



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Interview

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Dooplaya District Interview: The SAC's indiscriminate shelling killed a 17-year-old girl and injured three other villagers, March 2022

This interview describes events that occurred in Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District in March 2022. The SAC LIB #355 indiscriminately fired a mortar shell into Htee Moo Hta village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District on March 24th 2022. A 17-year-old girl was hit in the head by a fragment of mortar and died immediately. Additionally, one male and two female villagers were injured by the indiscriminate shelling. Local villagers' property was also damaged.¹

Interview | Htee Moo Hta village, Noh Hpoh village tract², Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township, Dooplaya District (March 2022)

Name: Naw³ E---

Gender: Female

Age: 47

Religion: Buddhist

Ethnicity: Karen

Family Status: N/A

Occupation: Health worker

Could you please start to explain what happened during the incident?

In the early morning [of March 24th 2022], there was gunfire at the Asia Highway [fighting broke out between the State Administrative Council (SAC)⁴ and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁵ on the highway between Kawkareik and Myawaddy towns]. I heard the sound of gunfire

¹ The present document is based on information received in March 2022. It was provided by a community member in Dooplaya 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 staff.

² A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

³ Naw is a S'gaw Karen female honorific title used before a person's name.

⁴ 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.

⁵ The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

for just two or three minutes. We were getting ready to move out of [flee from] the house but just before we stood up, a mortar shell [fired by the SAC Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁶ #355] was already falling down on my home and [a fragment of exploded shell] hit my niece. I did not even reach [manage to get] underground [to hide in the bunker].

What is the distance between the Asia Highway and your place?

The distance from my village to the highway is only about two or three miles [3.2 to 4.8 kilometres].

So, did they literally fire into the village or did the fighting happen in the [surrounding] area?

Yes, the fighting happened [between the SAC and KNLA] by the side of the Asia Highway [outside of the village]. After the fighting broke out, the brutal Burma [SAC] soldiers fired [a mortar shell] into the village.

What time was it?

It was early morning, just past about 5:00 am. She [the victim] had already cooked a rice meal by that time [normally consisting of rice with curry or soup]. After she cooked [her meal], she put the dirty plates in the washing place. Just as she went to put the plates [in the washing place], the shelling immediately fell and [a fragment] hit her. [The plan was,] once she put the plates away, we would go underground [to hide in the bunker].



This photo was taken on March 24th 2022, in Htee Moo Hta village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T' Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo shows the 17-year-old girl who was killed during indiscriminate shelling fired by SAC LIB #355. [Photo: KHRG]

Did anyone go underground [to the bunker under their house]?

We hadn't gone down yet. Our neighbours around here were about to go and hide in the bunker because of the gunfire. It [the gunfire] was heard [by the villagers] for just a moment, but it was not for long [so they did not make it to the bunker].

How many people were inside the house during the gunfire?

During the gunfire, only two of us, my niece and I, were inside the house. As I do not have a husband, I adopted one of my nieces. So I consider her my child because she is my older brother's child. I have looked after her since she was very little and I supported her in school until high school Standard [Grade] Ten. Due to the unstable situation at school [school closures due to the coup and COVID-19], she came back to stay at home.

⁶ 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, particularly following the signing of the NCA. LIBs are primarily used for offensive operations, but they are sometimes used for garrison duties.

How did the mortar shell hit her?

The fragment of mortar shell hit her directly on her head. When I looked at my niece, her skull was broken and her brain was falling out. How could I help her?

Were you by yourself when you saw her get hit and fall down?

Yes, I [was by myself when I] saw it all because it was just the two of us [in the house]. I immediately went to pick her up and hug her. As the shelling was still going on, our neighbours around us would not dare to come and help us. I was angry about that at first. I said to the other villagers that, *"I was very helpful to you in the past. Even when you were sick and injured, I had to take you [to get treatment] and look after you at night. When the problem has turned to me, none of you even take a look at me"*. A few minutes later, when the shelling stopped, two or three of the villagers came to [help] me.

What is the name of your niece and how old is she?

Her name is Naw Bleh Cho. She is 17 years old. She was born in 2005.

She is still very young.

Exactly, it has cost me a lot to support her at school. As it [the incident] happened so quickly, it has been unbearable for me. I do not feel normal yet when I think of her. Also, my house and my flowers and plants are very damaged. It will still cost a lot to repair the damage. The shelling fell on the roof, so the rooftop as well as the floors are all broken.

What else is damaged?

The other damaged property includes the rooftop of my rice barn and one of my concrete water containers for bathing; it did not break the water container itself but the cement floor around is broken into pieces.

Are there any other damages or casualties in the village?

