses destroyed or damaged. U<sup>13</sup> R---'s house was totally destroyed and U V--'s house was damaged.

On February 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 11 am, SAC fighter jets conducted an air strike in Pway Pwah Hkee village, Meh Way village tract. During the air strike, some houses were burned and damaged. Saw X---'s house and Saw Aa---'s house were destroyed [by shrapnel] and another two houses were [partially] damaged. One house was [completely] burned down, and three to four other houses were partially damaged [by the fire].

### **Destruction of property and looting by SAC soldiers**

From January 12<sup>th</sup> 2023 to February 15<sup>th</sup> 2023, SAC soldiers from the LIB #406, #405, #409, and Infantry Battalion (IB)<sup>14</sup> #96 destroyed villagers' houses, clothes, food, machines, a statue, monk clothes and other goods in Hkloh Hkee monastery, while based in Meh Way village, Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township. In February 2023, villagers from Plaw Hkee, Wa Thoh Law, Hkloh Hkee, Pway Pwah Hkee, Day Law Poo, and Toh Meh Hkee villages faced the same type of abuses. Between January and February 2023, the SAC destroyed the properties of 22 villagers in Hkloh Hkee village, Meh Way village tract, Dwe Lo Township.

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<sup>11</sup> Ko is a Burmese title meaning older brother. It can be used for relatives as well as non-relatives.

<sup>12</sup> Ma is a Burmese title meaning older sister. It can be used for relatives as well as non-relatives.

<sup>13</sup> U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

<sup>14</sup> 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.



These photos were taken on February 26<sup>th</sup> 2023. These photos show that the SAC destroyed the belongings of villagers in Meh Way village tract, such as clothes, food, a sewing machine and rice mill, a motorcycle, a TV, a wardrobe, and clothes' boxes [in the houses] when they were present in the Meh Way village tract area from January 12<sup>th</sup> 2023 to February 15<sup>th</sup> 2023. This destruction also included objects in a monastery building. *[Photos: Local villager]*

### Landmine explosion incident

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 11 am, a 21-year-old villager named Naw Ab---, living in Av--- village, Meh Way village tract, and another villager called Saw Ac--- (unknown age) stepped on a landmine planted by local ethnic armed groups and both were injured. Although the local Karen National Union (KNU)<sup>15</sup> leaders informed villagers not to travel [in the area] due to security concerns [and landmine contamination], the villagers could not avoid travelling to secure their livelihood. As both SAC and local armed groups planted landmines to protect their territory, villagers face difficulties when travelling and when working on their farmlands. Villagers' lives are at risk when farming, as they do not know exactly about landmine contamination in their farmlands.

### Conclusion

In 2023, there has been an increase in casualties and displacement [in Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw (Hpapun) District] due to fighting [and SAC abuses], in comparison with 2022. The situation in Meh Way village area, Dwe Lo Township, is worse than in other areas [in the Township]. The SAC soldiers destroyed the villagers' places, houses and clothes [all kinds of belongings], which made life more difficult for them. Sporadic fighting happened in Meh Way village tract area due to the SAC transportation of rations to their army camps located in the area of Meh Way village. The fighting [indiscriminate shelling, and air strikes] also caused the displacement of villagers. Villagers are worrying about their future in terms of scarcity of food and healthcare as well as education for their children. Children [now] have to study in the forest. This situation generated deep concern for the villagers.

<sup>15</sup> The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

Further instances of human rights violations in Mu Traw District of Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Mu Traw District Short Update: SAC indiscriminate shelling resulting in injured and killed"](#), April 2023
- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: A villager was fatally shot by SAC soldiers while hunting in the forest"](#), February 2023
- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: A villager from Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township was seriously injured by a landmine explosion"](#), May 2022
- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: A villager from Ler Muh Plaw village tract, Lu Thaw Township was seriously injured by a landmine explosion"](#), June 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 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.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

## Mutraw (Hpapun) District

