



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

July 20th 2021 / KHRG # 21-206-D1

Doo Tha Htoo Short Update: Looting by BGF and SAC soldiers, June 21st 2021

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District on June 21st 2021. Following a skirmish between the Karen National Union (KNU) and State Administration Council (SAC) and Border Guard Force (BGF) troops outside of L--- village, T'Kaw Boe village tract, Hpa-an Township, SAC and BGF soldiers engaged in the looting of villagers' homes while the villagers had fled to the nearby forest for safety.¹

Skirmish followed by looting

During June 2021, State Administration Council (SAC)² Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³ #406 under Military Operation Command (MOC)⁴ [#8] cooperated with Border Guard Force (BGF)⁵ #1014 under Company Second-in-Command Bo⁶ Tin Win in conducting road security for their operations

¹ The present document is based on information received in May 14th 2021. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha Htoo 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 term most commonly used in referring to Myanmar's armed forces is Tatmadaw. The term has been used by KHRG throughout its reporting history, and most consistently during periods of civilian government. Since the February 1st 2021 coup and the military's establishment of the State Administration Council (SAC) as the executive governing body of Myanmar, Myanmar's armed forces have also come to be referred to as the SAC military. KHRG uses the term SAC military in specific reference to the Myanmar military since the February 1st 2021 coup. During previous periods of military rule, KHRG also used the names adopted by the military government in referring to the Tatmadaw (i.e. SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council] between 1988 to 1997, and SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] from 1998 to 2011), because these were the terms commonly used by villagers in KHRG research areas.

³ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, 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. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

⁴ A Military Operations Command is composed of ten battalions for offensive operations. Most MOCs have three Tactical Operations Commands (TOCs), made up of three battalions each.

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 Bo is a Burmese title meaning 'officer'.

in T’Kaw Boe village tract⁷, Hpa-an Township, Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District. This area is under the control of the Karen National Union (KNU)⁸. Thus, in response to the movements and activities of the BGF and SAC, and in order to defend their territory, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁹ Battalion #1 attacked the BGF and SAC troops at Noh Hkay area near L--- village, T’Kaw Boe village tract on June 21st 2021. The skirmish took place outside of the village and the fighting lasted only a few minutes. There was no mortar shelling or civilian casualties, however, the gunfire frightened local civilians leading all L--- villagers to flee from their village.

After the fighting ended, SAC and BGF soldiers entered into the house of L--- villagers Saw H--- and Naw I---. The soldiers confiscated one of their solar panels, and stole a gold necklace, one pair of gold earrings, one gold ring with a green stone, and one large can of rice. The villagers were absent at the time because they had fled into the forest. After the SAC and BGF soldiers left the village, all of the villagers returned to their village safely. Saw H---and Naw I---, however, returned to their home to find that items that the couple had saved over the course of their lives for their family and their future children had now been stolen from them. [This is a clear violation of section 9(d) of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA),¹⁰ which prevents signatories from engaging in “looting, theft, or the taking of property without permission”. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 also explicitly prohibits the looting of civilian property during armed conflict.] The couple could not report the case to any court, including the KNU justice system, due to the lack of rule of law under the current military coup.

According to an update on July 6th 2021, the BGF and SAC soldiers have now returned to their army base at Meh Leh Hta Hkee gate, K’Ser Law K’Tee Place¹¹, Boo Prer village tract, Hpa-an Township.

Further background reading on the deterioration of the security situation in Southeast Myanmar following the February 2021 military coup can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“An End to Peace Efforts: Recent fighting in Doo Tha Htoo District between the KNLA and the Tatmadaw following the 2021 Myanmar military coup \(March and April 2021\)”](#), May 2021.
- [“Mu Traw District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw results in displacement in Lu Thaw Township, December 2020 to February 2021”](#), June 2021.
- [“Kler Lwee Htoo District Short Update: Increased militarisation and fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KNLA prevent IDPs from returning home in Ler Doh Township, March to May 2021”](#), May 2021.

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 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.

⁹ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

¹⁰ On October 15th 2015, after a negotiation process marred with controversy over the notable non-inclusion of several ethnic armed groups, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed between the Burma/ Myanmar government and eight of the fifteen ethnic armed groups originally invited to the negotiation table, including the Karen National Union. It was followed by the adoption of a Code of Conduct by the signatories in November 2015. In February 2018, two additional armed ethnic groups signed the NCA under pressure from the Burma/Myanmar government.

¹¹ Place refers to the name given by local communities to a specific location. It is smaller than what local communities refer to as an area.

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.

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

