



Situation update

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Toungoo Situation Update: Increasing militarisation and land issues in Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships, December 2018 to May 2019

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in Htantabin (Htaung Ta Thoo) and Thandaunggyi (Daw Hpa Kho) townships in Toungoo District between December 2018 and May 2019. These include an increase in militarisation by the Tatmadaw,¹ Tatmadaw military training and live fire exercises, land confiscations by several actors, livelihood difficulties due to loss of lands, the proposed Thauk Yay Khat Dam (1), and challenges in accessing healthcare and education.²

Increasing militarisation by the Tatmadaw

There has been an increased Tatmadaw presence in Thandaunggyi and Htantabin Townships. Civilians reported that the Tatmadaw is reconstructing and reinforcing their army camps and roads, rotating troops, and supplying rations, weapons and ammunition to said camps.³

Every month, about 20-30 trucks containing weapons and rations are transported to the army camps. Occasionally, the Tatmadaw forced villagers from Yay Ta Kone village in Htantabin Township to help them transport weapons and rations. Although reluctant, the villagers complied nevertheless due to a fear of retaliation. The following chart documents several occasions of the Tatmadaw transporting rations, weapons, other military equipment and supplies, and soldiers to and from their army camps.

	Date	To/from	Number of trucks	Content of trucks
1.	1 Dec 2018	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	10	Unknown
2.	11 Dec 2018	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	10	Unknown
3.	12 Dec 2018	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	15	Unknown
4.	13 Dec 2018	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	2	Diesel

¹ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

² The present document is based on information received in June 5th 2019. It was provided by a community member in Toungoo 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.

³ This is a clear violation of section 5(c) of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, which states that the signatories shall: “Avoid troop reinforcements in the ceasefire areas other than the provision of administrative support, emergency medical support and routine rotation of troops; avoid building new military bases and supplying of ammunition and weaponry, except those already agreed by both parties.”

5.	15 Dec 2018	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	25	Rations
6.	17 Dec 2018	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	10	Soldiers, rations, other military materials
7.	18 Dec 2018	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	17	Soldiers
8.	24 Dec 2018	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	20	Horses and donkeys
9.	17 Jan 2019	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	25	Rations, military materials
10.	17 Jan 2019	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	12	Unknown
11.	18 Jan 2019	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	15	Unknown
12.	24 Jan 2019	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	24	Rations, soldiers
13.	2 Feb 2019	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	13	Rations, military materials
14.	5 Feb 2019	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	13	Soldiers
15.	24 Mar 2019	Baw G’Lee – Toungoo	1	Unknown
16.	25 Mar 2019	Baw G’Lee - Toungoo	1	Soldiers
17.	5 Apr 2019	Toungoo – Baw G’Lee	2	Soldiers
18.	20 Apr 2019	Military Operations Command (MOC) ⁴ #4 in Toungoo – Nan Chain Kwin army camp in Baw G’Lee	56	6 trucks with military materials, 50 with soldiers

On April 20th 2019, the soldiers from Military Operations Command (MOC) #4 were brought to Baw G’Lee for a troop rotation with MOC #19. In doing so, they used the road connecting Shwe Nyaung Bin village to Maung Nwet Kyi. Local KNU authorities have restricted Tatmadaw’s access to this road since the 2012 preliminary ceasefire agreement. Villagers also reported that troop rotation exercises generally lasted much longer than in previous years; it lasted an average of 10 days during the reporting period as opposed to four previously.

In order to reinforce army camps in Maung Nwet Kyi, Nan Chain Kwin, Late Pyar Kyi, Shwe Nyaung Bin and Taw Pyar Kyi in Thandaunggyi Township, Tatmadaw soldiers have been trespassing into civilians’ lands and clearing their plantations on a daily basis during the reporting period. Civilians’ bamboo trees on the land were cut down and used to build fences for the army camps.

The Tatmadaw is currently constructing a road from the Kler La (Baw G’Lee) army camp to Yay Tho Lay (Yay Tho Kyi village tract) and has further plans to continue constructions to connect Yay Tho Lay to Maw Chee in Kayah State and Hsa Law Kyo army camp in Hpapun District. However, the Karen National Union (KNU) authorities did not give their consent due to the projects’ foreseen damage on villagers’ lands and plantations. Despite several warnings from KNU authorities, the Tatmadaw proceeded with road construction works from Baw G’Lee to Yay Tho Lay. On May 15th 2019, machinery and security guards were seen at the construction site. Civilians are worried that such tensions might result in armed confrontations, subsequently restricting their freedom of movement and increasing the risk of displacement.

Military training, live fire exercises, and other activities

The Tatmadaw is conducting military training on lands that they confiscated since 2000, subsequently destroying villagers’ plantations and posing livelihood challenges. In 1999, the Tatmadaw’s Ba Yint Naung Training Target Zone #7 confiscated 4,700 acres of lands in the Kywel Phyu Taung, Ywar Kyi and Shaut Pin Chaung village tract in Thandaunggyi Township.

⁴ A 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.

