



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Short Update

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Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC soldiers killed five villagers and burned houses after a skirmish with PDF troops in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township (January 2025)

This Short Update describes events occurring in Daw Hpah Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District, in January 2025. On January 2nd and 3rd 2025, fighting happened between an unknown State Administration Council (SAC) military unit and People's Defence Force (PDF) troops from the Pa Wa Nee Column in Way Htoo village tract, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township. After the fighting, the SAC soldiers killed a village head, arrested six villagers, and later executed four of them. They also killed seven PDF soldiers after their arrest. On January 4th and 5th, the SAC soldiers burned down more than 30 houses in Way Htoo village tract. Due to the attacks, more than 1,000 villagers fled their homes. They are now in urgent need of emergency aid.¹

Fighting, killing, and arrests in Way Htoo village tract

On January 2nd 2025, approximately 80 SAC [State Administration Council]² soldiers from an unknown military unit were travelling to Way Htoo village tract³, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District, in order to conduct a military operation. Local villagers said that the SAC soldiers were a combined force of many battalions based in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township. When they [the SAC soldiers] were travelling in the area, they encountered People's Defence Force (PDF)⁴ troops from the Pa Wa Nee Column [the 'Red Scarf' Column] [which is operating in Taw Oo District under the command of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁵'s Brigade #2]. Then, a skirmish happened between the SAC soldiers and PDF troops from the Pa Wa Nee Column near A--- village, Way Htoo village tract. The skirmish lasted a short time [less than 30 minutes].

¹ The present document is based on information received in January 2025. 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 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.

³ A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

⁴ The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

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

After the skirmish, on January 2nd 2025, the SAC soldiers went to arrest the village head of A--- village, named U⁶ B---, at his house. They took him out of his house, and they killed him. Then, they brought his dead body back to his house. Local villagers from the village witnessed the SAC soldiers killing the village head. The SAC soldiers also arrested other villagers from A--- village. However, KHRG could not get information on the names of the arrested villagers.

On January 3rd 2025, fighting happened again between the [same] SAC soldiers and the PDF troops from the Pa Wa Nee Column near C--- village, Way Htoo village tract. The fighting took a long time [several hours] that day. Therefore, some PDF soldiers ran out of bullets and seven PDF soldiers fled and hid at A--- Bridge, near A--- village. The SAC soldiers arrested seven PDF soldiers who hid at the bridge and killed all of them. Other PDF soldiers were injured during the fighting.

The SAC soldiers also arrested other villagers from C--- village. In total, the SAC arrested six villagers from C--- village and A--- village between January 2nd and 3rd 2025. According to local villagers, the SAC soldiers killed four of the arrested villagers [KHRG could not obtain more information on the deceased villagers]. Local villagers reported seeing a video posted by SAC soldiers on Facebook showing how they killed both the PDF soldiers and the arrested villagers. In the video, the SAC soldiers cut the throats of some PDF soldiers and villagers and shot other PDF soldiers and villagers.

Burning of houses and displacement in Way Htoo village tract

On January 4th and 5th 2025, the SAC soldiers burned down many houses [more than 30 houses] in C--- village. On January 7th 2025, the SAC sent more soldiers from Yay Tar Say Township, Bago Division, to A---, C---, D---, and E--- villages, Way Htoo village tract, in ten military vehicles. Currently [as of January 2025], there are more than 500 SAC soldiers in Way Htoo village tract.

Due to the SAC military operation, the increased number of soldiers, the burning of villager's houses, and the villagers' killings, some local villagers fled to towns, others to the forest, and others to different villages. The displaced villagers could not bring anything [like food, clothes, or house items] with them when they fled from their villages. Most of the villagers from seven villages in Way Htoo village tract had to flee from their villages, which are A---, C---, E---, D---, G---, H---, and another village whose name is unknown. Many villagers from these villages fled to I--- village, J--- village, and other (unknown) villages in Way Htoo village tract. There are approximately 1,000 displaced villagers in I--- village. The number of displaced villagers who fled to the forest, towns, and other villages is unknown. According to a local villager named Saw⁷ K---, who volunteers taking care of displaced villagers, they are in need of food and clothes. They request emergency aid from any humanitarian organisation. [According to Saw K---,] it may take time until the displaced villagers are able to return to their villages [given the security conditions as of January 2025]. Due to the current situation, it seems that more villagers in Way Htoo village tract will have to flee from their villages.

This information was provided by two villagers from Way Htoo village tract, two villagers from P'Saw Loh village tract, and a local community member who takes care of displaced villagers in the area. [The KHRG researcher also triangulated some details concerning the fighting with a PDF leader from another unknown PDF battalion operating in Taw Oo District.]

⁶ 'U' is a Burmese title used for elder men, used before their name.

⁷ 'Saw' is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.



KHRG received these photos from a local villager from Way Htoo village tract, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District, in January 2025. The photos show some villagers' houses in C--- village, Way Htoo village tract, burned by SAC soldiers on January 4th and 5th 2025, after a skirmish with PDF troops on the previous day. The SAC burned more than 30 houses in C--- village. *[Photos: A local villager]*

Further background reading on the situation on killings in Southeast Burma/Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Taw Oo District Incident Report: SAC soldiers tortured and killed a 68-year-old villager in Htaw Ta Htoo Township \(March 2024\)"](#), December 2024.
- ["Dooplaya District Incident Report: SAC soldiers killed five villagers, torturing two and raping a pregnant woman, in Kaw T'Ree Township, in May 2024"](#), November 2024.
- [*Why would they target us? - Exploring patterns of the Burma Army's retaliatory abuses against villagers across Southeast Burma*](#), June 2023.
- [*Deadly Encounters: Killings of civilians by armed actors in Southeast Burma*](#), June 2023.

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, 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.

