



Short Update

March 31th, 2023 / KHRG # 23-61-D1

Taw Oo District Short Update: Indiscriminate shelling, restrictions on movement and SAC military activity in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, February 2023

This Short Update describes events that occurred in Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District in February 2023, including indiscriminate shelling and the impact of martial law. On February 2nd 2023, State Administration Council (SAC) troops indiscriminately fired mortar shells in Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, resulting in fear in the community. Since February 2023, the SAC began to impose martial law in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, resulting in the restriction of villagers' movement. Villagers in Taw Oo District were not allowed to transport food items as they wanted, which affected their livelihood. The SAC also increased their activity, transporting more troops and food in the area, which caused concerns from villagers regarding their own security.¹

Indiscriminate shelling

On February 2nd 2023 at around 7:40 pm, the State Administration Council (SAC)² Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)³ #306 based in Sha Say Bo army camp, located close to C--- village, Hper Htee village tract⁴, Htaw Ta Htoo (Htantabin) Township, Taw Oo District, indiscriminately fired mortar shells in the area. The mortar shells fell in rice fields, near D--- village, Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township. Due to this indiscriminate shelling, local villagers feared for their safety.

¹ The present document is based on information received in February 2023. It was provided by a community member in Taw Oo 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 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.

³ A Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) comprises 500 soldiers. 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.

⁴ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.



These photos were taken on February 3rd 2023 in D--- village, Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. The left photo shows exploded mortar shells that villagers collected and put in their house [Photo: KHRG]. The right photo shows one of the mortar shells that fell into a rice field, nearby the village [Photo: local villager].

SAC martial law

Since February 2023, the SAC began imposing martial law in Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District, meaning that they rule over the area with military law. They [the SAC] began to impose restrictions on the villagers' freedom of movement. They increased their activity by stopping and questioning villagers about what they wanted to know. They [the SAC] also imposed new restrictions on motorbikes [in the township]: under those new restrictions, only one person per motorbike was allowed to ride. In addition, they sent more troops to the area.

On February 7th 2023, SAC troops patrolled in some villages in Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, such as E---, F--- and G--- villages, during night time and they indiscriminately fired guns [in the air]. Due to these actions, local villagers were scared and they worried about their security. In addition, villagers were not allowed to transport [basic] food, especially rice, in Taw Oo District. As the SAC was not allowing villagers to transport rice, villagers were facing food shortages. This was the biggest challenge that local villagers faced at the time.

On the morning of February 9th 2023, SAC troops started to leave Toungoo Town to travel to Htantabin (Ta Pyay) area with seven military trucks. They moved their soldiers in H--- village and I--- village, Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township. Those SAC soldiers in Nat Ywar village stayed in Nat Ywar school, using the school as their base. The SAC did not allow villagers to transport rice. Local villagers do not know the reason why they sent more troops to the area. Because of this situation, local villagers were worried about their security and food shortages. Local villagers also did not feel safe to travel in the area.

SAC activity

On February 10th 2023, at around 7:00 pm, 70 SAC soldiers entered A--- village, Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township, Taw Oo District. This village is also known as B---. A local villager said that villagers felt fearful as they [SAC soldiers] entered into the village all of a sudden [for unknown reasons, taking the villagers by surprise]. When they entered the village, they went to a wedding ceremony that was taking place in a village church. Villagers at the wedding ceremony had to provide food to those soldiers, in fear. After they [SAC soldiers] had food, villagers had to prepare one rice box for each soldier. Since they [SAC soldiers] went to

the wedding ceremony, villagers quickly had to finish the wedding ceremony, because they were worried that something bad might happen. Afterwards, they [SAC soldiers] left the village. It had often happened in the past that the SAC would come to this village, so some villagers fled to the forest to hide when they heard [from someone else from the village] that the soldiers were coming to the village, because they were afraid to stay in the village while the SAC troops were present in the village. Villagers think that this SAC troop might have been trying to find ways to transport food ration to Tate Pu army camp as they patrolled this village. LIB #582 is based in Tate Pu army camp, but villagers do not know which battalion the SAC troop that occupied their village was from. Villagers thought that this SAC troop might be the same troop from Ta Pyay (Kyi Taw) village, Hper Htee village tract, Htaw Ta Htoo Township.