Three other villagers were injured. They are U⁷ N---, 45 years old and his wife, Naw L---, 38 years old. They are husband and wife. The other injured villager is Naw M---, aged 35 years old. Naw L--- got a minor injury to her lower calf but it was not severe. Her husband was injured in the stomach from the exploded fragment and fell down immediately, but the fragment did not go inside his belly. Naw M--- was hit in her waist and the shrapnel exited through her buttocks

Is their house close to yours?

Yes, their house is close to mine. Naw M---'s house is just on the other side of the road from my house. She was chopping firewood underneath the house [raised house] during the shelling.

Where are they undergoing treatment now?

We did not know where to transfer Naw M---, so we just took her to the public hospital at Thingannyinaung Town. For the husband and wife [U N--- and Naw L---], they were not severely injured so they just underwent treatment in the village [from a health worker] and then came back to stay at their house.

Has Naw M--- been discharged from hospital?

She has not been discharged yet as her condition is very severe. She might have to stay there for more than 10 days.

Who took her to hospital?

Just the villagers from here, Htee Moo Hta village.

After she was hit [by the fragment of mortar], was she still conscious?

⁷ U is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

She, the woman who was transferred to the hospital, was still conscious after she was hit. But she felt dizzy and did not dare to look around. She was not unconscious.

Did anyone provide support to pay for the expenses for the treatment [of all the injured villagers]?

I do not know anything about that. They have to pay for everything by themselves. For my niece, one of the KNLA officials provided a donation of over 300,000 kyats [USD 162.03]⁸. I do not remember his name.

Do you know which armed group fired the mortar shell?

It might be the Burma soldiers [KHRG's researcher confirmed that it was SAC LIB #355]. I do not think that the Karen [KNLA] soldiers have that type of artillery.

After the incident happened [the shelling], how did you arrange the funeral [for your niece]?

I kept her for one night at my house, and yesterday [March 27th 2022] we took her and buried her at a cemetery [according to Buddhist practices].

Were there any other damages due to the shelling?

The car of U N--- [one of the injured villagers] was damaged. The mirror of the car was hit by a fragment from the exploded mortar.

So, how many mortar shells fell on your house?

One mortar shell fell on my house but exploded into many fragments. If two or three shells had fallen on us, we would have all died. Even though just one fell, the fragments injured people horribly.



These photos were taken on March 24th 2022, in Htee Moo Hta village, Noh Hpoh village tract, Kaw T'Ree Township, Dooplaya District. The photo on the left shows the damaged car (broken window) and the photo on the right shows the damage to the roof of Naw E---'s house caused by the SAC's indiscriminate shelling. [Photos: KHRG]

It was only one shell [that was fired into the village]?

Yes, it was just one. U N--- and his three or four children [who were at home with him at the time] were shielded by the bathroom. If the bathroom had not been there, it would be terrible to imagine. I have to thank God for the protection.

⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the May 3rd 2022 mid-market exchange rate of 1000 kyats to USD 0.54. (taken from <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/mmk-to-usd-rate>).

Are there any authorities from armed groups or the village head who have come to provide support and look after you?

I do not see such things.

Did they [the SAC] give any warning before firing the mortar?

We had heard from the village head that they [SAC soldiers] said, *"If anyone fights against us, we will fire mortars into the village."* So they [village authorities] warned us to be cautious when staying in the village.

After the incident happened, did any of the Burma [SAC] soldiers enter to check the situation in the village?

No, they did not come.

How would you like to express your feelings on this incident?

If I have to say something about it. It gravely affects my life. You can imagine that I supported my niece in attending school so that she would become an educated person. I am not a wealthy person so I have had to try very hard for her to get a chance to attend school. To get an education today, the priority is money. I am not rich because I just farm and sell rice. Then, I sent my niece to school with the income that I get from farming. I supported my niece from Standard [Grade] Five until Ten. The [school] expenses cost a lot.

How much do you think it would cost if you have to repair all the damaged materials in your home?

Umm, nowadays, everything is valuable and expensive. The zinc roofing of my barn alone already cost over 100,000 kyats [USD 54.01]. If I have to repair all the damaged materials, I think it would cost up to 1,000,000 kyats [USD 540.10] or much more.

How do you feel about this incident?

It put us in a state of fear and anxiety. The villagers are more concerned for their security because of the shelling into our village. As there are many villagers here, someone will [undoubtedly] be hit if a mortar falls into the village. If they [the SAC] still continue activities like this in the future, it would cause a lot of suffering to the villagers. They do not tell us when they will start fighting. Sometimes, we are in bed at night [when they start fighting]. How can you stay alert to the shelling while you are sleeping? That's why. There will be much more difficulty if the situation continues like this.

How do most villagers here secure their livelihood?

