



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Situation Update

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Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Ongoing fighting in Bilin Township leads to more than 2,000 IDPs, as well as injury and property damage, December 21st 2021 to January 11th 2022

This Short Update describes events occurring in Doo Tha Htoo [Thaton] District during the period between December 21st 2021 and January 11th 2022. The State Administration Council (SAC) sent about 60 soldiers to H--- village, and fighting happened between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and SAC-allied Border Guard Force (BGF) troops in H--- and E--- villages, Bilin Township. As a consequence, more than 2,000 villagers from five villages in Bilin Township have been displaced, eight schools have had to close, one villager was injured, houses and fruit trees were damaged, and one pig was killed. Displaced villagers are relying on other villagers for support, including food and shelter.¹

Introduction

When local Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)² troops in Bilin Township attacked and occupied the Border Guard Force (BGF)³ Yo Klah army camp on December 17th, 2021, many H-- and E--- villagers began to flee. On December 21st 2021, about 60 soldiers from State Administration Council (SAC)⁴ Light Infantry Division (LID) #22, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)⁵ #104 and allied BGF troops came to H--- village, where they used H--- monastery as a base of operations until January 8th 2022. On January 9th 2022, they moved to E--- village, where they

¹ The present document is based on information received in January 2022. It was provided by a community member in Doo Tha Htoo 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 The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

³ 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.

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 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 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.

used E--- villagers' houses as a base of operations until January 11th 2022. During this period, the local KNLA attacked the SAC troops⁶ and BGF troops almost every day. During the fighting, SAC and BGF soldiers fired mortars into villages and fighting occasionally took place in the villages. During this period, one H--- villager was injured, villagers' homes and fruit trees in H--- and E--- were damaged and villagers' livestock were killed.

One villager injured by SAC shelling, Yo Klah village tract,⁷ Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District

On January 5th 2022, due to an increase in the frequency of fighting, more than 2,000 villagers from five villages—H---, O---, E---, W--- and Y---—began fleeing to other villages or to Bilin Town. On the evening of January 6th 2022, at 5:40 pm, during one of the incidents of fighting between the KNLA and the allied SAC and BGF troops, the SAC fired mortars into H--- village. One H--- villager, Saw I---, suffered an injury to his left hand and a major injury to his lower stomach, around his bladder. After the incident, at 6:30 pm, villagers sent him to the local community hospital in Hpwa Gaw for medical treatment.



This photo was taken on January 7th 2022 in Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The photo shows an injured villager, Saw I---, who is hospitalized in the local community hospital. *[Photo: Villager]*

Ongoing fighting, displacement, and property damage

Fighting also occurred in H--- village on January 8th 2022. At about 8:00 pm, the SAC fired mortars into H--- village during the fighting, damaging one villager's house. All villagers had already fled to other places, so no villagers were injured during the January 8th incident.

⁶ 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.

⁷ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.



This photo was taken on January 9th 2022 in H--- village, Yo Klah village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. This photo shows the roof and window of a villager’s home that were damaged by SAC mortar fire. [Photo: KHRG]

On the morning of January 9th 2022, the SAC and BGF troops moved from H--- monastery to E-- - village. They encountered KNLA troops in E--- village and fighting broke out between them. Fighting occurred on two occasions on January 10th 2022 in E--- village, and once on January 11th 2022. There were no villagers in the village, so none were injured, but one house was damaged, one pig died, and fruit trees such as coconut and papaya trees [that villagers rely on for their livelihood] were damaged. The SAC and BGF troops used villagers’ homes in E--- village as their base of operations from January 9th, 2022 until January 11th 2022.

Eight schools have had to close, and all students and teachers have been fleeing to different places. Students cannot study anymore. Dormitory students are now being taken care of by Bilin Township Karen Women’s Organisation (KWO) staff.

One local villager estimated that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bilin Township is now over 2,000, [based on the number of households from the five villages that have fled]. Those IDPs rely on other villagers for necessities such as shelter, food, and other needs. There is an urgent need for food and security for the IDPs.



These photos were taken on January 8th 2022 in H--- village, Yo Klah village tract, Bilin Township, Doo Tha Htoo District. The two photos show villagers fleeing from their homes to other places due to the fighting and indiscriminate shelling. [Photos: KHRG]

Further background reading on the situation of militarisation and human rights abuses in Doo Tha Htoo District in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Forced portering and the use of civilians as human shields, and updates on livelihood, health and education, August to September 2021,”](#) February 2022.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Short Update: Forced labour, looting and skirmishes between the SAC and the KNLA, August 2021,”](#) December 2021.
- [“Doo Tha Htoo District Situation Update: Fighting between the BGF and KNLA, and pressure to close KECD schools \(April to June 2021\),”](#) November 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.khrq.org.

Doo Tha Htoo (Thaton) District