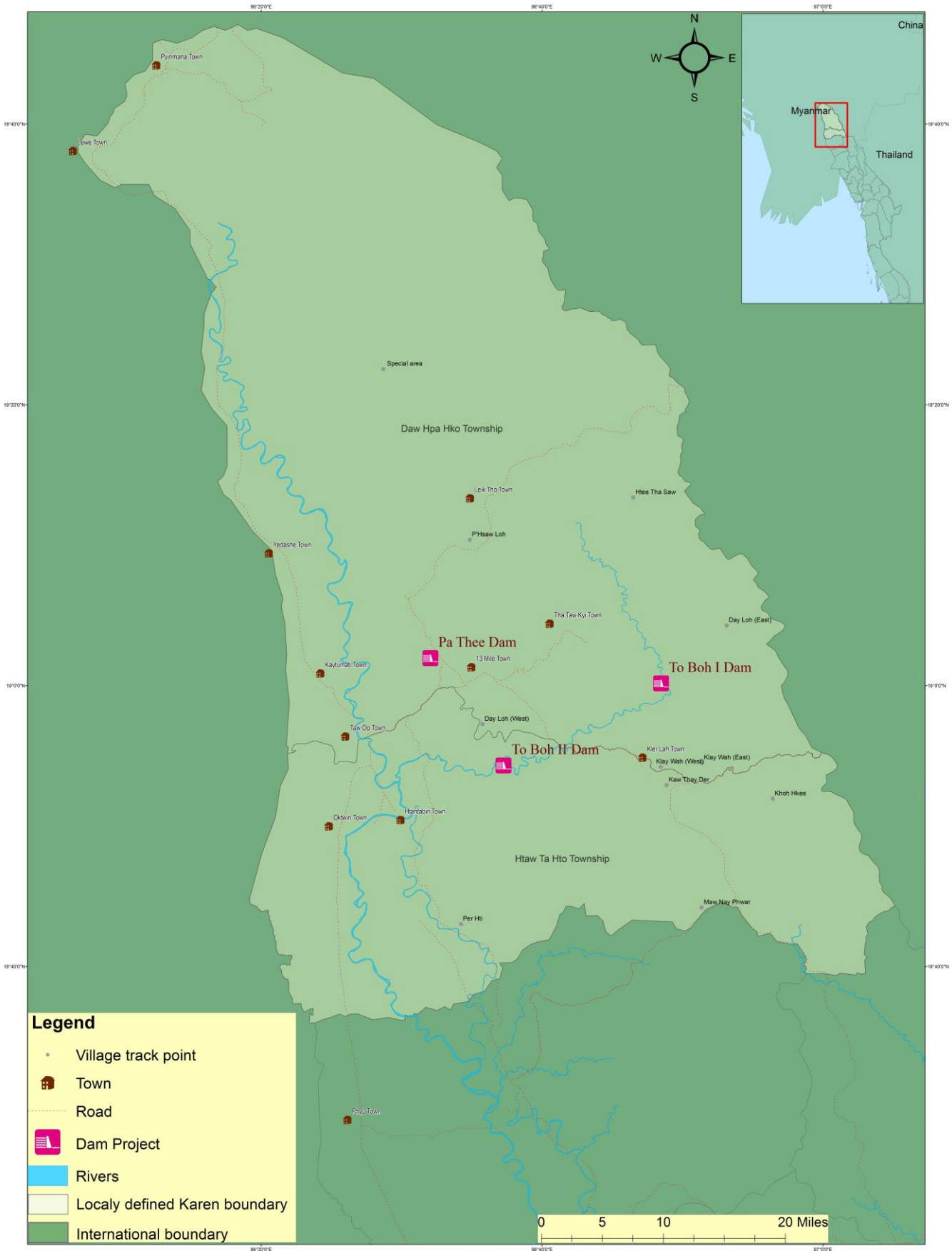
Further background reading on the security and human rights situation in Taw Oo District in Southeast Burma can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [*“Taw Oo District Incident Report: A female villager died in a landmine explosion in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, January 2023”*](#), March 2023.
- [*“Taw Oo District Short Update: One villager was killed and three villagers injured in SAC air strikes in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, November 2022”*](#), March 2023.
- [*“Taw Oo District Situation Update: Deliberate shooting of two villagers, military activity, including live-fire exercises into villages, fighting, shelling and displacement in Daw Hpa Hkoh and Htaw Ta Htoo townships, February to October 2022”*](#), January 2023.
- [*“Taw Oo District Incident Report: A villager died after he was shot by SAC troops in Daw Hpa Hkoh Township, December 2022”*](#), January 2023.

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.

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



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