There, the Tatmadaw's Ba Yint Naung Training School was established to conduct military training. Large artillery transported to the training camp once every three to four months is used for target practice, causing severe destruction to villagers' plantations and posing security risks for villagers who travel.⁵

Similarly, in seven villages in Thandaunggyi Township, Tatmadaw's Bu Yint Naung Tat Myot conducts military training for over 400 soldiers on a total of 5000 acres of local communities' heritage lands confiscated since 2000. Once every three or four months, they shoot at villagers' plantations and lands. As a result, a lot of the villagers' lands – their source of livelihood – were completely destroyed and unusable; no compensation was provided. The villagers submitted complaint letters to the Cantonment Area Commander in Bu Yint Naung Military Training School, demanding the return of their confiscated but unused lands. They also went to meet Tatmadaw authorities for this purpose but received no response.

Tatmadaw officers in P'Leh Wa, Mei Na Sel and Chaung Na Kwah army camps in Thandaunggyi Township are constantly monitoring and asking villagers about Karen National Union (KNU)'s⁶ and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)'s⁷ activities. A villager from Mei Na Sel stated that this can foster distrust in the on-going peace process and cause potential fighting between the Tatmadaw and KNLA. Additionally, Htun Htun Win, the P'Leh Wa Operations Commander also conducted unannounced visits to Tatmadaw's army camps during the reporting period. There, he asked the soldiers about who is responsible for Tatmadaw's Maung Nwet Kyi camp and other old Tatmadaw camps. While other Tatmadaw soldiers go around in uniform with weapons, he goes around with ordinary civilian clothes on a motorbike. Villagers are concerned and afraid as they do not know what the Operations Commander's intentions are.

On May 5th 2019, Htun Htun Win visited Tatmadaw army camps under his command and the Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) army camp in Late Pyar K'Lay under MOC #4. There, he spoke about the Tatmadaw's old army camps and about selling lands belonging to villagers living close to the camps. After he left, a villager reported that a camp commander from the Late Pyar Ka Lay army camp came to his village and asked him to sell his lands. The villager refused and told the commander that he would like to buy even more land instead.

The Tatmadaw's activities concerns villagers, who live in fear or renewed conflict. Villagers who previously fled due to fighting are also afraid of coming back returning to their own villages due to these activities. They currently struggle for their livelihoods.

⁵ This is a clear violation of section 5(a) of the NCA, which states that the signatories shall: "Cease the following actions in ceasefire areas: [...] destruction of property [...]." The disregard for the safety and security of civilians also violate Section 9(p) of the NCA, which states that the signatories shall: "Ensure the security and development of civilians living in ceasefire areas."

⁶ The Karen National Union is the main Karen group opposing the government.

⁷ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the KNU.



These photos were taken on April 20th 2019 and show the Tatmadaw transporting their soldiers and rations to their army camps in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. [Photos: KHRG]

Livelihood challenges as a result of land confiscations

Local communities in Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships rely on their lands and plantations for their livelihoods and economic survival. Land confiscations by the Myanmar government and private businesses have significantly impacted this livelihood.

In December 2018, the Myanmar government's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (Forest Department) confiscated and recognised a total of 113,839 acres of villagers' lands in Thandaunggyi Township as reserved forests, namely Mate Tha Lin Taung, Ma Lout Chaung, Ka Mone Taung and Yay Tar Shay. They did not obtain consent or hold consultations with the villagers in this process. Villagers were asked to relocate but they remained on their lands as they have nowhere else to go and fear that they will lose their lands. From the end of December 2018 to May 2019, villagers submitted letters to a state level parliament representative petitioning to abolish the reserved forests but have not seen any changes to date.

In the early 2000s, the Shwe Swan Ain and Asia World companies confiscated lands in various villages, including Htone Bo, Na Ga Maut, Yay Oh Zin and others in Htantabin Township for the construction of the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (2).⁸ Villagers were not compensated and many became and remain homeless as a result of land confiscations. The consequences thereof remain and villagers face difficulties travelling because the P'Leh Wa Bridge that was destroyed has not been repaired; some villagers have even drowned from crossing the river while travelling to their plantations. The villagers are currently working for their livelihoods on the lands that were confiscated to construct the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (2) but were unused. However, the Myanmar government also gave 30-year licenses to owners of companies, namely the Kaung Myanmar Aung Company, MEC Company, Asia World Company, Shwe Swan Ain Company, Kyaw Lwan Moe Company, U Aung Kyaw Oo, and the Ministry of Industry No 1, to work on those lands. As a result, some villagers have lost their lands and cannot earn for their livelihood.

These companies have also started judicially harassing villagers on issues related to land and the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (2) since 2013, which has continued until the present. They often summon the villagers to attend court appointments more than twice a month but often do not show up themselves. Whenever the villagers attend court, they are not able to work on their lands to earn money to support their families, and the income they earn is used to travel to court. Consequently, they face a lot of livelihood challenges. Similarly, villagers from Nant That Kone village continue to face livelihood difficulties due to judicial harassment by the Kaung

⁸ For more information, see <https://khr.org/2018/07/18-1-cmt1/ps/development-or-destruction>.

