



Situation Update

May 26th 2021 / KHRG # 21-46-S1

Mergui-Tavoy District Situation Update: Impact of the military coup on villagers in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships, February 2021

This Situation Update describes events that occurred in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah, and Ler Doh Soh townships, Mergui-Tavoy District in February 2021. This report includes information related to the military coup that took place on February 1st 2021. Due to the military coup, villagers living in K'Ser Doh, Ler Muh Lah and Ler Doh Soh townships are deeply concerned about a renewal of military abuse as in the past and are now living in fear. Some villagers have engaged in anti-coup protests, but others have not because they were warned against doing so by local leaders. Even though villagers can travel as they used to, the price of some goods has increased due to the military coup, thus adding to the livelihood challenges of villagers. Medical and banking services have also been impacted by the coup.¹

Since the military coup that took place on February 1st 2021,² local people have felt fear and concern [about the return to military rule], and have been protesting against the dictatorship. Villagers also keep watch at night [to protect themselves because they heard rumours that the military leaders released prisoners to attack villagers].

Many civilians are fearful and worried about the [recent] military coup because during the coups that took place in 1962 and 1988, there were unlawful killings of innocent civilians. Furthermore, the activists who stood up for peace [at that time] were put in prison. During the armed conflict in 1947, many Karen civilians were arrested and forced by the Tatmadaw³ to carry rations and ammunition. The Tatmadaw also used civilians as human shields when attacking areas under Karen National Union [KNU]⁴ control. This traumatised civilians and they remain fearful [to this day].

¹ The present document is based on information received in February 2021. It was provided by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy 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 On February 1st 2021, the Myanmar military deposed the democratically elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). The military proclaimed a year-long state of emergency and transferred power to Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's Armed Forces. Based on unproven fraud allegations, the Tatmadaw invalidated the landslide victory of the NLD in the November 2020 General Election and stated it would hold new elections at the end of the state of emergency. The coup d'état occurred the day before the Parliament of Myanmar was due to swear in the members elected during the 2020 election. Elected President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

³ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

⁴ 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.

On February 2nd 2021, local villagers in P'law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, and in Kleh Muh Htee area, K'Ser Doh Township heard a rumour about the Tatmadaw forcing people to become porters. Out of fear, male villagers fled to hiding places and began sleeping outside of the village. However, this rumour was not true and nothing happened in the end.

Civilians in K'Moh Thway area in Ler Doh Soh Township, Way Ta Eh and Paw Hkloh areas in K'Ser Doh Township, as well as P'law area in Ler Muh Lah Township took part in protests against the military coup. There were four slogans used in these protests: (1) Abolish the military dictatorship; (2) Abolish the 2008 Constitution; (3) Implement a federal democracy; (4) Release the wrongfully detained.

There are many Karen people who have not been involved in the protests. On February 21st 2021, [Mergui-Tavoy] district [KNU] leaders held a meeting with local [KNU] leaders in Kleh Muh Htee area, K'Ser Doh Township, telling Karen people not to participate in the protests. As a result, local Karen people did not get involved. When villagers [tried to] organise Karen civilians to participate in the protests, they responded that their leaders would not allow them to do so.

A rumour spread throughout Ler Muh Lah and K'Ser Doh townships about the Tatmadaw releasing prisoners to commit violent abuses [against the protesters and other civilians].⁵ This resulted in fears and concern by villagers. As a result, they have been keeping security watch in their villages located in P'law area, Ler Muh Lah Township, and in Kleh Muh Htee area, K'Ser Doh Township during the night. However, no released prisoners have been caught [in the area] so far, and there has not been any issue [caused by the released prisoners]. Villagers have, however, seen in social media that some [released] prisoners were caught [found] in the towns of Tavoy and Bleik.

There is no issue for villagers travelling and working. The situation remains the same as before [the coup]. The prices of some products and food items have however increased due to the military coup. This is creating challenges for poor people and is leading to food insecurity [for civilians].

In addition, the banks closed down because of the military coup, and the bank workers have been participating in the protests. Because of this, families who live abroad can no longer transfer money [to Myanmar] and no one can withdraw money from the bank either.

[Public] hospitals closed down while nurses and doctors participated in the anti-coup protests and in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁶ [it is unclear if the hospitals were able to continue operating on some days]. This became a challenge for sick people to get medical treatment.

⁵ On February 12th 2021, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, leader of the 2021 military coup, freed over 23,000 prisoners, pardoning them under Section 401, Subsection (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure. This is in line with an annual amnesty in celebration of Union Day that began in 2016 after Aung San Suu Kyi took office. There is no indication that the prisoners were released specifically to commit violence against other civilians. Many who were released were actually political prisoners. See <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/myanmar-frees-over-20000-prisoners-jail.html>.

⁶ On February 2nd 2021, healthcare workers at state-run hospitals and medical facilities across Myanmar spearheaded what is being referred to as a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) consisting of labour strikes in protest against the February 1st 2021 military coup. The movement quickly spread to include civil servants from all sectors of the government who are walking off their jobs as a way of non-recognition and non-participation in the military regime. Because of the popularity of the movement, and its seminal role in wider protests across the country, some people have begun using it as a catch-all phrase to include other protest forms like boycotts and pot-banging.



These photos were taken in February 2021, in K'Ser Doh Township, Mergui-Tavoy District. They show local villagers protesting against the coup in the days following the military takeover. [Photos: KHRG]

Further background reading on the consequences of the February 1st 2021 military coup can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["A Worrisome Escalation: Tatmadaw airstrikes kill at least 16 villagers, displace thousands in Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts, March 2021"](#), May 2021.
- ["Mu Traw District Short Update: Skirmishes, indiscriminate shelling by the Tatmadaw and landmine contamination in Dwe Lo and Bu Tho townships, March and April 2021"](#), May 2021.
- ["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.

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.

Mergui-Tavoy (Tanintharyi) District