My village is in a mountainous area close to [Myawaddy] town. Most villagers farm (work on hill farms or plantations). Villagers will not go to Bangkok or move to another village to find other work. We just stay in our own homes.

What do you do to earn a livelihood?

For me, I just farm and serve as a health worker with my experience and knowledge from attending a medical training offered by the Myanmar government [prior to the coup].

What would you like to tell the local authorities including the village head and soldiers, about taking action and responsibility?

I do not want to put more of a burden on them [local authorities]. Even if they take action [against armed groups] for the situation today, such situations can [are likely to] keep happening in the future. If it continues like this, the village leaders will have more concerns. That's why I do not want to put a burden on them. I also work for the community. I have been working as a medic for over 20 years. I know everything about the villagers' concerns, from my experience [as a health worker].

How has this incident impacted the villagers' movements outside the village? Are they afraid to go out?

The night after the shelling, the village head called a meeting about whether the villagers wanted to move out [displace] or not. But how can the villagers move if they do not have [cannot bring] food supplies with them? Healthcare is also important because there are a lot of elders and children in the village. So the villagers responded to him by saying that they would not move. We will just stay like this until we die. We will just carry on with our livelihoods and stay [in the village] as long as we can.

Is it also hard to move?

Yes, it is extremely hard to move. Where can we move to in the [local] area? Even if we move to the mountains, we will have to bring our food with us and then the weather is also unstable. If the medicine supplies are not sufficient for healthcare, especially for children and elders, you cannot hide in the mountains, can you? That's why if we move, we will suffer more.

What are the other villagers' perspectives about this incident?

Regarding the shelling, some of the villagers also feel angry because the people who fight are soldiers, but the shelling affects the villagers. This upsets them. The Karen soldiers fight against Burma [SAC] soldiers. If the Burma [SAC] soldiers were humane, they might fight the soldiers directly. Instead, they oppress the villagers by shelling into the village, so villagers are affected the most.

What will you do with your life now?

I am not sure about the rest of my life as I am growing old. I will just continue to do my work as much as I can.

What else do you want to express or share?

With today's situation on my mind, I do not want such things like shelling into our village to affect us. If possible, we also do not want to see our villagers injured like this. But we cannot prevent the activities of soldiers, can we? As we cannot prevent [military activity], we just have to suffer when it happens. It is very bad to be a civilian. If the authorities [any of the authorities, whether the SAC or ethnic armed groups] do not permit travelling, we cannot do anything and we just have to stay under the control of the authorities.

Right now, do the villagers feel secure to travel?

We do go to buy things from Thingannyinaung Town, but if the sun is rising higher [it is during the day] we have to travel with caution.

Are there any soldiers who check you when you travel along your way?

There has been no checking so far. It is only three miles to Thingannyinaung Town. It is quick to reach there. The villagers do not go further than that. They just shop there for a bit and come back.

Previously, where did you usually shop?

We used to buy [products] from Ra M'Tee [Myawaddy] and Kaw T'Ree [Kawkareik] towns before. If the villagers wanted to buy products from Myanmar they went to Kaw T'Ree Town, while some purchased products from Thailand from Ra M'Tee Town. Due to the unstable situation today, prices are getting higher and higher. Villagers are struggling the most with this situation.

In your village, are there any bunkers that you have made for hiding?

Yes, some villagers have made them recently but some of the bunkers were dug a long time ago and have now been fixed.

Did you recently make a bunker for hiding?

Yes, we made a bunker at the beginning of 2022 when we heard about the incident [airstrikes and attacks] in Lay Kay Kaw Town.⁹

Has almost every individual made a bunker?

Yes, almost everyone has made a bunker. But some, two or three families, share the same bunker. Currently, some villagers do not even dare to sleep inside their house at night. They just sleep at the entrance of the bunker.

Are people still sleeping in the bunker since the recent shelling?

Yes. [However,] after the incident [shelling on March 24th], there has not been anymore shelling into the village. Even when there was shelling, it landed outside of the village. So the situation is a bit better than before.

Further background reading on the situation of fighting and indiscriminate shelling Dooplaya District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations, July to December 2021”](#), March 2022.
- [“Dooplaya District Short Update: A woman was killed by mortar shrapnel during indiscriminate shelling by armed groups, February 2022”](#), March 2022.
- [“Dooplaya District Situation Update: Indiscriminate shelling, fighting, forced labour, peace talks, and the COVID-19 pandemic, August to September 2021”](#), February 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 Burma. 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.

⁹ See section “Eruption of conflict and SAC offensives in Lay Kay Kaw” in KHRG, [“Southeast Burma Field Report: Intensification of armed conflict, air and ground attacks, and widespread human rights violations, July to December 2021”](#), March 2022.

Dooplaya (Southeastern Karen State) District