Myanmar Aung Company and U Aung Kyaw Oo, the manager from the Ministry of Industry No 1.

Proposed hydropower project: Thauk Yay Khat Dam (1)

Due to the prevailing livelihood challenges resulting from the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (2), the villagers were very worried when they heard between April and May 2019 from local authorities that the Myanmar government gave permission to several companies [names unknown] to build the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (1). A sign on the implementation of the project was also put up. They raised their concerns because more than 50 villages and a vast amount of land will be destroyed if this dam is constructed. The villagers will be organising a public protest against the construction of the dam to protect their lands. This protest will be held in various villages and will include participation by religious groups and community members.



The photo on the left was taken on May 15th 2019 in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. It shows the signs that the villagers prepared to protest against the construction of the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (I). The photo on the right was taken on May 2nd 2019 in the same township. Over 20 villagers gathered together to share their perspectives on the Thauk Yay Khat Dam (1) and sign a document stating their opposition to the project. [Photos: KHRG]

Development projects

The Myanmar government is constructing a road from Toungoo to Baw G'Lee and roads connecting Toungoo to Late Tho and Loi Kaw to improve the transportation infrastructure. In March 2019, a significant amount of civilians' lands and plantations were destroyed by the bulldozers used for construction. Additionally, more than 10 of villagers' shops located in the Htone Bo Kyi and Lay Eain Su villages were also removed and destroyed due to the construction.

In December 2018, the Ei Daw Company built a Telenor⁹ cell tower in Kywel Phyu Taung village, which is located in a KNU-controlled area. A manager from Ei Daw Company obtained permission for the project from the Myanmar government and came to Kywel Phyu Taung village, Kywel Phyu Taung village tract, Thandaunggyi Township without consent from or prior consultation with the KNU or local villagers. The company confiscated the villagers' lands and destroyed their cardamom plants to set up the (Telenor) cell tower. The construction manager continued implementing the project even though Saw Tun Keh, the KNU Thandaunggyi Township chairman, explicitly did not give his consent.

⁹ Telenor is a Norwegian telecommunications company which in 2013 was granted a fifteen year licence by the Burma/Myanmar government to develop mobile telecommunications networks in Burma/Myanmar. See "[Myanmar To Grant Wireless Licenses To Norway's Telenor, Qatar Telecom](#)," Forbes, July 2013.



These photos were taken on April 20th 2019 between Ton Bo Kyi village and Lay Eain Su village, Toungoo Township [Thandaunggyi Township], Toungoo District. Bulldozers used for road construction activities between Loi Kaw and Toungoo have destroyed villagers' plantations and rubber plants. [Photos: KHRG]

Education

Access to education remains problematic due to a lack of infrastructure and accessibility for those living in remote areas.

From May 25th 2019 to May 31st 2019, the Myanmar Ministry of Education conducted registrations for school admission in Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District. A Myanmar government high school in Thandaung Myot Thit, Thandaunggyi Township did not accept any new students as the classrooms reached their maximum capacity. The township's education administration office also forbade them from registering at other schools. As a result, some students were not able to attend school this year.

Some of the villages in the hill areas in Htantabin and Thandaunggyi townships are located in a KNU-controlled area. There, the villagers built the schools and paid the teachers with their own money to show the Myanmar government and KNU authorities that the children in the area needed education. The infrastructure of these schools is ill-equipped to shelter the students from weather conditions [heat, cold and rain]. Students who graduate from self-funded schools in KNU-controlled areas or from Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD)¹⁰ schools are not recognised by the Myanmar government's Ministry of Education and cannot continue their schooling in Myanmar government schools. As a result, they continue their education in Htoh Lwee Wah High School (KECD School), Toungoo District.

Healthcare

Local communities living in remote areas face challenges in accessing healthcare due to a lack of clinics and hospitals in their vicinity.

Currently, local villagers in Toungoo District face illnesses such as high fever and hypertension. People who live in plains are close to clinics and hospitals and have access to treatment when they fall sick. However, people who live in hilly areas do not have such access and instead get treatment from local KNU health workers in clinics located in KNU-controlled areas. If the disease gets worse, the health workers conduct house visits.

¹⁰ The Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD), formally known as the Karen Education Department (KED), is the Karen National Union's Education Department. The main goals of the KECD are to provide education, as well as to preserve Karen language and culture in ethnic Karen areas.

Furthermore, the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BHWT)¹¹ offers medical services to villagers with serious diseases within a short period of time even though the Myanmar government hospitals have given up on treatment. They list the names of sick villagers in need of surgery and report it to relevant authorities. They also make arrangements for them to obtain surgery, if necessary.

Further background reading on the situation on on-going militarisation and development projects in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Toungoo Situation Update: Tatmadaw military activities continue in Htantabin and Thaundaunggyi townships”](#), (January 2019)
- [“Dooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi and Kyonedoe townships, November 2017 to January 2018”](#), (March 2018)
- [“Hpapun Situation Update: Lu Thaw Township, December 2016 to January 2017”](#), (September 2017)

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.khr.org.

¹¹ Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) is an organisation that provides health care and medical assistance to displaced civilians inside Burma.